Decoding 'Balance': Learning about the British Empire in English Secondary Schools

Abigail Branford
Jesus College
University of Oxford



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Abstract

"Teach colonial histories in schools" became a placard slogan in 2020 England. This vindicated history teachers who in the preceding years were early adopters of a new module on the British Empire: *Migration, Empires and the People*. A key feature of this General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) module for 14 to 16-year-olds is that it does not require teachers to teach the supposed 'pros and cons' of empire, known as 'the balance sheet' approach, which is common at Key Stage 3 (KS3) when students are 11 to 14 years old. This study of students' reception of the module is a useful test case for the broader movement to expand the teaching of imperialism. Using classroom ethnographies, focus groups and surveys allowed for a multi-dimensional exploration of students' changing discourses of empire over the course of the module. To analyse this data, I drew on critical socioculturalism from within the history education subfield of difficult histories and supplemented this framework with specific concepts from the work of Stuart Hall including his model of encoding and decoding. In terms of how messages about empire were encoded, some teachers and textbooks used balance sheet approaches during the module while others did not. However, these encoded messages to students did not in themselves determine whether students framed empire as a balance sheet of 'pros and cons'. Classmates decoded the same messages in different ways, with some asserting the virtue of 'balanced' views of empire and others taking a more critical stance towards empire. I describe how these differences are related to students' identities, contexts and agency. As well as analysing others' critiques of the balance sheet approach, I identify within students' discourses the specific ways in which this framework limits and distorts students' understanding of the imperial past.

Chapter One: Introduction

> "Our tale begins in the year 2019. Nicolas had agreed to meet with six of his young subjects. These citizens of the Kingdom had recognised a grave injustice – the children of the land grew up ignorant of the true story of how the Kingdom came to be. They were never told the tales of violence, cruelty, and exploitation done to the citizens of other lands in the name of the Kingdom in order to build its own power and riches. And so the valiant children named themselves 'Fill in the Blanks' and made it their quest to mandate the critical teaching of colonial history in schools across the whole land. Months went by but, alas, there was to be no meeting."
>
> (@fillinthblanks 2021)

Stylised as the pages of a fairy tale book in a Gothic font, this October 2021 series of tweets from Fill in the Blanks parodies the script of a heroic quest against a callous ruler. The group's Twitter bio reads: "Fill in the Blanks of our history. A campaign led by students from former British colonies seeking to mandate the teaching of colonial history." Fill in the Blanks was formed by sixth-form students based in Brixton, south London, in 2019 as part of the Advocacy Academy fellowship programme for young social activists.[1] Their fairy tale-themed tweets describe how, before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, then-Schools Minister Nick Gibb had agreed to meet with the group about the teaching of colonial history.

> "Fill in the Blanks remained hopeful that Nicolas would keep his word, as through the magic of Zoom all things are possible. But this was not to be! Even as the initial waves of tumult passed, Nicolas was content in allowing the silence between him and his subjects to grow... And then one day, Fill in the Blanks received a letter from the invisible Minister. It disavowed their quest, declaring that the curriculum was already of the highest calibre."

The group had made themselves heard offline too, surprising London commuters with a stunt carried out in the early hours of the 9th of January 2020. Fill in the Blanks switched the free newspapers which populate public transport in the city – 'Metro' and 'Evening Standard' – with 5000 copies of spoof versions called 'Metru' and 'New Standard'. Metru and New Standard

[1] Most sixth-form students are between 16 and 18 years old.

reflected an imagined Britain, a state pursuing racial justice with teaching colonial history as its centrepiece. The frontpage of Metru read:

> "NEW CURRICULUM WILL LOOK AT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY OF BRITAIN'S COLONIAL PAST. Boris Johnson began setting out his post-Brexit agenda today by announcing a shake-up to the education curriculum that will see every Key Stage Three pupil study British colonial history" (Fill in the Blanks, 2020).

Like the copies of Metru, I was also winding my way through buses and trains that day, travelling from my morning history class observation to my afternoon focus group in a different school a hundred miles away. When I asked the students in my focus group about imperialism, they – like Fill in the Blanks – emphasised the value of learning about 'the good, the bad and the ugly of Britain's colonial past'. Many of these students constructed narratives about, as Metru put it, "the importance of providing a balanced assessment of the British Empire" (Fill in the Blanks, 2020). London School of Economics researcher Hannah Wright retweeted a picture of the frontpage of Metru and commented, "Great work by campaigners who have long called for this, but the word 'balanced' is making me more than a little tense here 😬" (@hannahlwright 2020). This thesis is about 'balance' and the role it plays in students' constructions of the British Empire as they learn about this topic in history lessons at secondary school.

Fill in the Blanks' activism took place within a broader context of contestation about imperial memory which is the subject of this introductory chapter. How to describe shifting political contestations in Britain was the subject of much of the work by Stuart Hall, the theorist most central to this dissertation. In this introduction, I use Hall's (Gramscian) concept of the 'conjuncture' to facilitate my description of this this setting. Hall explained that "a conjuncture is a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape" (in Hall & Massey,

2010: 57). The period in which this shape holds may be long – retaining its essential features through multiple changes of government – or last only for a short while. According to Hall, one conjuncture moves to another primarily through crises, with jolting rather than smooth changes to this 'distinctive shape' of the times. However, crises come – to borrow a phrase synonymous with Hall – 'without guarantees'.

> "Crises are moments of potential change, but the nature of their resolution is not given. It may be that society moves on to another version of the same thing (Thatcher to Major?), or to a somewhat transformed version (Thatcher to Blair); or relations can be radically transformed" (*ibid*).

These ideas of conjuncture and crisis will help me to situate imperial memory, balance and history education within a broader making and re-making of Britain[2] in the tumultuous twenty-first century. This is crucial to understanding what led not only to the activism of Fill in the Blanks, but to an explosion of placards, online articles and soundbites about the teaching of imperial history in schools in 2020.

The Crises which Turned the Spotlight on Empire I: Before and After Brexit

The period of imperial decline after World War II coincides with a conjuncture of social-democratic consensus which lasted until a series of crises in the 1970s. Hall explains that,

> "The 1970s is a period of upheaval, and Thatcherism resolves that crisis into a new conjuncture. The new market-forces conjuncture has two phases to it: the Thatcherite

[2] The national framing of 'England' would be more accurate than 'Britain' in the context of my thesis. This is more accurate primarily because of devolved education systems in which curricula structures differ between the four nations of the United Kingdom. In broader terms, there is a particular quality to discussions of imperialism in England because it is the imperial centre of the United Kingdom. Conversely Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have distinct socio-political features, governing political parties and debates about colonial relations with England which in turn contribute to different discursive environments in which imperial memory is contested. However, in this chapter and elsewhere in the thesis, at times I refer to 'Britain' rather than 'England'. This is in order to be congruent with the literature that I draw on, a literature which uses the framing of 'Britain' and in which these distinctions become lost. A criticism that could be levied against this convention is that many of the remarks around imperial memory which are couched as reflecting 'Britain' actually reflect dynamics particular to 'England' rather than the diversity across the four nations. However, the space here is too limited to explore this diversity. Instead, I mirror the literature when necessary by referring to 'Britain' while I refer more specifically to 'England' where possible.

> destruction of everything associated with the welfare state, letting market forces rip, privatising the state, high unemployment, and battering society as a whole into the acceptance of a new order. Then, when even the Tories think this can't work for much longer, funnily enough, a transformed and deeply co-opted New Labour provides that other, more human, face. But the two phases should be regarded as a single conjuncture which we can characterise as the triumph of neo-liberalism" (*ibid*: 66).

These two phases are also distinguished by New Labour's separation of neoliberal economics from social conservatism, which had been brought together by Thatcherism (Gilbert, 2017; Hall, 1979). Instead, New Labour ushered in neoliberal cosmopolitanism characterised by a technocratic elite committed to socially liberal worldviews and a limited multiculturalism; this project championed diversity in as far as this posed no threat to financial capitalism. In his book *After Empire: Melancholia or convivial culture?* (2004) Hall's former doctoral student Paul Gilroy discusses the ways in which the imperial past was both present and absent in post-9/11 Britain. He argued that, although this past shaped twenty-first century Britain's multiculturalism at home and geopolitics abroad, it was still little understood.

> "The revisionist ways of approaching nationality, power, law, and the history of imperial domination are, of course, fully compatible with the novel geopolitical rules elaborated after 9/11. They have also been designed to conform to the economic machinery of weightless capitalism and work best when *the substance of colonial history and the wounds of imperial domination have been mystified or, better still, forgotten*" (Gilroy, 2004) [my emphasis]..

If Gilroy characterises colonial history as both present and absent in New Labour Britain, the imperial past would play a more explicit role in public discourse in the subsequent conjuncture.

Dented by the 2008 crash, neoliberal cosmopolitanism broke down in the 2010s. In his 2019 editorial for a special issue of *New Formations* titled 'This Conjuncture' (and dedicated to Stuart Hall), Gilbert makes the case that a new conjuncture has been shaped by austerity, platform capitalism and the technocratic political class's loss of authority.

> "These processes have acted upon populations within which consent to neoliberalism was for the most part only ever 'disaffected' in nature, and within which moral commitment to the prevailing cultural consensus of individualist, multicultural, socially-liberal cosmopolitanism was always highly uneven. Where that commitment has been called into question or challenged, issues of racialised identity, once thought consigned to the bad old days before the Third Way consensus took hold, have been activated and animated in various, mostly reactionary forms. ... Since 2015, ... we can fairly say that in the specific British case, the conjuncture obtaining from the late 1980s – the 'long 90s' epoch of cosmopolitan neoliberal hegemony under post-Fordist conditions – has finally come to an end." (Gilbert, 2019: 34).

The great showdown between the neoliberal cosmopolitan old guard and this emergent, ethno-nationalist revolt happened through the Brexit campaign and referendum. The old guard underestimated how quick on the draw their adversary would be.

Two threads connected Brexit to questions of imperialism. The first is the racialised qualities of Brexit's anti-immigration discourse. This discourse reasserted hostility against ethnic minority communities in Britain, including those which had immigrated from former British colonies. While 'tactical promises' were made to ethnic minority communities that various former British colonies would be prioritised in a new immigration system (Kenny and Pearce 2018: 154), the immediate aftermath of the referendum suggested that for some Brexit would lead to a 'racial purification' of Britain.

> "People were targeted on the streets because they were black, brown, wore a turban or had an accent. One tweet, mentioned in parliament, read: 'Go home. #WevotedLeave. Time to make Britain great again by getting rid of you blacks, Asians and immigrants'" (Sevenzo, 2016).

Race was re-centred as a key metric for belonging in Britain. The same ethno-nationalist, anti-immigration currents which drove parts of the Brexit discourse also gave rise to the hostile environment policies responsible for the Windrush Scandal. The scandal revealed that hundreds of black and brown immigrants from former colonies were targeted by immigration enforcement

despite legally residing in the UK.[3] In the wake of both Brexit and the Windrush Scandal, different actors argued that this discrimination was in part the product of widespread ignorance of the colonial past (and that promoting knowledge of this past would combat ethnonationalism).[4] The hope here was that if more white Britons knew that 'we're here because you were there' – in Ambalavaner Sivanandan's famous formulation – then these migrant communities would not be seen as 'other'. Instead, these communities would be recognised as rightful signatories to the same social contract as white Britons.

Returning to Gilroy's description of imperialism's absence and presence in early twenty-first century consciousness, the first thread connecting Brexit to empire emphasised the *absence* of imperial consciousness, but the second thread emphasised its *presence*. The presence of imperial consciousness in Britain is described by Dorling and Tomlinson in their book *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire* (2020). This autopsy report found that the cause of death of Remain was a post-imperial fever. Dorling and Tomlinson argue that the referendum should be seen as the manifestation of anxiety around Britain's diminished status in the world after losing the vast majority of its imperial territories. Brexit addressed this anxiety with the promise that leaving the EU would allow the UK to return to its former glory. This reading of Brexit came to be referred to as 'Empire 2.0'. This tongue-in-cheek moniker was coined in 2017 through "media reports that,

[3] Many of the victims of this discrimination by the state arrived in Britain as children during a period of greater mobility between the metropole and (at that time, both current and former) colonies before a similar strain of racialised anti-immigration sentiment eroded this right of movement over the 60s, 70s and 80s.

[4] This idea was expressed in the Windrush Lessons Learned Review which recommended that the Home Office "devise, implement and review a comprehensive learning and development programme which makes sure all its existing and new staff learn about the history of the UK and its relationship with the rest of the world, including Britain's colonial history, the history of inward and outward migration and the history of black Britons" (Williams, 2018: 15). Identifying a lack of knowledge of the imperial past as a problem was also evident in academia. Bowler argued that Brexit exemplified the danger of a lack of critical pedagogy around the legacy of empire and also highlighted that anti-racist youth work projects had become scarcer under austerity measures (2017). Without an understanding of empire, Bowler argues, racialised white identities and racial inequalities could not be appropriately explained, creating conditions for the fantasies of white nationalism to flourish.

shortly before [then Secretary of State for International Trade] Liam Fox attended a meeting of Commonwealth trade ministers, civil servants had taken to referring – in satirical terms – to Brexit as 'Empire 2.0'" (Kenny & Pearce, 2018).[5] Vince Cable, then leader of the anti-Brexit Liberal Democrat party, shared this reading of Brexit as an Empire 2.0 fantasy. In his 2018 party conference speech, he made the much-quoted comment that "too many [older, Leave voters] were driven by a nostalgia for a world where passports were blue, faces were white and the map was coloured imperial pink" (English, 2018). Cambridge professor emeritus of French history Robert Tombs referenced this comment in his *Spectator* article titled 'In defence of the British Empire' where he rejected Cable's premise that 'empire' was pejorative:

> "Why the Empire has again become an issue seems clear. Brexit, and the frequent Remainer jibe that it was motivated by 'imperial nostalgia', is one element: if Brexiteers seek to revive a world 'where faces were white and the map was coloured imperial pink' then that vision must be trashed ... This is politics masquerading as history" (Tombs, 2020).

Tombs would later go on to create the History Reclaimed group in 2021, defending imperial history from growing critique. History Reclaimed will appear again in this chapter, in relation to a different crisis discussed in the next section.

These narratives of Brexit imperial nostalgia prompt the question 'how do Britons come to knowledge of empire?' Dorling and Tomlinson emphasise miseducation:

> "Images of domination and pride in empire, illustrated by maps with lots of pink on them, adorned classroom walls in the 1960s; often they were still there in the 1970s ... The British education system, which, despite a certain modernisation in recent years, has its roots in nineteenth-century ideas about race and the class system. The majority of people who voted Leave were taught what they know of British history in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. We argue that the British education system has helped produce a homogenised and

[5] Kenny and Pearce (2018) reject framing Brexit as a desire to reinstate the broader multi-ethnic British Empire. They argue this obscures a more specific Brexit imagining of the 'Anglosphere': the bonds between the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. As they point out "appeals to Commonwealth ties and obligations were rare in the 2016 referendum" (Kenny and Pearce 2018: 154). Rather, the relevance of imperial connections lies for them in ethnonationalism – that is, an imagined community of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants – and the shared free market ideologies between the UK and these five particular former colonies.

> corrupt elite who are often descended from the architects of empire, and who too often make claims for British exceptionalism" (2020: 9).

Their chapter entitled 'Imperially rooted education and bigotry' focuses on elite education and the particular background of Brexit figures such as Boris Johnson, making a case for how members of this cohort developed pro-imperial views. However, this raises further questions as to how contemporary students outside these elite spaces understand imperialism, questions this dissertation seeks to address.

The Crises which Turned the Spotlight on Empire II: Before and After the Murder of George Floyd

If the previous conjuncture was characterised by an inter-racial 'conviviality' (Gilroy, 2004) overlaying and obscuring continuities in racialised violence and inequalities, then the present conjuncture is one where these continuities are more openly discussed and contested. Many of the memoirs and narratives from young Black British authors published in the present conjuncture shed light on the inadequacies and delusions of cosmopolitanism, how everyday experience was still racialised in those 'convivial' spaces (Akala, 2018; Boakye, 2022; Eddo-Lodge, 2018; Hirsch, 2018).[6] Moreover, the growth of reactionary ethnonationalism discussed in the previous section also undermined belief in inexorable liberal progress towards the eradication of racism.

The previous section introduced Gilbert's 2019 formulation of the present conjuncture in largely pessimistic terms, but he also described new mobilisations. The combination of disaffection from neoliberalism and the widespread, low-cost communication networks (provided by platform technologies) both facilitated new forms of oppositional politics. Gilbert particularly focused on

[6] I will return to these works in the Literature Review.

how these processes strengthened Labour under Corbyn. However, writing shortly before the summer of 2020, he also presciently remarked that

> "Any realistic assessment [of political cultures across the Black Atlantic], however, would have to conclude that the UK still awaits any significant revival of black radicalism that could equate to the galvanising effects of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, while also recognising in episodes such as Grime4Corbyn, the latent potential for such mobilisation, and the likelihood of it occurring in explicit dialogue with movements and tendencies in the US and elsewhere" (2019: 27).

Arguably however, the modes of platform-mediated youth opposition that would become prominent in Britain were pioneered not in the US but in my home country of South Africa.

The first iconic image of an unsettled statue in the twenty-first century was taken at the University of Cape Town [UCT]. This image was of UCT's statue of the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes harnessed to a looming crane. Its removal in 2015 was the product of youth mobilisation in a context where the post-apartheid version of neoliberal cosmopolitanism had failed to address either enduring racism or material inequalities. This success reinvigorated popular resistance to imperialist statues and ideologies elsewhere. Most directly, it generated Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford which shared the name of UCT's Rhodes Must Fall movement and protested against the continued presence of a different Rhodes statue, one atop Oriel College. Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford followed a somewhat similar trajectory as the Bristol lobby for revising the prominent memorialisation of the slave trader Edward Colston, commemorated with a statue in Bristol city centre as well as having local buildings and schools named after him. Both the Oxford and Bristol-based movements met with limited success in the 2015-2019 period. Each gained assurances that the existing uncritical plaques associated with the respective statues would be removed, but in

neither case was the plaque removed during this period (Cork, 2020; Izzo, 2016).[7] The wider context surrounding these contentions would change dramatically in mid-2020.

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 by a white police officer in Minneapolis catalysed the transnational growth of the Black Lives Matter movement. This movement drew greater public attention to systemic racial inequality and its history. *Bristol Live* explained in a June 2020 article that an online petition to remove the Colston statue "had barely 100 signatures in three years until a week ago. Then, as plans for a Black Lives Matter protest developed last week, more than ten thousand people signed it in a matter of days" (Cork, 2020). Soon the Colston statue was pulled down by demonstrators and pushed into Bristol Harbour, to the outcry of many in the Conservative establishment who framed the action as public disorder (BBC News, 2020). Rhodes Must Fall in Oxford found a second wind and a June protest outside Oriel College was attended by over 1000 people; by the end of the month the College had voted in favour of removing the statue (Makori & McKay, 2020). As had been the case in 2016 during the first wave of Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford, Oriel College came under intense criticism from conservative publications for taking the protestors' demands into consideration (Sandbrook, 2018; Shah, 2021; Telegraph View, 2020). Buoyed by the momentum around Colston and Rhodes, more empire-related statues and figures came in for criticism and subsequent defence.

[7] Oriel College announced its decision in 2016 to retain the statue and the student movement became less visible. The Huffington Post reported: "Femi Nylander, one of the original Rhodes Must Fall campaigners, said the university made 'a series of promises' to black students around the curriculum and access and representation following the movement in 2015. But he has said these never materialised" (Nelson, 2020). In Bristol, "the statue remained in place as the 2010s ended, and 2020 began with no official moves to even discuss the statue or a second plaque" (Cork, 2020).

These public debates speak to the theme of 'balance'. The shape of the back-and-forth about particular statues varied as different figures evoked different themes and histories. For example, when Churchill was slated for his racist views and his role in the Bengal famine of 1943, this caused a particularly vociferous counter-response. His centrality to a national identity rooted in (de-empired) WWII narratives made critique of Churchill especially sacrilegious. However, Colston lacked the national cultural cache of Churchill and the role of 'slave trader' was readily legible in the British court of public opinion.[8] These factors meant that Colston's defenders required a different approach, one which did not attempt to delegitimate the criticisms against him but could instead absorb these criticisms while maintaining the relevance of his 'good deeds'. This was accomplished by appeals to 'balance'. Defenders of Colston argued that his slave trading activities could not be the sole focus but his philanthropy in Bristol deserves an equal place in the narrative. In *The Spectator*, Heaven described Colston as "the nearest thing the city has to a patron saint ... There's no doubt Bristol owes Colston" (Heaven, 2020). Heaven appealed to a version of 'complexity' with the implicit logic that if an individual was 'not all bad', their commemoration should continue: "People can be heroes and villains ... Colston should be fished out of the docks and put back" (2020). While statues, their protests, and counterprotests were the most prominent symbols of imperial memory contestation in this period, public debates extended beyond particular named imperial figures to the broader question of how England should think about the imperial past as such. Here too, appeals to 'not all bad' became the defence of the right.[9]

[8] By 'readily legible in the British court of public opinion' I mean that Colston could be positioned within a well-known historical crime against humanity, namely slavery (with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 being a key site of national pride). By comparison, the ways in which mining, expansionist warfare and colonial legislation shaped southern Africa was, for example, less well-known in the British context. Underscoring this point, at times Rhodes would be referred to erroneously as a slave trader in the mould of Colston (Gershon, 2021).

[9] While this thesis is particularly concerned with appeals to 'balance', other strategies which were prominent at this time were comparisons with other places/people ('no one is perfect'), fears of erasing/changing history ('Orwell said -'), and changes in normative standards ('a man of his time').

As the prominent right-wing politician Jacob Rees Mogg put it: "The British Empire had good and bad bits like all sorts of things. The bad bits were terrible. But some of its good bits were really wonderful ... We did great things in the British Empire, but there are blots on it as well. That's true of all countries at all times" (Bradley, 2018a). This heuristic of 'balanced' assessments of empire, what this heuristic enables and what it precludes, is central to the thesis.

These debates – extending before and after the murder of George Floyd – also encompassed questions about the role of history education in shaping memory of the imperial past. Indian National Congress politician and author of *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (2017), Shashi Tharoor, framed critical education about empire as reparative justice: "A genuine apology; teaching unvarnished colonial history in British schools as part of an honest history curriculum; & establishing a museum to colonialism, would together constitute serious atonement" (@ShashiTharoor 2019). Corbyn promised critical imperial history in schools as part of his 2015 leadership campaign, describing this history as a narrative of "the expansion of one empire at the expense of people where that empire is expanding" (Waugh, 2019). The Black Curriculum was founded in 2019 as a campaign group to reform history education by including more Black British history.[10] They also emphasised that "a more critical engagement with issues around Empire and slavery is essential in understanding Britain's troubled and oppressive history, in its absolute unfiltered entirety" (Arday, 2021). The thrust among these claims was that history education had hitherto either not focused sufficiently on imperialism or was not sufficiently critical of imperialism. Conversely, a focus on the British Empire in school history has been rejected by some as merely ideological and that it should not have precedence over other topics:

[10] Similarly to Fill in the Blanks, the Black Curriculum were unsuccessful in their early efforts to meet with leaders in the Department for Education (Chao-Fong, 2020).

> "Seen against the sweep of British history from prehistoric times, the age of the British Empire is hardly more than a passing moment. [Imperialism and slavery] are indeed important issues, and the National Curriculum leaves room for them to be tackled in detail if teachers wish. But they are merely two connected topics within a long history where there are hundreds of other topics of equal importance. Only seen from within a certain ideology, which the Black Curriculum holds firmly and, it seems, unthinkingly, do they occupy the centre stage. The Black Curriculum does not want to help pupils put the recent past into perspective. For its author, teaching history should be teaching an ideology" (Marenbon, 2021).

However, a focus on empire is not incompatible with traditionalist views on history education, as was the case of the controversy surrounding Gove's earlier attempts to centre imperial heroes in the curriculum (discussed in Chapter 3). Teaching the imperial past could also be seen as a means of maintaining students' connection to British history as opposed to the growth of teaching the history of Islamic, West African and Indian kingdoms (Harding, 2021). This was the view Alan Smithers, Professor of Education at the University of Buckingham, expressed in an interview with the *Daily Mail* where he lamented the perceived decentring of Britain in history education. He argued that "the limited teaching time available should be focused on British history in the context of the empire and migration. It is what has made us who we are. The time has come for the silent majority who are dismayed at the attempt to undermine our heritage to speak up" (Harding, 2021). Fill in the Blanks' activism should therefore be seen as part of a broader surge in contestation around history education and colonialism.

Despite the ballooning of media pieces opining on the role imperial history should/not have in schools, very little of these public discourses came from school students. Moreover, students were positioned in many of these articles as straightforwardly imbibing curricula messages reminiscent of banking education models, equating curricular inputs to student outputs. I chose to begin this dissertation with Fill in the Blanks precisely because it is one of the very few instances in this period in which students' agency was made visible beyond the school and in the wider public

domain. Teachers and educationists working in higher education have also largely been absent from the fray in the media, likely wary of becoming involved in unproductive toxic exchanges. However, this has resulted in acrimonious debates that are disconnected from expertise on history education. The numerous opinion pieces and news articles quoted here thus give readers very little substantiated insight into how imperial history is currently being taught or how students engage with this history. My empirical research in schools with students attempts to facilitate a more grounded conversation which centres students and affirms their agency.

The question of youth politics will be the last section in this introductory description of the present conjuncture. The public clashes over Brexit, imperialism, commemoration and racial justice speak to polarisation as a key feature of this conjuncture, but in the following section I want to draw attention to the *intergenerational* aspects of this polarisation.

Youth Politics and the Great Moving Left Show

If I had not alluded to Stuart Hall's classic work on Thatcherism, *The Great Moving Right Show*, I might have instead named this section after Keir Milburn's book *Generation Left* (2019). Gilbert cites Milburn after commenting that

> "the neoliberal consensus has given way to a sharp polarisation between a newly radicalised Labour Party, an extreme English nationalist wing of the Conservative Party and an increasingly isolated and impotent neoliberal 'centre', all driven by an apparently dramatic shift to the left amongst the under-50s" (Gilbert, 2019: 16).

While the radicalisation of the Labour party proved to be more short-lived than that of the Conservative Party, the intergenerational cleavages Gilbert and Milburn point to are indeed dramatic. In 2010 there was just a 15-point gap in voting intentions between the youngest and oldest cohorts of voters, but by 2017 this gap had grown to 97 points (Milburn, 2019). The

younger a voter was the less likely they were to vote Leave – although, the younger they were the less likely they were to vote in the referendum at all (Dorling & Tomlinson, 2020). Younger Britons were also more likely than older respondents to support the Labour Party moving further left under Corbyn (*ibid*). Milburn emphasised the divergence in material interests between different age cohorts that were separated by the 2008 crash. Policy in the wake of the crash distinguished state support for older cohorts with access to asset wealth (particularly homeownership) and state neglect for younger cohorts through the differential effects of austerity.

Intergenerational divides were also on full display in the cultural sphere during the protests of 2020 around imperial memory. Younger demonstrators displayed 'Black Lives Matter' placards while older counterparts declared 'British History Matters' on their placards. The four people who stood trial at Bristol crown court for toppling the Colston statue were in their twenties and early thirties (Gayle, 2021). Historian of Black British history, David Olusoga, was quoted in a *Guardian* piece about the Colston statue as saying "People who don't have as much contact with young people, who don't teach like I do, don't understand that this generation doesn't want to live in a racist society anymore" (Weaver, 2020). Young people that were vocal about issues of social justice – and especially 'statue topplers' – attracted labels which dismissed them as over-sensitive such as 'snowflakes'. Godwin explained the term in an article where he argues that millennial and GenZ 'snowflakes' are unfairly maligned (2017). He satirised grumbling about young people by writing that 'snowflakes' "think they're so precious and unique but melt when faced with, say, someone who thinks the British Raj was just great or a Cabinet minister putting his hand on their knee" (2017). Similarly, the use of the term 'woke' as an insult gained popularity amongst the right, a term which originated in African American Vernacular English and spread across Generation Left to describe being aware of racial injustice.

Couching intergenerational divides almost entirely in the cultural sphere (with no economic dimension), the right has been exercised in their attempts to find the *source* of the great moving left show. Universities (Heffer, 2022) and social media (Harding, 2022) provide potential sources of 'brainwashing' according to the right-wing press, but so too do schools (Gant, 2021).[11] The matter has become existential for the radicalised Conservative party. A report titled "The Political Culture of Young Britain" by the right-wing think tank, Policy Exchange,[12] opens with this existential threat:

> "Is West's contention [that British conservatism is dying] accurate? In an attempt to find out, this report examines the demographics and political beliefs of a sample of 1,542 18–20-year-old British young people surveyed by *YouGov* between 14 April and 6 May 2022. ... Its focus is on mapping the culturally-left youth culture that West so prominently identified in his book, and which underpins progressive parties' overwhelming 60-point advantage over conservative parties among young people. The study design allows me to examine which forces, such as education and social media, are reproducing this culture" (Kaufmann, 2022: 7).

While the report was not the first occasion in which the focus shifted from universities to schools as 'the problem', it represents the first attempt to demonstrate this with a large quantitative sample. The report found that:

> "Those who plan to attend university are as left-wing and supportive of political correctness as those attending, suggesting that schools, social networks, media and psychology, rather than university content, is the main transmission belt for cultural left attitudes" (8).

Another key finding was that most of those surveyed responded that they had heard about social justice concepts at school (e.g. 'systemic racism', 'patriarchy'). This discourse of the report – which

[11] The Thatcherist era also included 'exposés' in the right-wing press of allegedly leftist teaching in the classroom (Hall, 1979).

[12] Policy Exchange has also created a rolling compendium called the History Matters Project. This project attempts to record "the removal of certain statues on public display, the renaming of buildings and places, and changes to the way history is taught in educational curricula" (Gray, 2021). The evidence was ostensibly gathered with a periodic "call for evidence asking museum directors, curators, teachers and the wider public to share their experiences and concerns about the ways in which history is being politicised, and sometimes distorted" (*ibid*).

builds a picture of indoctrination in schools – makes no space for young people thinking for themselves. As Dickinson points out, this research pinning the blame on 'lefty teachers' is an attempt to

> "go hunting for extrinsic explanations for young people's views. It may be that governing against the economic interests of the young for a decade has impacted their sympathies towards the government and its political positions, and it could be that social media exposes attitudes towards identity and history that they [Policy Exchange] find distasteful – but their [young people's] agency to make those decisions for themselves is never really even considered as a theory here" (Dickinson, 2022).

Faulty models of banking education notwithstanding, schools as alleged sources of left-wing bias have taken on major significance within the present conjuncture in which the right faces demographic devastation in the near future as new generations become new voters.

'Unbalanced' imperial history forms part of this story of alleged indoctrination. In the Policy Exchange report, concern with 'balance' includes and extends beyond history education. Extending beyond history education, the report expresses a concern that when social justice concepts are mentioned only a third of respondents reported being told "that there are respectable counterarguments to these ideas" (Kaufmann, 2022: 7). With respect to history education, the report and policy recommendations imply that students are taught "an overly negative account of Britain's history" (*ibid*: 41). However, the report struggles to build a case for this as the question which asked "Which best characterises what you were taught about British history" turned up 32 percent of respondents answering "more pride than shame, while *just 13 percent replied that they were taught more shame than pride*" (*ibid*: 42) [my emphasis]. Nevertheless, as with defences of statues, there is an appeal to recognise a 'complexity' that is assumed to be absent:

- "The report recommends a more nuanced approach to historical episodes where Britain or its leaders have not met contemporary moral standards, such as colonialism" (*ibid*: 9).

- "Policy in this area should reflect the values of *political impartiality and historical balance*" (*ibid*: 42) [my emphasis].
- "Ensure that teaching of past wrongs such as fascism, slavery or the more negative aspects of colonialism be contextualised by teaching about similar excesses in the non-European past and present, including the excesses of communism and other left-wing movements.[13] This can be done via the Model History Curriculum, as part of the National Curriculum" (*ibid*: 48).[14]

Promoting balance and impartiality in (history) education have therefore become, in some contexts, a strategy for fighting against the tide of Generation Left.

In aggregate, the picture that emerges from the discourses in this chapter about students' experiences of history education is a confused one. Depending on whom you ask, students are either: taught a jingoistic version of the imperial past; not taught any imperial history at all; or subjected to an overly negative account of the British Empire. Each narrative typically does not make any space for the idea that students exercise any of their own thinking in these 'unbalanced' lessons. While this confused picture is of course a product of political contestation, it is also at least partly perpetuated by a lack of empirical evidence on the teaching and learning of empire – which itself is produced by the severe methodological problems in providing a clear picture. Policy

[13] The reference to fascism is surprising given that – unlike slavery and colonialism – it hasn't formed a significant part of the history wars in the British public sphere tracked by Policy Exchange (see footnote 12). The data only probed pride/shame and did not specify particular historical phenomena and so this policy recommendation is the only reference in the report to fascism and slavery (and only the second reference to colonialism). This particular grouping of phenomena is a departure from traditional conservatism. A traditionalist canon of British history education emphasises Britain's/Churchill's role in WWII and the defeat of fascist powers, constructing British identity an anti-fascist one. This canonical WWII narrative is deployed as evidence of Britain's triumph over racism, holding even stronger resonances than abolition. Conversely, here, the discourse shifts from these themes of nationalist histories to discourses where European 'past wrongs' need to be juxtaposed with 'similar excesses in the non-European past' (and the far right juxtaposed with the far left). This suggests the emergence of new concerns on the right about historiography which go beyond the domain of traditional national identity (Britain vs fascism) and instead at times uses other heuristics such as an ethicised 'West vs the Rest' heuristic or one which pits the 'excesses' of the far right against those of the far left for 'balance'.

[14] See the concluding chapter for further information of the Model History Curriculum set to be published in 2024. To note, however, the Model History Curriculum has been pitched as non-statutory and at the time of writing would not be a mandatory part of the National Curriculum for those schools which follow the National Curriculum. As most secondary schools in England are 'academies' they do not have to follow the National Curriculum which is now only mandatory for a minority of schools which are not 'academies'. Therefore, it is an open question how much influence this particular policy lever (whether the Model History Curriculum or National Curriculum) would have in practice.

Exchange's outputs on history education rely on surveys with young people who are over the age of 18 and, in their History Matters Project, on voluntary reporting by teachers and members of the public (and is likely supplemented by desk research). The complexity entailed in research with *school* students is daunting, particularly in trying to understand how specific themes are taught and understood in an incredibly diverse educational landscape in England with high degrees of curricular autonomy. Moreover, understanding how students' views relate to what they have been taught is difficult to do beyond the broad self-reporting method used by Policy Exchange (which does not contextualise this self-reporting with evidence from classrooms, teachers or teaching materials). In going beyond self-reporting of what students had learned to a more granular picture of their classroom context, the possible sample size one might access shrinks from a large YouGov dataset of hundreds to something considerably smaller. These methodological obstacles notwithstanding, I offer here a fine-grained analysis of important currents in history education and student expression, an analysis which illuminates new aspects of youth politics in this conjuncture.

My Journey to the Topic

I watched the Brexit referendum result announcement on a grainy TV screen in a hospital waiting room just outside Cape Town. I was getting my chest x-rayed for my visa application to study in the UK to prove I wasn't carrying tuberculosis.[15] Despite Britain's post-war history of designing immigration legislation to favour white settler communities with surnames like mine (Patel, 2021) – 'more English than the English' as my dad would say – I lacked that most prized possession among South Africa's Anglo-elite: a British passport. Born one generation too late on my English-

[15] While there are many inequalities and double standards in questions of global mobility, this particular requirement is not example of one. Radiology reports are also required for a visa to study in South Africa (Department of Home Affairs, 2016)

descended side and of course no such perks from my Afrikaans side, I spent my postgraduate years and this new conjuncture in the 'Other Passports' queue at Heathrow passing through the checks without the extended questioning reserved for those without surnames like mine.

While this chapter created a case for why this research is timely, here I want to address why I chose this topic for my doctoral research. Only in small pockets of my own school experience in South Africa was I able to gain any understanding of why my society was so fraught and stratified, but those small pockets mattered. Beyond history classes there was only silence about the past in conservative white communities like mine, or worse than silence, contorted narratives about 'the good old days when things were better.' In my own narratives about myself, going to a (by then) desegregated school and studying history both gave me better alternatives to the blinkered and bitter responses to the past that seemed to pervade so much of white South Africa. In this sense, school seemed to me to be liberatory but also – as became more evident in hindsight – filled with ambiguities and limitations. My questions about the role schools play in divided societies led me to focus on history education in my two master's theses, on Northern Ireland and South Africa respectively. After these projects about settler colonial histories in postcolonies, I wanted to turn the lens onto the former colonial power. I felt that I had, in some way, inadvertently contributed to a system in which places like Northern Ireland and South Africa were seen as 'basket cases', where children learnt the biased, ethnically determined histories of their segregated communities. By contrast, the imperial metropole seemed (at that time) to have escaped scrutiny. When one of my African Studies lecturers showed me a textbook for a new GCSE module on British imperialism and migration in 2017, I decided to pursue it as a case study for my doctoral research. This module, *Migration, Empires and the People*, was immediately intriguing as I had the same

misconception as the mass media, that imperial history simply wasn't taught in England. Four years, one pandemic, and many hours later, this dissertation is the result.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

I use the term 'balance sheet' as shorthand for listing 'pros' and 'cons' of the British Empire. This chapter sets out to describe how the British Empire has been framed over time in order to situate the 'balance sheet', in British history and in history education. The chapter begins with a brief sketch of imperial historiography from the late 19th century onwards, contrasting only a few key nodes in a large academic field, namely: Seeley, the Cambridge School and the 'new imperial histories'. The following section shifts from this broad historiography to a series of specific well-known popular histories published by a small group of academic historians and high-profile politicians: Satia, Ferguson, Tharoor, Kwarteng and Olusoga. These provide useful touchstones for exploring the intersections between academic scholarship and how political claims are made about empire in the 21st century. I describe in broad terms the changes within history education as they relate to empire as a prelude to setting out the current structures of the National Curriculum and what is currently known about the topic of contemporary English history education about empire. As academic scholarship and reports on this topic lack ethnographic detail, I turn to the non-fiction books which have produced evocative vignettes and commentary on the topic and put them in dialogue with further history education research on similar topics.

A Selective Historiography of the British Empire

Few English historians can claim to have had a sentence from their work persist as long as that of John Robert Seeley: "We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind." The phrase belongs to his most famous book *The Expansion of England* published in 1883. As Satia explains, this phrase

> "expressed his conviction that British rule in India was an act of magnanimity, that it was entirely in India's interests and, far from benefitting Britain, involved considerable British sacrifice ... [it] implies lack of intention of any sort. It was the ultimately exculpatory phrase when it came to reckoning morally with empire" (2020: 123).

The Expansion of England was a bestseller and remained in print for over 70 years. David Armitage (2010) suggests that this work and its famous phrase is an early example of diagnosing England with imperial amnesia, attempting to alert historians and others to the importance of empire to 'English' history. What had not yet been realised, Seeley argued, was that there was already no merit to isolated 'English' history when "the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia" (in Armitage, 2010: 17). Armitage credits Seeley with "the creation of the new and separate subfield of Imperial history" (*ibid*). He also points out the irony in this accomplishment given that Seeley had argued vociferously for the need for imperial history to not be sequestered into its own subfield but to be seen as 'core' to any history of England. Beyond academia, John MacKenzie described Seeley's influence on school education:

> "[Seeley's] vision of Empire as the logical and inseparable outcome of English dominance within Britain had a considerable influence on teachers and school textbooks ... The vast majority of publishers continued to take a pride in Empire for many decades thereafter. There are few, if any, dissident voices within school geography and history texts, for to take a contrary line would inevitably have been seen as unpatriotic. No school or local authority could take such a risk. The satirical work, *1066 and All That*, first published in 1930, was reacting against a tradition of history teaching in the period" (1999: 222).[16]

In addition to the persistence of references to 'a fit of absence of mind', another enduring legacy from Seeley is the contraction of the longer history of the British Empire to the nineteenth century:

> "[this new subfield] also identified Imperial history almost exclusively as the history of the 'Second' British Empire. ... even in *The Expansion of England* the eighteenth century was important only as a prelude to the Imperial grandeur of the nineteenth" (*ibid.*)

[16] This is taken from MacKenzie's chapter "The Popular Culture of Empire in Britain" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire* series. His name is most commonly associated with the Porter–MacKenzie debate about the degree to which there was a 'popular culture of empire in Britain' in the 19th and 20th centuries. Porter's book, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, takes its title from Seeley's aphorism.

The nineteenth century is still the core of much teaching in England on empire, especially at Key Stage 3 (KS3, ages 11-14) as I discuss later in this chapter and again in Chapter 5.

It is worth a short diversion from professional historians to briefly explore the imperial history in *1066 and All That* (1930). Its full original title was *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England, Comprising All the Parts You Can Remember, Including 103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings and 2 Genuine Dates*. Written by two public school teachers ('public school' in the British sense of 'private school'), *1066 and All That* satirises Whiggish history by separating historical events into 'good things' and 'bad things'. As opposed to more contemporary balance sheets of 'good things' and 'bad things' which I discuss in the thesis, in *1066* whether something was 'good' or 'bad' was more specific and depended on whether it facilitated progress towards the supposed utopian end of history that was early 20th century Britain. This included a send-up of the framing of imperial history; the Marxist historian Raphael Samuel went so far as to call *1066 and All That* "that much underrated anti-imperialist tract" (Samuel, 1999: 82). That some of its jibes are still recognisable suggest how persistent some of these discourses have been:

- "It was in the eighteenth century that Indian History started" (1930: 85).
- "The Sheikhs were very tall men on the frontier of India who obscured the Imperial outlook. A bloody strife ensued ... The Sheikhs were thus reduced in every way and were afterwards on our side and a Good Thing" (104).
- "The Barwar [Boer War] was obviously a Good Thing in the end because it was the cause of Boy Scouts" (108).

Richard J Evans also pointed to the uncomfortable similarities between contemporary debates and the satire of *1066*:

> "Nor is history a matter of awarding ticks and crosses to the people of the past, canonising some as heroes and damning others as villains. Arguing about whether the British empire was a Good Thing or a Bad Thing is puerile and has nothing to do with the serious study of the past: such crude moralising should have been disposed of forever by WC Sellar and RJ Yeatman's withering satire on the school history textbooks of their own day, *1066 and All That*" (Evans, 2020).

Evans' remarks are reflective of the approach of many historians towards the 21st century debates about the normative status of empire, that the way these debates have unfolded is 'unserious' and divorced from the questions historians ask and the work that they do.

In addition to *The Expansion of England* (and according to Samuel, *1066 and All That*), another watershed moment in imperial history was the publication of "The Imperialism of Free Trade" by Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in 1953. If Seeley's mission was to expand English history to a 'Greater British' history which encompassed the formal empire, Gallagher and Robinson instead sought to expand this further by incorporating 'informal empire'. To restrict analyses to "the history of those colonies coloured red on the map ... is rather like judging the size and character of icebergs solely from the parts above the water-line" (Gallagher & Robinson, 1953). Their article inspired long debates about the validity of their argument that informal influence over 'satellite economies' was the default whilst formal annexation was a last resort, but more importantly it launched 'the Cambridge School' of imperial history. A defining feature of this school was a focus on imperialist elites and their motivations. Stephen Howe summarises Gallagher and Robinson's characterisation of imperial expansion as

> "undertaken not in response to pressure from public opinion or economic interests, but by a policy-making élite: the famous 'official mind' ... Neither the supposed needs of industrial or finance capital, nor any significant or elaborated imperialist ideology, played much of a role. This view, in its turn, has been subjected to multiple criticisms, some of which have centred on its allegedly exculpatory effects, which are said to deny or downplay the culpability of imperialists along with their purposefulness and intentionality" (2010: 10).

While the Cambridge School did not share Seeley's overt triumphalism or ethno-(trans)nationalism, it was still seen by later scholars as also positing 'a reluctant imperialism' (Vinay Lal in Howe, 2010: 13). A further contention is that in histories of decolonisation the Cambridge School's narrow focus on British imperial actors and their agency casts them as the stimulus to which others, including anti-colonial nationalists, merely react (*ibid.*) In a *Teaching History* article

which I discuss more extensively in Chapter 5, Benger provides a useful summary of the school which I have reproduced in part in Table 1. I return to the implications of narratives of empire which centre the 'official mind' – analogous to what I've called 'imperial logics' – in Chapter 6.

Table 1: Extract from Benger's Overview of the Cambridge School

Exemplar questions	Critiques
• Why did the empire expand? • How and why did Britain rule different colonies in different ways? • What was the thinking behind the decisions of imperial officials?	• Primarily concerned with the decision-making of imperial officials ('the official mind'), but not the perspectives and experiences of the majority of the colonised • Failed to see how the colonisers themselves (e.g. the British nation, white racial identities, disciplinary knowledge itself, etc.) were shaped by the experience of colonialism • Pre-occupation with traditional political, economic and military themes • Reliance on official sources, read 'with the grain'

It is also worth noting as an aside that the 'official mind' was hard at work in this period of the ascension of the Cambridge School. In 1957, shortly after the publication of "The Imperialism of Free Trade", Macmillan instructed the Colonial Office to draw up perhaps the most famous balance sheet of the British Empire. This was a cost-benefit analysis of trying to retain the empire after a series of post war crises – particularly Indian Independence and the inspiration it provided to Britain's remaining colonies – had begun to seriously erode the imperial project. According to A. G. Hopkins:

> "Historians have reported, variously, that the audit was 'ambiguous', 'inconclusive', or '*evenly balanced*', ...[It concluded] that it was better to keep friends than to risk creating enemies. In the absence of other compelling economic and strategic imperatives, it was possible (if, in retrospect, overly optimistic) to believe that granting independence would strengthen Britain's economic ties with her former colonies ... The audit gave Macmillan a mandate to press ahead with decolonisation, while allowing him to believe that the new

> relationship would enable Britain to maintain her informal influence over the colonies once they became independent" (Hopkins, 2020) [my emphasis].

Questions of the nature of this postcolonial 'informal influence' of Britain in former colonies would come to occupy many later scholars of imperialism. I discuss the balance sheet as a contemporary means of assessing empire's benefits *to Britain* in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8, but generally the balance sheet refers to 'pros and cons' for groups both within and beyond Britain and often, in particular, for colonised peoples.

To return to the critiques raised against the Cambridge School, these critiques signalled new dynamics in imperial history. Since the 1980s, debates have taken shape between the proponents of 'new imperial histories' and, by corollary, the proponents of 'old imperial histories'. The New Imperial Histories Reader (2010) brings together chapters from a large number of preeminent scholars of imperialism, from Partha Chatterjee to Paul Gilroy to Ann Laura Stoler among others. As the editor of the Reader, Howe wrote its introduction and described how new imperial histories tended towards cultural history and away from governmental or economic history while also being more interdisciplinary:

> "most of those who have used the tag [new imperial history] ... mean approaches to imperial history centred on ideas of culture and, often, of discourse; ones with strong attention to gender relations and/or to racial imaginings; ones which emphasise the impact of colonialism's cultures on metropole as well as on the colonised, and tend also to urge its continuing effects after the end of formal colonial rule. ... [These approaches often share] a strong insistence on the desired, or expected, political or ethical effects of the scholars' own work" (2).

These were not, however, universally welcome developments. New imperial history's league of postcolonialists, postmodernists and poststructuralists flouted previous positivist disciplinary norms:

> "The idea of the new imperial history has already occasioned a remarkable number of negative polemics: often extremely heated ones, with strong political and/or ethical overtones. From the 'old historians' side of the disputes, much work in the 'new' is – in line

> with the general epistemological-cum-political cleavage already noted – seen as, quite simply, not being properly historical at all" (3).

Related to this acknowledgement of the politics of knowledge production (as non-neutral), many new imperial histories explicitly critiqued empire. In comparison to Marxist critiques, new imperial histories do not subsume the history of colonialism into a history of capitalism and, in comparison to anti-colonial nationalist historiography, new imperial histories are often more sceptical about independence bringing an 'end' to empire and the broader power relations of imperialism.

Not only has the explicitly political stance in much new imperial history been controversial, but so too has its focus on discourse. In addition to the positivist objections (that parts of this body of work on colonialism and discourse are not 'properly historical'), there is the objection that this work often over-generalises about the power and reach of particular discourses on the basis of a small group of texts or one particular text. While my methodology (rooted more in the social sciences than in the humanities) is different from the methods of new imperial historians, I have tried to take seriously the problem identified here. I have actively attempted to make my analysis of discourse more specific than what Howe describes as "sweeping assertions about a generalised colonial situation" (7). The focus on discourse has also proved difficult to integrate with material concerns. Howe writes in a beleaguered tone: "the neglect of economic history has been so often noted that one need not belabour that complaint again here" (3). He also notes that cultural histories of empire have generally struggled to integrate cultural and economic analyses even when professing a Marxist orientation. This suggests that to the extent that there are 'cultural Marxists' they are still working through methodological issues rather than controlling institutions across the West.

Present Literature about the Past

Studying modern South Asian history during my undergraduate degree under Vashna Jagarnath I was significantly influenced by new imperial history, reading Said, Spivak, Chatterjee and Chakrabarty. However, for this project, instead of these earlier scholars my key interlocuter from the history discipline has been Priya Satia. Similarly to Bill Schwarz's *The White Man's World* (2011), Satia's *Time's Monster* (2020) looks at how particular ideas in the British imperialist imagination changed over time. Both were influenced by new imperial history; while Schwarz looks at changing ideas of and identifications with racial whiteness, Satia focuses on British historians changing interpretations of empire and its ethical dimensions. Her work shares several dimensions with new imperial history, including a discursive orientation; an explicitly critical stance towards empire; an emphasis on the impact of empire on the metropole; and acknowledgement of the continuing legacies of empire into the present. In a roundtable on the book Taylor Sherman pointed out how:

> "*Time's Monster* sits at the intersection of two trends. The first is a public debate in Britain about whether Empire was 'good' or 'bad' and what this ought to mean for Britain today.... The second trend is an academic one ... what Mehta calls the 'irony of the liberal defence of the empire' (p.4). The debates between these scholars are intricate and highly enriching – about as far from the public debate as possible. Satia's nimbly composed text unites these two conversations" (2021).

Time's Monster is thus a heady mix of analysis of past historians' debates about empire – an analysis which itself is a contribution to a scholarly debate about how to understand the contradictions of 'liberal empire' – and an intervention into contemporary popular debates about empire. Addressing multiple audiences is however less easy than Sherman implies. Published by a trade publisher and with book reviews in the press (although predominantly in elite broadsheets such as *The Guardian* and the *Wall Street Journal*), *Time's Monster* was not only read within academia. Nonetheless, with its more dense and conceptual elements than other trade books on

empire, it did not have the same reach in England as books like Sathnam Sanghera's *Empireland* (2021) which are more accessible.

Time's Monster and *Empireland* are part of a group of recently published books which explore Britain's relationship to the imperial past. The titles in the following incomplete list indicate the mood of this group: Robert Gildea's *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (2019); Peter Mitchell's *Imperial nostalgia: how the British conquered themselves* (2021); Hannah Rose Woods' *Rule, Nostalgia: A Backwards History of Britain* (2022); *Deny and Disavow: Distancing the Imperial Past in the Culture Wars* (2021). While there is not the scope here to describe their specific interpretations and differences, they share a general narrative in which many British people relate to imperial history through a nostalgic mythology and that this in turn shapes the present 'imperial history wars' in the public sphere.

When Sherman and other historians have lamented that contemporary debates about empire have been far from 'enriching', they are likely referring primarily to their manifestations in traditional media and social media. However, book publishing – and thus the opportunity for more substantive contributions – has also been a significant part of this renewed public interest in empire even before the post-2019 cluster of books listed above. In fact, Sherman and Kim Wagner (2021) both begin their reviews of *Time's Monster* with reference to Niall Ferguson's book *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (2003). *Empire*, pre-empted by his Channel 4 television series on the same themes, serves as an anchoring point in the 21st century politics of popular histories of empire. In the book, Ferguson does not deny that empire was violent, but rather he emphasises that it led to modernisation, state-building and development. The book delivers another infamous balance sheet of empire, but unlike Macmillan's 1957 version, Ferguson was not concerned only

with whether empire benefitted Britain but whether empire benefitted humanity. As Andrew Porter described it,

> "[Ferguson] offsets the brutality and destruction associated with slavery, piracy, and events such as the Morant Bay rebellion (1865) or the Amritsar massacre (1919), with factual information to illustrate the triumph of capitalism, the spread of parliamentary institutions, the growth of literacy, recognition of the virtues of the minimal state, and the rule of law" (2003).

If *Time's Monster* asks how historians navigate the contradictions of liberal empire, then *Empire* is the utilitarian manifesto that celebrates liberal empire. Ferguson set out his stall by asserting that the contemporary norm was (wrongly) to be anti-imperial:

> "Fond of phrases such as 'most people assume', 'nowadays it is quite common to think', he sees himself as a new radical, despatching to its resting place a tired conventional wisdom that holds empire to have been always either exploitative, or unnecessary, and everywhere thoroughly wasteful for both colonisers and colonised" (Porter, 2003).

In other words, he created the impression that the critical stance of new imperial history was widespread and that his own stance was iconoclastic. However, as Porter argues,

> "Ferguson's own 'on-balance-beneficial' legacy of empire offers no new insight but rather the refurbishment of a much older conventional – some would say Whiggish – wisdom. Far from updating our view of empire, in highlighting the interplay of 'liberty' and 'slavery', Ferguson looks backward to an outdated literature, and at times is consequently wide of the mark."

The old-wine-in-new-bottles of *Empire* struck a chord with a great deal of the British public, making Ferguson one of the most recognisable names in popular history and enabling him to produce another book and television series pairing.

Ferguson's work attracted substantial criticism. While the clash between Ferguson and Pankaj Mishra drew the most attention, a different exchange – although also one which played out in the London Review of Books – is more pertinent here. Bernard Porter labelled *Empire* with the memorable phrase a "panegyric to British colonialism" to which Ferguson responded:

> "This misrepresents the book. My conclusion is explicit. 'No one,' I write, 'would claim that the record of the British Empire was unblemished. On the contrary, I have tried to show how often it failed to live up to its own ideal of individual liberty, particularly in the early era of enslavement, transportation and the "ethnic cleansing" of indigenous peoples.' What I do argue is that the British Empire was nevertheless *on balance* preferable to the available alternatives" (2005) [my emphasis].

The contention here is that because Ferguson acknowledges 'negatives' that it is not a hagiography of empire. His of use of a balance sheet formulation, he argues, insulates him from such criticisms.

In the wake of Ferguson's *Empire*, several other popular histories addressed the legacy of British imperialism. This includes *Inglorious Empire* (2017) by Shashi Tharoor mentioned in Chapter 1. The book grew out of his well-known 2015 speech in an Oxford Union debate whose motion was "Does Britain owe reparations to its former colonies?" While historians have taken issue with the ways Tharoor arrived at particular figures and interpretations in *Inglorious Empire*, William Dalrymple compares it favourably to other more carefully researched work because it makes a clear and, for Dalrymple, persuasive overall case:

> "Shashi Tharoor's wonderfully accessible *Inglorious Empire* popularised three decades of postcolonial criticism of empire, making compelling the argument that the whole enterprise of the Raj was a vast British-run exercise in loot and plunder that reduced a previously great and wealthy nation to beggary and despair" (2018).

Kwasi Kwarteng was another politician to intervene in the space, but from a more unlikely quarter: the right wing of the Conservative party. In *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (2011), Kwarteng largely describes the ways in which the 'official mind' (particular elite imperial officials) created enduring political problems in a number of former colonies such as Iraq and Nigeria. However, he claims that:

> "I have not written one of those books that purport to show that the empire was a good thing or a bad thing. I have tried to transcend what I believe to be a rather sterile debate on its merits and demerits. I have simply sought to enter, as best I could, into the mentality of the empire's rulers, to describe their thoughts and their ideals and values. I argue that individual officials wielded immense power, and it was this that ultimately led to disorder and even chaos" (3).

Kwarteng is not alone in rehearsing this routine of assuring audiences that 'this is not about whether empire is good or bad' before offering a scathing critique of empire, but here it draws a clear contrast with Tharoor's openly 'partisan' approach. Tharoor and Kwarteng with their divergent political allegiances use different strategies to build credibility with audiences and here it is notable that – in a more C/conservative milieu – part of Kwarteng's manoeuvring is to project a neutral, balanced stance towards empire while simultaneously critiquing empire.

In order to contextualise the *Migration, Empires and the People* module – which is at the centre of the dissertation – here I want to highlight another popular history, but one which does not take imperialism as its central organising theme. Like Ferguson's *Empire*, David Olusoga's enormously popular *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016) is also a landmark publication by an academic historian which significantly influenced public discourse beyond the academy and also twinned a book and a television series. Rather than writing a book about empire as such, Olusoga chronicles the long history of black people in Britain (from the Roman occupation to the present) as well as the black presence within events seen as key to British history. (Miranda Kaufmann's book *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (2017) makes similar moves but with a focus on the Tudor period, a period seen as integral to English identity.) While these works are not archetypical of new imperial history, they do share its ethos of looking at global networks rather than fixed geographies. I argue that comments by the editors of the *Journal of World History*'s special issue on "Networks in Imperial History" are applicable here:

> These interconnected histories "often have a distinct political agenda", that is, to counter the parochial island story which "at best, ascribed fixed identities created in the peripheries to black and Asian Britons and, at worst, excluded these former subjects of empire from metropolitan citizenship altogether" (Curless et al., 2015: 713).

This movement to break free from 'the parochial island story' is highly significant to the *Migration, Empires and the People* module (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 6). I turn now to describing the changing shape of history curricula.

History Curricula and Empire

As the British Empire's bureaucratic machinery consolidated in the colonies in the late nineteenth century, so did mass education in the metropole. History education during this time celebrated the achievements of 'Great Men' while perpetuating myths of the colonised being 'people without history' (Yeandle, 2015). Warner's *A Brief Survey of British History* (1899), an elementary school history reader, is illustrative of the genre in its imperial fervour:

> "When we look at a map of the world, and we see how wide is the red that marks the British Empire, we may feel proud ... Our race possesses the colonial spirit ... the daring that takes men into distant lands, the doggedness that keeps them steadfast in want and difficulties, the masterful spirit that gives them power over Eastern races, the sense of justice that saves them from abusing this power and attaches those they rule with so... strong an attachment" (249).

This textbook's narrative also effectively arranges the cast of the drama into the central protagonists (pioneering rugged British men) and the justly ruled (a non-agentive, undifferentiated Orient). During this time, history education functioned as an attempt to shape young people's imperial patriotism which bestowed a race-exclusive and class-inclusive sense of national belonging (Yeandle, 2003).

Tomlinson (2019) focuses on imperialist continuities in curricula, arguing that from the 19th to 21st century critical discussion of the brutalities of imperialism is persistently absent in most school contexts. Similarly to her work with Dorling described in Chapter 1, she argues that this 'education for ignorance' helps explain the Brexit moment of the mid-2010s, in which imperial nostalgia

fuelled a vision of Britain reclaiming its former global significance. As well as this continuity of 'education for ignorance', Tomlinson identifies moments of struggle in which this status quo was threatened, such as the 1990s debates around the National Curriculum History working group about whether to promote progressive (multicultural) or traditional (monocultural) history curricula.

Mycock (2017) argues that in the second half of the twentieth century the emphasis in English history education shifted towards framing Britain as a liberatory power in the Second World War and a reformist society in its aftermath, neglecting narratives of either empire or decolonisation:

> "The association of progressive political and social modernisation with the post-war – as opposed to the post-colonial – period provided historical reference points that nourished positive national self-esteem. It also deflected political and intellectual foci away from addressing the often violent nature of decolonisation or the lack of positive legacy of empire in many former colonies. History education curricula and textbooks often replicated this bias, offering national historical perspectives that sought to avoid substantial post-colonial critiques of empire ... Criticism about the narrow and fragmented nature of the history curriculum and its excessive focus on the Second World War has encouraged calls from across the political spectrum for the history of the British Empire to be taught in greater depth" (400).

However, political divides became important during the period of Michael Gove's reforms. Then-Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove had attempted in 2013 to prescribe what was perceived as a jingoistic history curriculum (enlisting Ferguson for a time), for instance stipulating the inclusion of imperial figures such as Robert Clive of the East India Company and glossing these figures as 'heroes' (Watson, 2019). That the Historical Association[17] couched opposition to these proposed reforms in disciplinary rather than ideological terms greatly aided its success (Smith, 2017). The Historical Association argued that a detailed prescription of content would encourage superficial rote understandings and prevent students from developing historical skills.

[17] The Historical Association is a membership charity of history teachers and academic historians.

Ultimately, many of these specific prescriptions (such as particular imperial figures) were dropped from the reforms. However, Gove did make other significant changes to the structure of the history curriculum. These changes at GCSE level included an increase in the amount of British history required (from 25% of the curriculum to 40%).

As Haydn (2016) explains, there has been provision for studying the British Empire in history classrooms from the launch of the national curriculum in 1991 to the latest post-Gove iteration. Currently, the National Curriculum states that in KS3 teachers needed to cover "ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901" but teachers had relative autonomy over how to cover these. The British Educational Research Association reported how in a small-scale survey (N=15) of heads of history, all those surveyed reported that they did teach about empire at KS3 (Haydn, 2016). Additionally, popular textbooks used in the last year of KS3 mostly did address empire. A limitation in the way empire was framed was that it was often confined to the nineteenth century, a depressing continuity with Seeley's emphases, himself a 19th century historian! Haydn also found major variation in how much time is dedicated to the topic in KS3, ranging from a single lesson to a series of lessons over eight weeks. Most teachers in the survey used balance sheet framings.

> "Those surveyed were also asked whether they taught Empire as a 'good thing or a bad thing'. Only one respondent said his or her school taught empire as a 'bad thing', with this teacher saying 'we treat it as a study of exploitation', while 13 of the 15 said the question was one to be explored with pupils. Several responses said the topic needed to be treated in a 'balanced' way, with one head of department stating: 'It is not to be taught in a manner of triumphalism... It deserves to be balanced, though, and not [with the Empire] as some fantasy villain in black mightily oppressing the 'good guys'."

Haydn also describes the accusatory political environment in which Gove made unfounded claims that teachers were teaching imperial history in a partisan way, that teachers were "painting an anti-national and inaccurately damning picture of the British Empire." This contextualises how balance sheet framings can offer teachers protection from such indictments.

The History Association's 2021 Survey of English schools (N=286) found that at KS3 "the majority of schools (82%) reported teaching (at least) a series of lessons about some aspect of the British Empire" (Burn & Harris, 2021). They found a relationship between the demography of the school and the length of time dedicated to teaching about the empire at KS3:

> Of the schools which did not teach any imperial history in KS3, a total of seven schools in the sample, "all had cohorts in which the majority of students were White. It was the schools where the majority of the student cohort were from Black or other minority ethnic backgrounds that were most likely to devote a series of lessons to the history of the British Empire, with 93% of them reporting that they did so, while the remainder (7%) allocated just one or two lessons to studying the British Empire. In schools where the population was more evenly mixed or those with a White majority, the proportion allocating just one or two lessons to the topic was twice as high (15% and 17% respectively)" (11).

After KS3, the curricular structures differ. For GCSE (ages 14-16) and A-level (ages 16-18), teachers choose a history exam board (with each exam board offering its own range of modules) and then teachers choose particular modules from that exam board. While modules which substantively address the British Empire, like *Migration, Empires and the People* are available, their uptake is low and there are relatively fewer of them than there are modules addressing 'traditional' topics (Burn & Harris, 2021; Leach et al., 2020). Similarly, the Royal Historical Society (2018) in their survey of university-based historians including master's and PhD students (N=737)

found that the narrowness of school curricula was a frequent complaint. Moreover, the Royal Historical Society noted that:

> "Many BME[18] respondents believe there are structural reasons for the ***absence of difficult and challenging histories*** such as Empire and decolonisation from school and university history curriculums: 'It's an ingrained problem within British society that has to be challenged from school', commented a research student from a Black Caribbean background; 'White Britons need to be able to discuss uncomfortable histories without becoming defensive'" (64) [emphasis in original].

In sum, while the situation is often oversimplified in the media with framings such as 'schools don't teach about imperialism', the available evidence suggests that rather the coverage of imperialism is uneven between schools and between key stages. Most schools seem to teach empire in some form at KS3, although the topic is often not developed after KS3. It is unclear how to understand this apparent contradiction between empire's presence in history lessons and the widespread discourse about its absence in history lessons. It may be due to a difference between cohorts, where the discourse of 'absence' reflects older (millennial) cohorts' experiences, but not younger (Gen Z) cohorts' experiences. Another (not incompatible) possibility is that coverage at KS3 is superficial, sanitised, insensitive or not memorable and so potentially many school-leavers either forget or are otherwise dissatisfied with the teaching of empire in schools, despite its ostensible presence. The discussion below explores these possibilities and supports an argument that each of these aspects have played a role in shaping dissatisfaction with empire's treatment in school history.

Black British History, Schools and Empire

Recent non-fiction books from a new generation of young Black British authors have stimulated discussion on postcolonial identity, race and exclusion (Akala, 2018; Boakye, 2022; Eddo-Lodge,

[18] BME is the acronym for 'black and minority ethnic' groups similar to BAME, the acronym for 'black, Asian and minority ethnic'. Their use has been subject to debate, with many official bodies no longer using these terms in recent years.

2018; Hirsch, 2018). Part argument and part memoir, this body of work provides insights into the recent history of history education in England. Boakye, Eddo-Lodge[19] and Akala contrast schools' silences about British colonial history with their greater emphasis on 'safer' topics.

> "The word imperialism had never been used in the classroom, much less 'class struggle'. What history I did learn can be seen as little more than aristocratic nationalist propaganda; Henry VIII and his marital dramas; how Britain and America defeated the Nazis – minus the Commonwealth[20] and with a very vague mention of the Soviet contribution; how Britain basically invented democracy and that was all good and wonderful" (Akala, 2018: 75).

Akala's description of his syllabus would not be out of place in an updated version of *1066 and All That*.

In contrast to these silences Hirsch describes the contemporary presence of black history in schools, a presence which she attributes to the work of Olusoga and others. However, she questions whether a marginalised presence is better than silence. She compares the absence of black history in 1960s Britain (when her mother was in school) with the institutionalisation of Black History Month (BHM):

> "Neither events concerning black people nor information about Britain's relationship with majority black countries like Ghana – until a few years earlier Britain's 'model colony' – were part of the [1960s] school curriculum .... Aspects of this history are now taught in all almost schools, albeit usually for just one month – October – which has been designated Black History Month. I'm not sure which of these states of affairs ... is more dishonest" (50–51).

[19] Eddo-Lodge also describes the ambiguities of the role of African American history in Britain: "It wasn't until my second year of university that I started to think about black British history. I must have been about nineteen or twenty ... I'd only ever encountered black history through American-centric educational displays and lesson plans at primary and secondary school. With a heavy focus on Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad and Martin Luther King, Jnr, the household names of America's civil rights movement felt important to me, but also a million miles away from my life as a young black girl growing up in north London. But this short university module changed my perspective completely. It dragged Britain's colonial history and slave-trading past incredibly close to home" (1–2).

[20] This resonates with Stuart Foster's (2005) work on textbooks' portrayal of WWII. He describes how the role of the colonies in the war and colonialism more broadly are both erased within these textbooks' narratives of a core episode in modern British identity.

Sociologist of education Nadena Doharty (2017) offers a critique of BHM based on an ethnography of a state-maintained school in the north of England in 2014. She found that these classes and activities can be saturated with racial microaggressions and she emphasised their connectedness to broader systems of power:

> "These instances are legitimated by systemic racism within the very construction of the Key Stage 3 History curriculum that reflects the same demeaning message to black students: their histories are only significant where they provide a function. In this case study, the institutional pedagogies for teaching BHM/BH centred on cultivating feelings of empathy, social cohesion and anti-racism and it has to be asked why BH is engaged with only where it serves a function, particularly as the wider History curriculum at Key Stage 3 can simply be taught for its historical significance" (125).

Hirsch and Doharty in these different genres of writing both draw attention to the asymmetries in English history education, contrasting what is consistently treated as 'essential' academic history and what appears only sporadically and in instrumentalist framings.

Boakye's *I Heard What You Said* (2022) is rich with classroom detail, accumulated over his professional career teaching English. While Fill in the Blanks focused on Nick Gibb, in the same period Boakye highlights Gavin Williamson in the contentions about colonial history in schools:

> "In a secondary curriculum where many young people will study the works of William Shakespeare every single year of their school career, there must surely be room for deeper units on colonial history than are currently on offer... As ever, the finger of blame can be pointed way higher up in the chain. July 2020 saw the government's rejection of proposals to broaden the history curriculum in light of these concerns. The then Education Secretary Gavin Williamson had this to say: ... 'time and time and time again, this country has made a difference and changed things for the better, right around the world...We should, as a nation, be proud of that history and teach our children about it.' ... You start to hear the protectionism of Britain's sense of itself, and even the echoes of imperialism, in this notion that this country has done more good than bad, right around the world" (186–187).

Here, Boakye identifies the shades of Ferguson in the Education Secretary's narrative, a utilitarianism of 'more good than bad'. Like Doharty, he emphasises the ways in which what happens in schools is connected to broader systems; Boakye relates the shape of the curriculum to

the threat that black narratives – "especially narratives of resistance" – pose to post-colonising states (186).

Boakye's vision of agentive black history contrasts with Traille's (2006) important findings about the prevalence of non-agentive black histories in English schools in her work with Caribbean students learning about the transatlantic slave trade. She argued powerfully that "if the only story that black children can tell about slavery is of whites controlling the destiny of black people then they are limited with what they can do with the narrative, except personally identify themselves as victims or reject it" (197). Also of particular significance to this thesis is Traille's point that the ways that students experienced these history lessons about the transatlantic slave trade differed from teachers' intentions (Traille, 2007). She demonstrates how the socio-political context shapes students' experiences of their teachers' narratives. Moreover, her work underscores that student perspectives are vital to understanding how any classroom interaction is functioning; the meanings of the interaction cannot simply be 'read off' curricula, classroom materials, teacher narratives or textbooks alone (although these all illuminate important aspects). This in turn gestures to the importance of doing history education research which brings both these and student perspectives into view.

Conclusion

This chapter emphasised the recurring theme of 'balance' and 'balance sheets' in narratives of empire. Contestations about how to administer and – later – how to remember empire provoked normative questions about the fundamental nature of the imperial project. One heuristic used by both historians and politicians for navigating these normative questions has been 'balance', although this has been critiqued by yet other historians and politicians. The second half of the

chapter related these questions of how empire has been framed to history education, where again 'balance' plays a prominent role. I briefly sketched the discussion about the status of empire within English history education, drawing on history education research, large organisations' reports and the experiences and research of Black British authors and scholars.

Chapter Three: Conceptual Framework

> *"I would do without theory if I could! The problem is, I cannot. You cannot. Because the world presents itself in the chaos of appearances, and the only way in which one can understand, break down, analyse, grasp, in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one, is to break into that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have: concepts, ideas, and thoughts"* (Hall 2019, 310).

The preceding chapters built a case for the importance of furthering our understanding of students' meaning-making about the British Empire in English secondary schools. This chapter begins to unpack how I approached this project. Specifically, it details how I position my work in relation to various traditions of history education research. While I use concepts, models and ways of thinking beyond these history education research traditions, I argue that my additions are synergistic with those traditions.

After problematising the trajectories of academic knowledge production in English history education, I explore the utility of Epstein and Peck's formulations of both difficult histories and the critical sociocultural approach. I argue that these formulations can be enriched by interfacing with the scholarship on discourse and that here the work of Stuart Hall provides helpful conceptual tools for research in this area.

As a preface, I should note that while here I refer particularly to 'traditions of history education *research*' these traditions exist in complex relation to history teaching practices, to broader trends in education beyond the subject specialism of history as well as to competing orientations in academic scholarship more widely. Particularly because many researchers of history education are also involved in initial teacher education and teacher professional development, there is an enmeshment between *describing* and *developing* history education within these traditions.

Therefore, while I frame the following discussion as a question of how to conduct *research* in this area, that is not to erase the tight relationship between ways of describing how history has been taught and arguments about how history ought to be taught.

Conceptual Landscapes and Powerful Knowledge in English History Education: An Argument for Looking Further Afield

The politically charged aspects of history discussed in the previous two chapters stands in contrast to the scholastic field of history education in England.[21] This field has been more suited to avoiding the kind of explicitly political questions being raised about imperial history than engaging them. It has constructed the goals of history education as developing students' abilities to assess historical evidence and to develop arguments about change and continuity, remaining largely agnostic towards the topics or narratives used for developing these skills (Seixas, 2017). This way of understanding history education is referred to as a 'disciplinary approach' although I will later problematise this terminology.

History within this tradition is essentially impersonal. By contrast, history as personal (and collective) is an axiom of the Germanic tradition of history education – rooted in the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer – which has had significant influence on curricula frameworks in continental Europe. This tradition is more explicitly concerned with equipping students to navigate a pluralist society, encouraging reflection on how all methods and cultures of engaging with the past

[21] When talking about this field, 'English' is more appropriate than 'British' due to devolved education systems and the corresponding network of researchers and theorists I refer to being concentrated in England. As will be expanded on in the section on 'difficult histories', Northern Irish history education has a distinctly different profile in ways that are relevant to the argument I construct in this chapter.

are limited and situated (Körber, 2011). Moreover, scholars working within the Germanic paradigm were

> "centrally concerned with how historical questions arise from everyday life, and, in turn, with how historical research could feed back into the larger culture. These concerns were largely outside the purview of the British history education discussion. The British would go no further than asserting that learning the operations of the discipline of history as an open and critical practice would yield educational benefits, by definition, for participation in a liberal, democratic polity" (Seixas 2017, 62).

That many researchers and professional associations in England related history education to the contemporary socio-political milieu only in indirect and implicit ways could help protect the subject from some of the more explicit attempts to politicise it.[22] This disciplinary detachment was helpful in softening Gove's nationalist reforms (discussed in Chapter 2). However, this sense of detachment was less advantageous in the face of demands to address exclusions in the curriculum and the lack of representation of, in particular, black historical actors beyond the transatlantic slave trade (Leach, Voce, and Kirk 2020; The Black Curriculum 2021).

This confrontation is illustrated by Tom Allen's description of why he decided to transition from teaching the history of medicine in Britain (Health and the People) to teaching Migration, Empires and the People:

> The reason I changed my mind was actually it came from a student – or an ex-student who I taught all the way through Key-Stage 3 and GCSE, she was in my tutor group as well and this girl is from a half-Sudanese half-Jamaican background and she came in on her last day of Year 11, she wasn't staying on for the sixth form. She sort of burst into my classroom, almost kicked the door open and came in and said, "You haven't taught me all the history I

[22] Another important function of disciplinary approaches in England is to act as a means of defending the subject from becoming amalgamated with others into constructs such as 'social studies' or 'general skills'. Disciplinarity undergirded arguments for history's distinctiveness and hence why it should retain a separate place in the curriculum. As Chapman explains, "if you were to go back about 10 years is what we would call the rise of a kind of 'competency focused' or '21st century focused' approach to curriculum and for many of us in history we perceived this as a threat because the central plank of the argument was that subjects are not key because in the age of Google all the knowledge in the world is at our fingertips ... The disciplinary approach ... is an emphasis on the forms of knowledge and an argument that says what children really need is not generic skills only, not generic information only, but mastery of these important domain specific ways of knowing" (Chapman, 2021b: 11:15–15:01).

> wanted to know." And it was just such a life changing moment for me, really. I kind of – you know if I'm honest, my first instinct was I felt quite defensive. You know I sort of thought *We studied the slave trade in Year 8. We've done all sorts of different things. What are you talking about?* But actually I ended up having quite a long conversation with her, and I realised she was right. I hadn't taught her all the history she wanted to know. And that was what gave me the push to persuade the department that we had to make a change; we needed to look at the British Empire in more detail (Justice to History 2020, 1:58 to 3:10).

His rendering of the young, assertive woman with heritage in the postcolonies making visible the asymmetries in the curriculum to her white, male teacher is an arresting image. The confrontation was inescapably personal and a detached response couched in skills-based language could not have answered the charge.

While professional associations, exam boards and many individual teachers and departments are – like Allen – making sense of and responding to growing challenges, academic research in English history education has yet to do the same. I argue that this is due to a limited conception of disciplinary history animating the field, such that the field does not take into account the discipline's diversity nor important contributions from other disciplines. At the centre of the English history education tradition is a particular vision of 'the academic historian'; this figure acts as a compass to guide students towards appropriate epistemological values and towards appropriate understandings of rigour.

This central figure is most apparent in the field's adoption of the framework of 'powerful knowledge' (Chapman 2021; Young 2016) which advocates for school curricula to be guided by the relevant (university-based) disciplinary epistemic communities. Knowledge originating in these communities can, in this framework, be objective with "its objectivity arising from peer review and other procedural controls on subjectivity in knowledge production exercised in disciplinary

communities" (Chapman 2021, 9). Ford (2022) argues that this framework leaves vital questions of curricula choice unanswered and that any selection *between* historical topics relies on value metrics beyond the discipline. As he puts it (2022, 7), if history is a study of people in time "then there is nothing within the discipline itself that suggests where the substantive core might lie: which people, and in which time?" Rudolph, Sriprakash and Gerrard (2018) critique powerful knowledge for idolising disciplines which they argue lack sufficient reflexivity about their entwinement with the imperial past or with present global hierarchies of knowledge production. Here I construct a different problematisation of powerful knowledge: its restricted view of how disciplines might relate to knowledge and knowledge producers.

In addition to being produced by specialists in the discipline (here historians), powerful knowledge is defined in opposition to 'everyday knowledge'. Drawing on Durkheim, Young explains that powerful knowledge "is distinct from the 'common-sense' knowledge we acquire through our everyday experience ... [which is] limited because it is tied to the contexts of our experience" (2014: 74-75). This characterisation of the knowledge that disciplines create – as fundamentally *separate* from the contexts in which this knowledge is produced or the experiences of the producer – seems to negate the reflexive turn in the social sciences and humanities. For instance, historical scholarship *on* historians can emphasise how their individual and collective experiences and their contexts have shaped their work, for instance Catherine Hall's *Macaulay and Son* (2014) and Priya Satia's *Time's Monster* (2020). More broadly, new imperial history demonstrated a concern with "the relationships among knowledge, identity and power, including a high degree of explicit self-consciousness about the positioning of the historians themselves" (Howe, 2010: 2). My objective here is not to relitigate the extensive and ongoing debates around reflexivity. Rather it is to point out that the conception of powerful knowledge does not simply point to 'the disciplines' as the

answer to curricular questions, but it also *a priori* shapes how 'the disciplines' are represented in these answers. They appear tidily separate from the contexts of knowledge production in ways that many working within the social sciences and humanities would not recognise.

Operating within this bifurcation of knowledge and context, English history education has generally drawn only from *part* of the wellspring of the disciplines. The history discipline may act, for example, as a source for warranted narratives of the Reformation or for contrastive historical interpretations of WWI. However, despite the wealth of scholarship on how knowers and knowledge relate to the contexts in which knowledge is produced (e.g. that knowers are embedded in relations of power and this influences the knowledge they produce),[23] this scholarship is structurally marginalised within English history education. The label of 'disciplinary' history, therefore, obscures the narrowing taking place between what the disciplines (and the many sub-disciplines of history) might offer and what is recognised as legitimate 'disciplinary history' in English history education. The consequence of this is that when it comes to questions about the knowledge-context nexus – such as what topics history teachers should prioritise in their context or how students of different socio-political circumstances understand the narratives they engage with in class – this limited conceptual toolbox is unhelpful.

This problem is illustrated in the only other empirical work on students' understanding of the British Empire in English secondary schools, conducted by Adam Burns (2016). Burns acknowledges a number of important complexities: the tendency of media debates about empire in curricula to mischaracterise history education as "a body of knowledge to be transmitted",

[23] For further discussion of this topic, see the later section in this chapter: 'Hall, Discourse and Meaning-Making'.

disregarding how knowledge about imperialism is mediated by teachers' and students' identities and by "a long list of factors that have affected these identities and forged preconceptions of imperialism, from literature and media, to family and friends" (2016: 94-95). However, due to the systemic omissions in the field discussed above, these insights lack the necessary conceptual and methodological support to investigate these complexities in depth. Burns' method (2016: 108) mirrors assessment methods typically used in history exams, providing students with pictorial and textual sources and eliciting students' written responses to each source with the question, "What does this source tell us about the nature of the British Empire?" Here Burns is deploying the tools of the English history education tradition – which have centred on examinable skills like assessing historical evidence – in the service of asking new kinds of research questions about the knowledge-context nexus such as "Are students' views on British imperialism more a product of the classroom or of external, extra-curricular influences?" (2016: 106) He concludes that the diversity of responses to the same question from different students and the absence of references to what they had learnt in class both point to the curriculum lacking influence on students' understandings of imperialism. Although the study seeks to understand the relative influence of classroom instruction versus external, extra-curricular influences, there is no detail provided about these classroom interactions (beyond listing the topics addressed in the curricula) or about students' external, extra-curricular influences. Students are presented as identity-less and the analysis is also disconnected from the characteristics of the three schools. In other words, context seems to be markedly absent from the study despite its relevance to the research questions. This can be a product of a myriad of limitations (in time, wordcount, or other limitations derived from conducting sensitive research, especially with school students), but what is also at play are the limited conceptualisations offered by English history education (and English history education research). That is, Burns' research also

seems to be shaped by the way this field marginalises questions of identity and the socio-political contexts of learning.

The Boomerang of Difficult Histories

The situation differs elsewhere; in addition to the Germanic paradigm discussed above, a further way of thinking through questions of history education is that of 'difficult histories'. This has "focused on how students understand potentially controversial historical topics, particularly those which have relevance for contemporary identities" (Barton 2018, 12). For scholars in England, the research of Barton and McCully (2005) with students in Northern Ireland is the most well-known of this tradition. It is telling that when Burns' concluding paragraphs drew the argument back to the knowledge-context nexus he placed his findings in dialogue with Barton and McCully's findings on students' community-informed historical narratives. This indicates that difficult histories may be an appropriate avenue for addressing the kind of concerns which Burns brought to imperial history.

Although scholarship sharing these general concerns about identity, education and controversial history began earlier, Epstein and Peck explain that the particular term 'difficult histories' emerged from the conceptualisation of a 2015 conference in New York City sponsored by the American Educational Research Association. In the introduction to their edited book that proceeded from the conference, they explain that "we used the concept of difficult histories as a heuristic device for distinguishing the research included in this volume from a cognitive or disciplinary approach to research in history education" (2019, 1). Their introduction goes on to discuss how various history education research traditions have been used to understand students' interactions with difficult histories, which I will describe further in the subsequent section. Here, however, I want to turn first to the geopolitical dynamics which have shaped how and where difficult histories thinking has

emerged as a scholarly concern within history education before briefly reflecting on the relationship between difficult histories and 'disciplinary approaches'.

This work on 'difficult histories' is concentrated in particular former British colonies (e.g. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA), where scholars aim to explore the relationship between history education and identities forged by (post)colonial history (Epstein & Peck, 2019). If not exactly 'theory from the south', it is theory from the settler colonies. Whilst this is meant somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it does also point to the ways in which the conditions of settler colonies have prompted deeper and earlier reflections on the relations between identity, learning and coloniality within their respective history education research communities. These are conditions where imperial histories are unavoidable in the explanation of why these geographies are populated by the descendants of European settlers as well as the descendants of enslaved and indentured peoples while indigenous communities have been demographically decimated. Moreover, national discourses of patriotism and formal equality sit uneasily alongside the enduring relevance of colonial history in structuring inequalities. Simultaneously navigating these two poles of equality of inequality creates acute difficulties for history teachers and students.

Post-2020 England increasingly appears to be experiencing similar conditions as settler colonies in terms of the inescapability of imperial history and in terms of the aforementioned clashing emphases on equality and inequality (such as the contestation around the 2021 Sewell Report which claimed structural racism does not exist in Britain). This change could be explained through a shift out of melancholia. Gilroy argues that melancholia is derived from "the error of imagining that postcolonial people are only unwanted alien intruders without any substantive historical, political, or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects" (2004: 90). However,

this error is increasingly being challenged by young 'postcolonial people' in England in the new conjuncture. If Britain is no longer in a state of melancholia, what concepts may help describe this new state of convergence between the conditions of the metropole and conditions of settler colonies?

This might usefully be called a boomerang. While Césaire (2000), Arendt (1973) and Foucault (2003) describe a boomerang effect where mechanisms of power exerted on the colonies come to be used against populations in the metropole, what I am describing here is a boomerang effect where the conditions and contradictions of settler colonial societies come to characterise the metropole. Demographic shifts (and discursive shifts) have drawn attention to the question of why England is populated by the descendants of 'postcolonial people'. In this sense, history education in England now confronts similar questions to those of settler colonies and here I explore the utility of integrating the concept of difficult histories associated with settler colonies into the English history education space.

Difficult Histories and Disciplinary Approaches

Epstein and Peck position difficult histories in opposition to disciplinary approaches, as antitheses. However, as the Burns example demonstrates, disciplinary approaches have been used in relation to researching colonial history which, as the narratives in Chapter 1 demonstrate, is difficult history. Additionally, Seixas (2000) contrasts different approaches (collective memory, disciplinary, and postmodern) to a hypothetical lesson about the contentious 1998 signing of the Nisga'a Treaty.[24] He explains that, in a lesson with a disciplinary approach, students would be

[24] As Seixas explains, "In August 1998, British Columbia's first negotiated treaty since Confederation was signed by representatives of the Nisga'a people and the federal and provincial governments. It provides for treaty settlement

> "learning how to question a historical account, understand the evidentiary base upon which it rests, and to assess it in relation to competing accounts ... In the case of the Nisga'a treaty, schools would have students examine the historical documents, the records of early British Columbia settlement, and the oral and artefactual history of the Nisga'as. Students would then weigh the competing versions" (2000, 22).

In this sense, Seixas is applying a disciplinary approach to difficult history. Extending beyond the hypothetical, a disciplinary approach has also been applied by the Stanford History Education Group (n.d.) in their materials on the colonisation of the Americas as part of their 'Reading Like a Historian' series. If disciplinary approaches can and do inform the treatment of colonial histories which may be regarded as 'difficult histories' then in what way might these two constructs be considered antithetical?

I argue that the answer lies in considering difficult histories not as free-floating narratives or specific periods or topics but as a present *relation* to particular narratives, periods or topics.[25] Here I want to expand on Epstein and Peck's original definition of difficult histories as "historical narratives and other forms (learning standards, curricular frameworks) that incorporate contested, painful and/or violent events into regional, national or global accounts of the past" (2019: 1). Difficult histories imply that there are subjects who *experience* difficulty, tension, pain or discord in relation

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funds, land, property ownership, and self-government for the Nisga'a, within the limits prescribed by Canadian law... the debates over it provide an avenue into an examination of the legacy of the past" (2000: 19).

[25] When I first began working with the concept of difficult histories, this prompted the question of whether using this terminology implied that there are histories that are not 'difficult'. Instead of thinking of certain topics as being inherently difficult or not difficult, what is important is whether they are experienced as such, whether their affective potentialities are realised. To illustrate, as a tourist I went on a 'ghost tour' of Edinburgh's South Bridge Vaults. Descriptions of how impoverished Edinburgers lived in vaults in the nineteenth century were largely instrumental for the tour company, creating the necessary background and suspense for kitsch thrills in the dark underground spaces. As opposed to a feeling of happy adrenalin which the tours of this genre might bring about, my experience in the vaults was one of difficulty. The conditions in which the past residents of the vaults lived disturbed me and coming from Holyrood Palace earlier that day exacerbated the starkness of the city's inequalities. The difficulty was deepened by noticing my own voyeuristic positioning in the vaults as a tourist. While the substance of the tour had affective potentialities (it had 'the makings' to be difficult history, as it could speak to past suffering), it is only through it being experienced as difficult which makes it difficult history (and only by these experiences being recognised can they be studied as difficult history). If no present subjects experience the history of the vaults as difficult (in the moment or in memory), it ceases to be difficult history, although given its potentialities it may (again) become difficult history.

to those histories and who have a troubled affective relationship to them.[26] As Stuart Hall explains, it is not the mere presence of violence itself which offends or saddens but the specific relationship the subject has to that violence (how the subject relates to who perpetrates violence on whom in what context), which is crucial to the subject's affective response. He uses the film genre of the Western where violence perpetrated by the hero is unproblematic – it is not difficult – but violence perpetrated by the hero's enemies elicits a different response. That this relation between a subject and a historical narrative is contingent on how the subject imagines herself and how she imagines the world is beautifully illustrated by James Baldwin. Also using this theme of the Western, Baldwin explains that as a young African American

> "it comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6 or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you" (1965: 32).

The young person in Baldwin's narrative experiences the violence in the Western differently as her awareness of her own marginalisation in American society grows; she develops a troubled affective relationship with the text. It is my contention that the antithetical relationship between disciplinary approaches and difficult histories stems from how difficult histories require *actively recognising* these troubled affective relations between subjects in the present and (constructions of) the past and that this is not something disciplinary approaches are geared to do.

[26] These troubled affective relationships between subjects and difficult histories do not, as Rothberg (2019) argues, need to be restricted to either victim, perpetrator, or bystander but could also include what he calls 'the implicated subject'. "Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes ... In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present" (1). Rothberg developed his ideas through considering the problems of how to relate to inequality and violence (both past and present) in different contexts, including South Africa and the United States among others. His work highlights that post-colonial subjects who did not experience or support particular regimes, such as formal colonial rule, may still have an (implicated) relationship with that past and its legacies, a relationship which can be experienced as difficult.

Disciplinary approaches, as currently constructed, cannot recognise these forms of relation in the present which is why – although they can be used as a lens to look at histories that are difficult – such approaches *cannot recognise them as difficult histories*. Disciplinary approaches can recognise historical actors as having positionalities and relations to narratives. This is required for analysing 'sources' and how their provenance affects their constructions of events. However, these principles are not explicitly integrated into how subjects in the present (or more specifically, how the student-as-quasi-historian) may have complex affective relationships with certain histories. Rather, as Epstein and Peck explain, disciplinary approaches promote "bracketing out affective responses to historical sources or narratives in favour of more objective evaluations" (2019: 2). As work on difficult histories recognises present subjects' relations to history (and it is these relations which I seek to investigate in this dissertation), this is an attractive space in which to locate my own work. In the following section I discuss Epstein and Peck's recommendation to investigate difficult histories through what they term 'a critical sociocultural approach'.

The Critical Sociocultural Approach

In the same introductory chapter where Epstein and Peck described difficult histories, they explain their 'critical sociocultural approach' by first taking stock of earlier approaches that have been used in history education research. They include disciplinary approaches, sociocultural approaches, critical approaches and those which centre the idea of historical consciousness. I summarise this schematically in **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

Table 2: History Education Research Approaches and Difficult Histories

	Historical Consciousness	Socioculturalism	Critical	Disciplinary
Emphasis	Using the past to understand the present and one's place in it	The influence of layers of context on shared historical narratives which inform identities	Relations between historical memory and power	Assessments of historical sources and arguments
Example of a key text in history education	Rüsen, 1987	Keith Barton and McCully, 2010	Zembylas and Beckerman, 2012	Wineburg, 2001
Example of theoretical influences	Hans-Georg Gadamer	James Wertsch	Michel Foucault	Michael Young
Relationship to difficult histories	Can be used to research difficult histories according to Epstein and Peck			Cannot recognise difficult histories (see section on Difficult Histories and Disciplinary Approaches)

Epstein and Peck advocate for synthesising sociocultural and critical approaches into a new approach called critical socioculturalism.[27] Drawing on Wertsch they described socioculturalism as an investigation of "how political, social and cultural contexts influence the historical narratives produced by national, subnational or transnational communities" (2019: 3). Additionally, they explain that sociocultural approaches make visible the dialectic between identity and historical narratives, as each informs the other. Epstein and Peck combine these sociocultural themes with a concern with power – characteristic of critical approaches – as they investigate how operations of

[27] They do not here explicitly identify why historical consciousness is not a named element of their new construct. There are several possible ways to think of the relationship between critical sociocultural approaches and historical consciousness approaches. It could be that, although not stated as such, historical consciousness has influenced critical socioculturalism by undergirding the latter's concern with agency; Epstein and Peck do mention a historical consciousness study discussing variations in how agentive students perceived themselves to be in processes of change (Barca, 2015). Similarly, the emphases of historical consciousness could be argued to be subsumed in critical socioculturalism, that by centring identity and contexts in the construction of historical narratives, critical socioculturalism already points to the self-in-the-present-past emphasised by historical consciousness. Alternatively, the reticence to incorporate historical consciousness more explicitly might be due to the difficulty of operationalising historical consciousness in research (Seixas, 2015).

power institutionalise and affirm certain histories while suppressing others. Epstein and Peck describe this new synthesis as an approach which asks, "how concepts of power, identity and/or agency influence the production and appropriation of historical narratives in specific national settings" (2019: 2).[28] The critical sociocultural approach's framework of power, identity, agency and attention to the specificities of socio-political context is enabling for this research project. Identity and agency highlight how curricula are *mediated* by students, avoiding the kinds of erasure of students I problematised in Chapter 1. Attention to power and context makes the knowledge-context nexus visible and deepens the analysis in ways foreclosed by the 'depoliticised' disciplinary approach. In other words, critical socioculturalism enables my research to address the fraught politics of difficult histories (here imperial histories, in a polarised England) while acknowledging the ways in which students are both agential and situated.

The critical sociocultural framework is ripe for innovation. Whilst other research approaches in history education may already be structured around particular lodestar theorists outside of history education (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), critical socioculturalism consists of a constellation of key concepts: identity, power, context and agency. These concepts can be informed by the theorists already employed within critical approaches or sociocultural approaches, but this is not set in stone by Epstein and Peck; those key concepts (identity, power, context and agency) are not intrinsically tied to particular theorisations. The flexibility in how these are theorised and related to one another is reflected in how the works in their edited volume – which Epstein and Peck cast as sharing concerns with critical socioculturalism – variously draw on ideas from memory studies (Wertsch), poststructuralism (Foucault), critical pedagogy (Freire) as well as

[28] By highlighting 'national' settings here, Epstein and Peck are not advocating for methodological nationalism but throughout their chapter they make clear that a range of scales of context and types of identities are pertinent.

other domains. This flexibility stands in comparison to the boundaried disciplines and bordered epistemic communities of powerful knowledge and research traditions in English history education. Here I continue this practice of flexibility by incorporating the ideas of Stuart Hall, whose concept of 'the conjuncture' was introduced at the beginning of this dissertation. His work has not previously been prominent in history education, but bringing his ideas to this space allows me to build out critical socioculturalism's key concepts in helpful ways.

Stuart Hall and 'Everyday Knowledge'

Erstwhile schoolteacher of Geography, Stuart Hall is a particularly appropriate theorist to think with in this research project as he was concerned not only with the concepts emphasised in critical socioculturalism, but also the afterlives of colonialism in England. He emphasised that he arrived in England as a 'colonial subject' from pre-independence Jamaica, "and, as such, was the product of a much longer 'encounter' between Europe and its 'others' around the world" (Hall, 2018). His work on British culture and politics often made visible the repressions and revivals of imperial memory.

Moreover, Hall advocated strongly for taking seriously how 'ordinary' people understood the world and not to dismiss this as an irrelevance to a superior academic project of discovering deeper truths. This ethos resonates with my focus on students' understandings. Hall thus stands in opposition to powerful knowledge in that Hall, following Gramsci, positions the 'everyday knowledge' dismissed by powerful knowledge as extremely important. A chapter in Hall's posthumously published memoir weaves together recollections of formal instruction in history, his school's colonial rituals, the national positioning of Jamaica during WWII, and the war as he experienced it through various prisms of news footage, atlases and schoolyard re-enactments of the

fighting, all of which were mutually formative of his historical understanding. The importance of both the broader context and of student agency in shaping educational encounters is vividly illustrated in the following passage where he recounts his own history education:

> "Although we were tied to the formal curriculum, other more subversive elements kept creeping in ... The optional paper required us to learn about 'contemporary historical events': about the rise of fascism, the causes of the Second World War, Lenin and the Russian Revolution, the scourge of Communism and the origins of the Cold War ... I think [our history master] regarded our learning about Russia as inoculating the emerging leaders of Jamaican society against the virus of Marxism and anti-imperialist politics. However, we thought it brought history alive. This part of the curriculum stimulated our interest in the contemporary world, illuminated things we wanted to know more about ... We appropriated the knowledge transmitted by these unexpected sources in unpredictable ways. I remember finding in the library a paperback copy of *The Communist Manifesto*, my first encounter with the captivating prose of Karl Marx. The more the British Council pamphlets [read for the optional paper] thundered at the iniquities of the Russian Revolution and of Lenin on imperialism, the more intrigued I became. Disturbing elements were always penetrating and subverting the protective shell of my colonial education which somehow could no longer insulate itself from them. ... I don't mean to suggest that my schooling was ever *directly* subversive. It wasn't. But ideas began to circulate which gradually unsettled the solid edifice of colonial knowledge and affective identification codified by English cultural models, to which we were harnessed" [emphasis in original] (Hall and Schwarz 2017: 114-117).

This vignette is suggestive of Hall's ethic of refusing to reduce the complexities of meaning-making to unidirectional impositions by the powerful and it is how he builds this ethic through a wider conceptual matrix that is the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

Although Hall's work is more associated with media than with education, I argue below that his formulation of discourse and his model of encoding and decoding can make useful contributions to education research, particularly research on learning difficult histories. Given that I am using a terminology of discourse where the work of Michel Foucault has had such an enormous and

controversial influence,[29] Foucault acts here as a useful foil in order to draw out what I have found both specific about using *Hall's* work and why this has been particularly productive for my project.

Hall, Discourse and Meaning-Making

Hall called the discursive perspective a 'theoretical revolution' (Hall & Grossberg, 1986). Long after that first encounter with *The Communist Manifesto*, Hall rejected Marx's formulation that ideas in society simply reflected the class interest of dominant groups in a capitalist economy ('ruling ideas'). Like Gramsci, he rejected this model to instead consider how ideas are produced in a more collective (albeit still unequal) fashion (Hall, 1982). In this Gramscian model, the popular majority and their interests could not merely be dismissed because maintaining dominance required consent and this entailed that shared ideas in society were influenced not only by dominant groups but also by subordinate groups. This required thinking about a plane on which ideas were produced, contested, and ultimately, could change or maintain existent patterns of dominance. The 'theoretical revolution' to which Hall referred was to think of this plane as discursive, as systems of representation within and beyond language. For Hall discourses were constituted not only through language but through social practices and images because these were also representations to which meaning is ascribed (Hall, 1997b). Discourses are therefore the way in which meaning-making can be conceptualised as multi-modal, as polyvocal and as part of the means through which power operates in society.

[29] Foucauldian ideas of discourse have been very influential in studies of the (post)colonial condition, notably in Said's classic *Orientalism* (1978). Satia also positions Foucault as a touchstone in *Time's Monster*, "To Foucault, discourses are what constitute and empower the subjects that make history; they are thus the proper objects of historical study. Indeed, this book is in many ways a study of how the discourse of history shaped empire" (2020, 254).

Hall was influenced by (and resisted) Foucault's formulation of discourse. Foucault's work argued that concepts (e.g. madness, race) do not have intrinsic meanings, or intrinsic rules for talking about them, or intrinsic aspects which can be known about them, but that rather these meanings, rules and 'known' aspects are constructed by discourse. While for Hall there are material existences outside of discourse, these material existences do not have *meaning* outside of discourse (Hall, 1997b). Hall defines discourse as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment ... Discourses are ways of talking, thinking, or representing a particular subject or topic" (1992: 201-205). Hall illustrates this with an example of a particular discourse: a way of representing 'the West', 'the Rest' and the relationships between these constructs. This discourse represents the West as naturally superior to the Rest. Just as meaning cannot exist outside of discourse, discourse cannot exist outside of power. Discourse is never innocent but is shaped by and constitutive of power. To again use Hall's example,

> "The Europeans stood, vis-à-vis the Others, in positions of dominant power. This influenced what they saw and how they saw it, as well as what they did not see. ... the knowledge which a discourse produces constitutes a kind of power, exercised over those who are 'known' ... the Rest becomes defined as everything that the West is not" (1992: 187-216).

This discourse does not reside in one text, but rather many texts share a discourse; as Hall demonstrates 'the West and the Rest' discourse is constructed through many modes whether poems, paintings or lengthy philosophical treatises. In these ways Hall's and Foucault's conceptualisations of discourse overlapped.

Although 'historical narratives' are the object of analysis within Epstein and Peck's formulation of critical socioculturalism (as historical narratives are shaped by power, identity, agency and context), I argue for a shift to 'discourse' as the object of analysis in this project. This is not alien to critical

socioculturalism as 'discourse' is centred within critical approaches, such as in the work of Zembylas and Beckerman (2012). As explained above, discourse has a very recognisable lineage as being co-constitutive with power and this makes it particularly useful within difficult histories research. Using the term 'discourse' for the object of analysis indicates that what is being studied is imbricated with power, while this imbrication is less marked in the terminology of 'narratives'. A terminology of discourse, therefore, facilitates critical socioculturalism's objective to centre questions of power.

Moreover 'discourse' signals broader phenomena than 'sequences in the [distant] past' and better encompasses links to ongoing concerns in the present context. In the course of my analysis, I realised that many of the statements from students and teachers that were of interest were not necessarily 'historical narratives'. In *Teaching History for the Common Good* (2004) Barton and Levstik offer a definition of narrative as an account of a selected and arranged sequence of events which are explicitly or implicitly constructed as casually related. However, in focus groups my interlocuters would often speak about 'the British Empire' without an emphasis on the sequences of historical events which constitute 'the British Empire'. Rather our conversations were often about how the phenomenon of 'the British Empire' was positioned in the present. For instance:

> "Like in places that you know history is taught when it glorifies the British Empire places like I guess more privileged areas, they are able to like ignore certain things because it doesn't affect them as much as it may affect us."

The emphasis here is not the internal organisation of a sequence of historical events; the sequence of historical events often remains implicit. Instead, the student is speaking in more abstract terms about what people are doing with historical narratives in the present ('glorifies the British Empire'). It is more appropriate here to use 'discourse' as the object of analysis and to understand historical narratives as one form of discourse that my data may take but not the only form. 'Discourse'

signals to the reader that the data analysed here does not primarily reveal how students organise the internal sequences of historical events constituting the British Empire. Instead, 'discourse' signals that the data consists of statements made about the British Empire – statements where historical narratives about the empire may be implicit or explicit – and emphasises that these statements are always imbricated within power relations.

Where my understanding of discourse becomes aligned with Hall rather than Foucault is the way in which I conceptualise how different discourses relate to each other, taking from Hall the idea of 'unity out of diversity'. However, before expanding on this, there is again an important overlap: Hall and Foucault both used the phrase 'discursive formation'. Statements made by multiple texts can belong to the same discursive formation if a regularity or pattern between them can be identified. "The statements within a discursive formation need not all be the same. But the relationships and differences between them must be regular and systematic, not random" (Hall, 1992). One way to formulate this crudely is to say that the statements which form part of this discursive formation may disagree with each other, but there is a pattern to them which illuminates how these different statements play according to the same rules. Where Hall and Foucault diverge is that Hall is more interested than Foucault in elaborating how what is happening differently in different spaces can be seen in the aggregate as a unity (Chang, 1986; Hall, 1986). Moreover, for Hall these unities have implications for centres of power (like the state), while Foucault would reject the idea of power centres and rather advocate for a nominalist view of power which is decentred. Hall's formulation of Thatcherism presents a useful means of illustrating this conceptualisation of a discursive formation, a unity which can have (patterned) heterogeneities within it and which has implications for centres of power. The discursive formation of Thatcherism married social conservatism and free-market economics, but these elements are not natural

bedfellows: rather they have important differences and contradictions (Hall, 2021). The discursive formation thus constructs an artificial unity from different projects, repertoires and groups. Contra Foucault, Hall emphasises that this heterogeneity within a discursive formation is a means of attaining popular consent for a central regime:

> "Thatcherism, as a discursive formation, has remained a plurality of discourses – about the family, economy, national identity, morality, crime, law, women, human nature. But precisely a certain unity has been constituted out of this diversity ... the particular ways in which Thatcherism has stitched together a contradictory juncture between the logics of the market and possessive individualism, on the one hand, and the logics of an organic conservatism, on the other, are highly amenable to a Foucauldian type of analysis, provided we understand that *it is the contradictory unity so constructed and held that rules* – not the rules of diversity alone. The problem with Foucault, to put it brusquely, is a conception of difference without a conception of articulation, that is, a conception of power without a conception of hegemony. ... [Hegemony] entails the critical passage of a system of domination into the authority of a leading bloc, which is capable not only of organizing its own base through the construction of alliances between different sectors and social forces, but which has as a central feature of that process *the construction and winning of popular consent to that authority among key sectors of the dominated classes themselves*" (2021, 53) [my emphasis].

It is not only the elements of discourse themselves which require analytic attention, but the ways these elements can be organised into an ensemble, that is, into a new discursive formation. This combining and recombining of elements is what Hall calls 'articulation'. Crucially, Hall perceives the point of such analyses as grasping something about how powerful institutions are operating in a certain context, about how a bloc comes to dominate in a particular conjuncture.

This idea of a discursive formation is helpful for my analysis in that it provided a means of understanding this 'unity out of diversity'. I had initially struggled to see how I might convey not only the discourses of my data (the first layer) but the relationships *between* different discourses (the second layer). In terms of the first layer, a nomenclature of 'discourse' allowed me to see commonalities across different data sources (e.g. commonalities between what students say during a focus group, what teachers say in a classroom and learning materials and so on) through shared

discourses, for instance shared ways of constructing imperialism as racist. However, these discourses would coexist with other discourses which construct the same topic differently, such as for instance the coexistence of discourses of imperialism as racist with discourses of imperialism as development. This raised questions as to whether such coexisting discourses opposed and excluded each other; or related and blended; or remained parallel. That one piece of data from a single participant may contain a number of different discourses about the subject matter (imperialism) and arrange these discourses in particular ways to one another seemed crucial to theorise, especially as the research project started to centre ideas about 'balance'. The idea of a discursive formation gave me a means to highlight these relationships between apparently contradictory discourses. By following Hall, I could understand students' ambivalences about the British Empire through their arrangements of different discourses into a distinct ensemble (a discursive formation) and I could also reflect on how this related to broader structures of power in the conjuncture.

Two finals point to make here are that this concern with how discourses relate to centres of power has implications for my research methodology and stems from a particular orientation to intellectual work. While Halls speaks about multiple discourses this does not mean that these discourses have equal weight as they have *relative* power to one another and are distributed in patterned ways across social identities. A researcher therefore needs to search for "the relations of power and distribution of different regimes of truth in the social formation at any one time – which have certain effects for the maintenance of power in the social order" (Hall and Grossberg 1986, 49). In other words, it is not only that a range of discourses exist but *where* different discourses are articulated and by *whom* that matters. I have endeavoured in my methodology (by looking at a range of different sites, comparing across identities, thinking through the inequities which structure

these sites and identities) to take these questions of the relative power of different discourses and the social distributions of different discourses seriously. Hall makes clear why this is important: citing a need for a closer attention to relative power in society (how strong or weak differing forces are) and to the distribution of different discourses within society, Hall accuses Foucault of being unable to talk about where resistance would come from and only being able to give vague assurances that resistance is possible. As Hall puts it, "[Foucault] saves for himself 'the political;' with his insistence on power, but he denies himself *a politics*" (Hall & Grossberg, 1986). Hall had a strong inclination for his work to intervene in relations of power and contemporary politics (Scott, 2017), more so than Foucault. Hall was more willing to name injustices explicitly rather than merely differences among otherwise equivalent power formations. Sedlmayr described how Hall, while borrowing from poststructuralism, was frustrated by the elements of poststructuralism which undermined what Sedlmayr refers to as 'the political viability of theory' (2018: 19). Poststructuralism could at times obscure rather than illuminate pathways to effective political action. In this way, rejecting a Foucauldian nominalist view of power and asserting – as Hall does – the relevance of differences in power both shapes my research methodology and allows me to hold out hope for the utility of intellectual work with 'a politics'.

Completing the Critical Sociocultural: Identity, Agency, Context

Moving beyond my use of discourse and discursive formations, below I elaborate on Hall's conceptualisations of identity, agency and contextual contingency with an attention throughout to power. While I have organised these into the above three themes, they overlap significantly as these concepts are each implicated in the other.

Identity

Here I discuss in turn the ways in which identity is exclusionary, conditional, and agentive. By exclusionary I mean that an identity is constituted by what lies outside it. Identities require exclusion and this is a key site for the working of power in identification. Identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity" (Hall, 1997a). In addition to the classic examples which Hall cites (the identity of 'man' and 'white' premised on the exclusion and alterity of 'woman' and 'black'), one could add Derrida's Racism's Last Word (1985). Here power operates through denouncements of apartheid by European states as they erect symbolic boundaries between Europe and South Africa. The exclusion of the latter from the former insulates European identities from complicity in the colonial formation of apartheid, an institution which "would have no meaning and would have had no chance outside of a European 'discourse' on the concept of race" (Derrida 1985: 294). As demonstrated by Derrida's piece, what is excluded from the identity then comes to trouble and destabilise it.

As identities are not 'naturally-constituted', they are conditional. Identities do not point to natural allegiances or origins, but identification is a never-completed process of constructing symbolic boundaries.

> "[Identification] is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency. Once secured, it does not obliterate difference. The total merging it suggests is, in fact, a fantasy of incorporation" (Hall 1997a, 2-3).

Identities are therefore in flux; contingent on particular conditions and resources; and unable to 'obliterate' internal differences in the group.

History itself is also important in the formation of identities because historical narratives and representations provide resources for these identities to form again and to be represented again, although with no guarantee that these forms will remain identical to previous iterations. As identities' conditions of existence are always changing – and at increasing rates with globalisation – so too are identities. Hall highlights how migration has disturbed supposedly settled identities in the postcolonial period (1997a). These shifts in identities over time (who is 'we' and who is included/excluded) are in a dialectal relationship with shifts in the ways that power is exercised in society over time. This diachronic rather than only synchronic view of identity thus opens up interesting questions. As Hall puts it "I am not as interested in racism as a single phenomenon marching unchanged through time, but in different racisms that arise in specific historical circumstances, and their effectiveness, their ways of operation" (Hall 2019: 314). To return to the example above, erecting symbolic boundaries between Europe and South Africa was important for European powers in the 1980s, while the 1940s were characterised by different boundaries which brought South Africa and Europe's Allied Powers together into unity. This illustrates that identities are "produced in specific historical and institutional sites" which change, thus changing identities too (Hall 1997a: 4).

Hall holds this historicity together with agency in identification.[30]

> "I am interested in identity because identity is a source of agency in action. It is impossible for people to work and move and struggle and survive without investing something of themselves, of who they are, in their practices and activities, and building some shared project with others, around which collective social identities can cohere" (2019: 314).

[30] While I have been less precise on this point than Hall, it is important to note that Hall uses the term 'identification' rather than 'identity' in order to emphasise this agentive process and its temporary nature.

While discourses create subject positions to be occupied, an explanation is needed as to how subjects come to occupy these subject positions (and not others). Here Hall describes the second sense in which he uses the term 'articulation':

> "The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an articulation, rather than a one-sided process" (1997a: 6).[31]

Hall describes identification as the act of saying who one is (for the moment) and where one stands (for the moment) which in turn enables speaking from/acting from that place, which he glosses as 'a positional notion of identity' (Hall 2019: 315). He argues that we need:

> "a theory of what the mechanisms are by which individuals as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the 'positions' to which they are summoned; as well as how they fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform' these positions, and why they never do so completely, for once and all time, and some never do... In short, what remains is the requirement to think this relation of subject to discursive formations *as an articulation*" (1997a: 13-14).

While Hall spoke against the idea of entirely free play, as conditions always impinge on the choices available to us, he nonetheless stressed "recognizing the capacity of subjects to reposition themselves differently" (Hall and Grossberg, 1986: 51). Hall uses the example of Rastafarian identity as formed through taking pre-existing discursive resources such as the Bible and refashioning this discourse into a new language and identity and in the process becoming new political subjects.[32] It is this 'positional notion of identity' – provisional, agentive and contingent – that I use in viewing students' discourses of imperialism, including their position-taking in the

[31] According to Hall, Foucault is one of those guilty of engaging in this one-sidedness (prior to his last works): Foucault's archaeologies "offer a formal account of the construction of subject positions within discourse while revealing little about why it is that certain individuals occupy some subject positions rather than others. By neglecting to analyse how the social positions of individuals interact with the construction of certain 'empty' discursive subject positions, Foucault reinscribes an antinomy between subject positions and the individuals who occupy them. Thus his archaeology provides a critical, but one-dimensional, formal account of the subject of discourse. Discursive subject positions become a priori categories which individuals seem to occupy in an unproblematic fashion" (Hall 1997a: 10).

[32] There is of course much more to be said about Hall's conceptualisation of identity – such as hybridity and race as the floating signifier – however there is not the space to explore these adequately here.

quantitative elements of the survey. In choosing one survey response over another, students are only stating where they stand for the moment in an artificial construction.

Agency

This section illustrates why, although a troubled concept, agency is key to the themes of this second half of the chapter: discourse and identity.[33] Generally, Hall tends not to use the term 'agency' directly, possibly because it can be read with connotations of a unified un-historicised subject: "By 'agency' I express no desire whatsoever to return to an unmediated and transparent notion of the subject or identity as the centred author of social practice" (Hall 1997a: 2). Hall accepts the unviability of a unified, self-sustaining subject and that the subject needed to be reconceptualised (see 'the contingent subject' below).

Agency is a necessary component of Hall's conceptualisation of how both discourses and identities "do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects" (Hall and Grossberg 1986: 53). Instead of seeing this as a passive process of slotting into predefined identities and discourses, he highlights how active articulation "empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position" (Hall and Grossberg 1986: 53). If articulations are as Hall insists *non-necessary* linkages, then agency may be a term employed to describe how it is that subjects are temporarily attached to particular discourses and identities

[33] Agency is also a necessary condition for the political: "that its future is not already wrapped up in its past, that it is not part of an unfolding teleological narrative whose end is known and given in its beginning. I do not believe, in that sense, in 'the laws of history.' There is no closure yet written into it. And to be absolutely honest, if you do not agree that there is a degree of openness or contingency to every historical conjuncture, you do not believe in politics, because you do not believe that anything can be done about it. If everything is already given, what is the point of exercising yourself or of trying to change it in a particular direction?" (Hall 2019: 313) This speaks to another theme in this chapter: what demands are made on a conceptual framework where the aim is to conduct 'useful' intellectual work? An affirmation of agency is one of those demands.

over others (as well as how these subjects temporarily articulate different discourses together in discursive formations, as in Hall's first sense of 'articulation').

This is again not to deny that Hall works at the intersection of agency *and* structure. Davis puts this vividly:

> "Hall is not about to relinquish structure and agency in pursuit of an identity politics that is founded purely on an idea of self-determination. We are *not*, according to Hall, simply whatever we want to call ourselves. Identity is *not* simply a question of identity-shopping. Identity is in constant production and exists at the point of intersection between the individual and other determining structures and institutions" (2004: 162).

Each step a subject takes is stepping into what has gone before and this is a necessary part of being and interacting in the world. "We enter culture, and by doing so appropriate a language, a culture, which someone else – many other people – created for us, and only in that way gradually become subjects" (Hall 2019: 308). The following section raises the issue of how to conceptualise the way forces of agency and forces of context meet, which for Hall is contingency.

Contingency

While Epstein and Peck highlight 'contexts' and 'settings', here I give these some further specificity as to how they interact with agency and identity through Hall's conceptualisation of 'contingency'. As Hall puts it, "the conceptual issue is, is there a way of thinking determinateness which is not a closed determinacy? And contingency is the sign of this effort to think determinacy without a closed form of determination" (Hall 2019: 313). Articulations are contingent, that is, these elements have come together under particular conditions and as these conditions shift so too can the articulations, but the way they might shift in the future is both not predictable and not free of previous articulations. He gives the example of religion to say this can be articulated with politics in particular ways which can change over time (for instance from being central to political life to be being more peripheral). But "if you want to move religion, to rearticulate it in another way, you are

going to come across all the grooves that have articulated it already" (Hall and Grossberg 1986: 54). Therefore, while the subject is agentive, these grooves make some actions more possible than others for the subject. The task is to investigate *what* is new within a new conjuncture – such as the ways in which discourses have changed – while being cognisant that "every new configuration contains masses of the old" (Hall in Akomfrah 2013: 26:15). Hall continues this thought later in the film: "I think of the new not as breaking completely with the past, always as reconfiguring some elements of the past with some elements that are new. Each time that comes it does require a change of perspective" (Akomfrah 2013: 1:18:00- 1:18:20). In this sense, students are making meaning in these contingent conditions, surrounded by the grooves of previous meanings, while there is also the potential for something new to be identified that is distinct to the present conjuncture and goes beyond those old grooves and previous meanings.

Contingency helps illuminate the nature of subjects and how it is that subjects can only conduct politics 'without guarantees'. As mentioned above, the subject is contingent:

> "For you [Hall] the idea of contingency does not license an ethical-political subject of sovereign agency ... part of the point of contingency is precisely that we are not simply the sovereign authors of ourselves and our worlds, that we are partly constituted by energies – desires, injuries, dispositions, pasts – flowing beneath the threshold of rational self-consciousness" (Scott 2017: 81).

Whilst these 'subterranean' contingencies of the subject complicate the task of political action and identification, the optimistic edge here is that, because the articulations which make up the present are contingent and not necessary, they *can* be changed, even by these non-sovereign subjects. If we are 'not simply the sovereign authors of ourselves and our worlds' this also entails that this change is necessarily messy and without guarantees. Contingency, therefore, has implications for how we might think about what is means to do productive political work:

> "As I understand you [Hall], the idea of the contingency of determinations is important insofar as it helps to unsettle – indeed, subvert – a naturalized idea of politics as the mastering and instrumentalist practice of securing a preconceived community of the Good or the True or the Right. To hold open a space for contingency, to read the present conjuncturally, is to see in this conventional idea of politics an ideal of *antipolitics*, in other words a politics conceived to pre-empt and foreclose the possibility of an ethics of politics as such. The point you hold about contingency, then, is that it promotes a conception of politics understood as strategic practice… [Contingency] is meant to encourage us toward opportunity, new initiatives, the challenge of remaking our worlds" (Scott 2017: 80-82).

The thrust here is that while it is tempting to take the intellectual work of politics to be coming up with correct, a priori answers (or a priori communities) that will provide a blueprint for how to right wrongs, this is not helpful or sufficient in a complex, ever-changing, contingent world. Rather, a close attention to the complexities of the present must inform how we intervene (provisionally, strategically) in the political.

The forgoing has sketched an account of how I will be interpreting the key concepts of critical socioculturalism in my research on difficult history, but this chapter requires one last section to connect these concepts more closely to the specific interactions I will discussing in the research. I still require a language for talking about the process of students interacting with a variety of texts and producing their own responses to them as well as how the broad abstractions described above (identity, agency, contingency) relate to that process. This language is provided by Hall's encoding and decoding model.

Encoding and Decoding

I began to think about the generative possibilities for reception studies in education research while running a discussion group on African cinema. Although members of the group had all watched

the same film, with the same dialogue and same images, the discussions revealed that we often had very divergent interpretations of the films. This mirrored the heterogeneity of my research participants' interpretations of what they had been learning in the same module, even in the same classes. This led me to the encoding and decoding model first presented by Hall in a paper titled "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" for a 1973 colloquy in Leicester; the paper was subsequently published in other forums (1999) as a classic text in reception studies and more widely in media studies and cultural studies. The model moved reception studies from behaviourist assumptions about how audiences respond to texts. It also insisted on the importance of contingencies external to the text itself in how audiences made meaning of the broadcast.

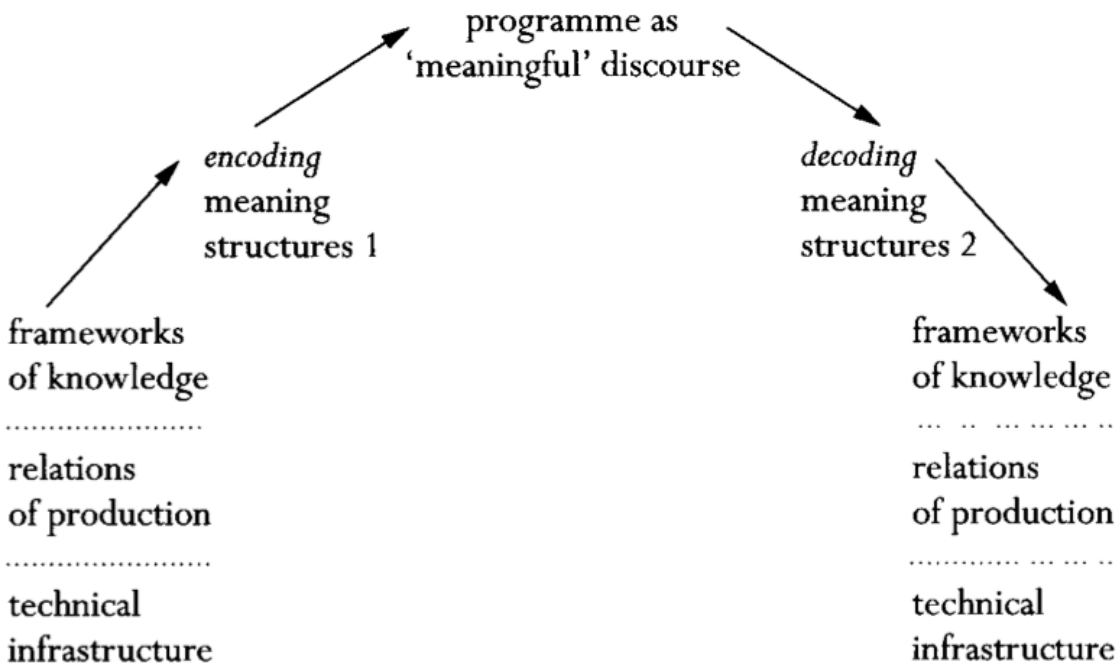
Although written with television programmes in mind, the encoding and decoding model can make useful contributions to education research, particularly research on the learning/reception of difficult histories.[34] This is because firstly it allows for the (partial) splitting of different moments in the communication process and draws attention to the relative autonomy of the moment of production of the message from the moment of reception of the message. Secondly, it enables thinking through the political opportunities available in the moment of reception. In terms of the fit between conceptual models and methodology, it is significant for my project that this model has been used in influential ethnographic research (Morely, 1986; Morley, 1974). As Ivala argues, ethnographic research suits the encoding/decoding model because they both emphasise meaning-in-context: ethnography has "greater potential for engaging with the production of meaning in everyday life... as it takes into account the social world of actual audiences" (2007: 36-37). Below is

[34] To my knowledge, this is the first usage of encoding/decoding in educational research. While Giroux (2000) has written on the relevance of Hall's work generally for education, he does not make specific reference to the encoding/decoding model.

a diagrammatic representation which acts as a useful launching pad for explaining the model in further detail.

Figure 1: Encoding and Decoding Model

(Hall 1999: 510)



In order for meaningful communication to occur, a message must be encoded and then decoded. Encoders, enmeshed in particular frameworks of knowledge and relations of production, making use of particular technical infrastructure,[35] encode the message. Decoders, enmeshed in their *own* frameworks of knowledge, holding *alternate* positions in relations of production and potentially *different* technical infrastructure, decode the message. The key point is that, due to these non-

[35] In broadcasting, an historical event cannot be transmitted in a 'raw' form to an audience without being mediated and shaped by wider discourses and technical aural-visual forms of e.g. television news. This is as applicable in history education as an historical event cannot be transmitted in a 'raw' form to students without being mediated and shaped by history textbooks, teaching materials and teachers' narratives at the front the class. In other words, the communication must take particular forms within the schooling institution (e.g. worksheets, handouts). While I have not focused particularly on the affordances and constraints of technical infrastructure in the project, sufficed to say that materiality of Hall's videotape and television sets is here the materiality of the projector and the textbook.

congruences, the decoded meaning may differ from the encoded meaning. What occurs in one moment does not guarantee what occurs in the next. Multiple possibilities exist for how to interpret (as well as argue with) the message and there is no guarantee this will be carried out in the way encoders intend. It is this distinction between what is encoded and what is decoded that is missing from the representations of learning that I outlined in the Introduction; these are representations which make no space for young people thinking for themselves partly because they assume what is encoded is also what is decoded. Disciplinary approaches likewise erase this polysemy as they focus intently on what should be encoded (powerful knowledge) but lack consideration of how this might be differently decoded. Various moves that Hall makes in reception studies through this model (Ivala 2007) echo those I want to make in history education: from mono to polysemy, from a focus on texts-in-themselves to a focus on audiences, from passive audiences to active audiences and from undifferentiated audiences to demassified audiences.

This model not only allows for distinguishing and relating students' meanings from that of other actors in the encounter (e.g. teachers, textbook authors), but stresses that (student) audiences respond actively and argumentatively to messages. This breaks with behaviourist assumptions of 'passive minds' (Morley, 1992). However, Hall's specific typology for organising different forms of audience decodings (dominant, oppositional and negotiated) is problematic in the context of my research (as I explain below), but discussing them here is helpful for illustrating the point that decodings are political in nature.

According to Hall's typology messages have dominant or preferred meanings which align with the intentions and interests of the powerful ('dominant' decodings). In keeping with the foregoing sections on discourse, agency and contingency, decoding is not a space of infinitely free play:

> "Polysemy must not, however, be confused with pluralism. Connotative codes [36] [different decodings] are *not* equal among themselves. Any society or culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political worlds" (1999, 513).

Whilst this acknowledges inequalities between meanings, an issue that arises with this part of the typology is that it assumes encoders are encoding hegemonic discourses. This does not adequately capture the nature of the *Migration, Empires and the People* module's encodings as this includes subversive elements. It therefore seems inappropriate to conflate – as Hall does here – the encoder's preferred meaning with a wider dominant meaning.[37] As well as 'dominant' decodings, Hall also notes that these messages can also be interpreted in 'oppositional' and 'negotiated' ways. Oppositional decoders, Hall argues, understand but reject the dominant/preferred meaning. For instance, an oppositional decoding describes "the viewer who listens to a debate on the need to limit wages but 'reads' every mention of the 'national interest' as 'class interest'" (Hall 1999, 517). Negotiated decodings are slightly more complex:

> "Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules – it operates with exceptions to the rule. It accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions' ... This negotiated version of the dominant ideology is thus shot through with contradictions" (1999: 516).

His example, although recognisable as 1970s Britain, has echoes in contemporary Britain with its own 2022 winter of discontent, including new anti-strike laws and rising inflation:

> "The simplest example of a negotiated code is that which governs the response of a worker to the notion of an Industrial Relations Bill limiting the right to strike or to arguments for a wages freeze. At the level of the 'national interest' economic debate the decoder may adopt the hegemonic definition, agreeing that 'we must all pay ourselves less in order to combat inflation'. This, however, may have little or no relation to his or her willingness to go on

[36] Hall (1999) differentiates between denotation and connotation. While recognizing the artificiality of the distinction he describes denotation as what the message represents 'literally' (e.g. a person driving a car smoking a cigarette) and connotation as what the message represents at other levels such as the affective, political, cultural (e.g. freedom).
[37] Indeed, Morley's ethnographic work surfaced several issues with Hall's model (causing Morley to modify it) but there is no scope to discuss the particularities of these further here.

> strike for better pay and conditions or to oppose the Industrial Relations Bill at the level of shop-floor or union organisation [due to 'exceptional' local circumstances]" (*ibid*).

What is missing from Hall's model, and particularly important for its educational use, is that decoders with different interpretations from the intended encodings do not necessarily understand the dominant/preferred meanings. While not exclusive to students, that students are still being inaugurated into the societies in which they live (in a more intense sense than their older counterparts) make this possibility for incidental misrecognition more likely. For this reason, the fact that across Hall's typology (of dominant, oppositional and negotiated decodings) decoders are always assumed to be cognisant of an agreed dominant meaning is unhelpful. Cumulatively, these issues mean that it would be inappropriate to apply Hall's original typology (of dominant, oppositional and negotiated decodings) strictly or comprehensively in this project. It does however serve to make the point that research using the encoding/decoding model should distinguish between different forms of decoding. For example, some differences between students' discourses arise from students who – although they have similar understandings of the module (decoding it as intended by the encoders, broadly speaking) – take different positions on the question of the normative status of the British Empire. However, other differences between students' discourses arise because of/in tandem with the fact that they decoded the module in incommensurate ways. Therefore, in this latter case it is not that these students were taking different positions in a shared debate but rather that they were not even having the same debate.

The model attempts to enable an analysis of 'the communicative process as a whole' (Hall, 1999). While I collected data from students, teachers, a textbook author and the exam board in order to explore both encoding and decoding, this proved unwieldy and I have instead focused primarily on students' decoding. Although the aspiration to live up to Hall's emphasis on 'the communicative process as a whole' could not fully materialise in this dissertation, the process was nevertheless

valuable for appreciating the different contingencies and institutional logics which fed into the iterative encodings and decodings between policy, exam boards, textbook producers and teachers, all of which preceded students' decoding of the module.

One aspect associated with encoding rather than decoding which I do draw on, especially in Chapter 5's discussion of the balance sheet as a discursive formation, is that of 'professional codes'. These are the ways of transmitting messages which conform to the norms of the profession – for Hall the profession of broadcasting and for my purposes the profession of teaching. Hall describes 'professional codes' as autonomous, reproductive *and* resistant to state interests.

> "The professional code is 'relatively independent' of the dominant code, in that it applies criteria and transformational operations of its own, especially those of a technico-practical nature. The professional code, however, operates within the 'hegemony' of the dominant code. Indeed, it serves to reproduce the dominant definitions precisely by bracketing their hegemonic quality and operating instead with displaced professional codings which foreground such apparently neutral-technical questions... to act in such a way as to reproduce (not without contradiction) the hegemonic signification of events ... Of course, conflicts, contradictions and even misunderstandings regularly arise between the dominant and the professional significations and their signifying agencies" (Hall 1999: 515-516).

This professional aspect is a key element of the frameworks of knowledge at work in teachers' encoding. Chapter 5 demonstrates how these professional codes relate to balance sheet approaches to empire.

Differentiating not just individual but socially patterned decodings was also an important aspiration of the model. More confident on this point after Morley's research, Hall later dispensed with his more tentative 1973 framing and by the late 90s he explained that to understand why different decodings of the same message may exist, researchers must look "to orders of social life, of economic and political power... of course, there will always be private, individual, variant readings.

But ... the patterns exhibit, across individual variants, significant clusterings" (1999: 51-515). Here we can see the cleavages between a Foucauldian discourse analysis (with its temporal rather than synoptic differentiations) and Hall's desire for a more thorough account of the sociology of clusterings in the present. I attempt to address this question of sociological patterns through my maximum variation sampling – disaggregating between findings in very different schooling environments – and by paying attention to different variables in the survey data, however as with Morley's 1986 study I cannot lay claims to representivity. Moreover, while the social positions and identifications of encoders and decoders are important for the meanings they create, this is not a determined relationship, as discussed in the section on agency.[38]

the encoding and decoding model has helped to knit together the broad abstractions of the critical sociocultural approach's key concepts to the more micro-level interactions I observe directly in my research. That is, students actively 'decode' messages about imperialism during the course of the module in ways that may be aberrant from the intentions and expectations of those who encoded these messages. Not only is decoding agentive, but it is also a political act. The wider discursive environment(s), identifications and other contingencies such as the material environment and available technologies all shape this process of decoding.

Research Questions

[38] As Morley explains: "In insisting that individual decodings of messages must be considered within their socio-cultural context, I am not implying that individual thought and action are simply determined by, and therefore directly 'explicable' in terms of social position. This would be a crude form of determinism which effectively obliterated the category of the individual – as actor in a social world – and replaced it with the category of social class – as if all the facts about an individual (and in particular the way in which an individual decoded messages) could be reduced to the question of which social class he or she belonged to" (1992: 82).

By setting out the context of the research (Chapter 1), the literature that I am building on (Chapter 2 and 3) and the concepts which have facilitated my research in this area (Chapter 3), these first three chapters have laid the groundwork for the development of my specific research questions.

Related to the broader debates about 'balance' and empire set out in the Introduction and Literature Review are debates about what school students *should* be taught about empire. However, very little is understood about what students *are* taught about empire. Research on empire in English history education lacks detail or analysis on the *specific* contents of what students are learning. This is partly because the fragmentary structure of the curriculum (autonomy at KS3 and many choices at GCSE and A-level) makes researching this challenging. This produces my first research question:

"What role does 'balance' play in structuring messages to students about empire?"

'Messages' here refers to lessons, textbooks and other learning material related to the module Migration Empires and the People.

My conceptual framework enables separating out these messages – pedagogical encodings – and students' decoding of those messages. To explore these decodings of the module and also to explore students' ideas of empire 'in their own right' (i.e. not necessarily directly related to the module) I ask a further question:

"What discourses of empire do students express over the course of the module?"

Debates about what students should be taught about empire (or other contentious topics) would have little meaning if good faith participants in these debates did not believe that teaching these histories *affected* students in some way. However, there is little research about whether and how students change their ideas of history during their schooling. Due to this gap, Barton (2018) calls

for a 'dynamic research tradition' in teaching and learning difficult histories which explores change rather relying on 'static portrayals'. To address this, I ask:

"How are students' discourses changing over the course of the module if at all?"

Barton also emphasises building knowledge about *how* change is occurring and what relationship this has to classroom practices. His own research with McCully (2005) illustrates how complex this process can be for researchers to try to understand. They find that, although teachers in Northern Ireland drew from both Nationalist and Unionist narratives of history, students appeared to become more sectarian over the course of schooling. It is unclear, they point out, whether history education had an unintended polarising effect as students may have selectively embellished prior political stances with further historical detail provided in lessons *or* whether the multi-perspectivity of these lessons did have the desired ameliorative effect (and that without this history education students would have been even more sectarian in outlook). To explore these processes in more depth I make use of my conceptual framework to ask:

"How do these discourses relate to identity, agency and contingency?"

To note, 'contingency' here includes the classroom lessons which (may) influence students' discourses of empire as well as various other contingencies such as the broader schooling environment.

Lastly, the analysis moves beyond describing students' decodings by asking a final pair of reflective questions:

"What role does 'balance' play in structuring students' discourses of empire?

What does this tell us about the present conjuncture?"

These questions attempt to offer a deeper interrogation of the findings in light of the themes explored in Chapter 1 ('balance' and 'the conjuncture') and thus the analysis comes full circle.

Conclusion

It was necessary to discuss disciplinary approaches, difficult histories and critical socioculturalism in order to locate my work within developments in history education. The roles (students, teachers), materials (textbooks, lesson slides), dynamics (timetables, examinations) and content (constructions of the past) in my research are those *of* history education. For this reason, it is valuable to locate this project within the field of history education as opposed to translocating it wholesale to other related disciplines (for example, cultural studies).

I critiqued powerful knowledge and so-called disciplinary approaches by making visible their foreshortening of the disciplines and this in turn allowed me to maintain my hope in the disciplines, in their capacity for doing reflective politically engaged work. After all, Hall's scholarship – although inter/transdisciplinary – is nonetheless produced through engagement with the disciplines. For better or worse, attempts to disrupt disciplines often become assimilated into them. Of course, this hope of mine is also the product of my personal situated desire within the academy to defend its utility despite recognising its manifold issues and troubling legacies.

Hall's work has been enormously productive for this research, providing a means of conceptualising discourse itself as well as how discourse connects to key concepts in the critical sociocultural approach to difficult histories (identity, agency, power and contingency). Foucault notes that

> "Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in *technical* processes, in *institutions*, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for *transmission* and *diffusion*, and in *pedagogical* forms which, at once, impose and maintain them" (1977: 200) [my emphasis].

Contingency provides a means for thinking about how the technical processes of teaching/learning and the institutions of schooling create the ground for students to interact with particular histories of imperialism and encourage students to interact with these histories in certain ways. The model of encoding and decoding similarly provides a means of thinking about how this transmission and diffusion occurs between teachers (who follow professional codes) and agentive student 'audiences'.

Chapter Four: Methodology and Research Design

The Broad Strokes

This section briefly outlines my research methods and conveys the most important decisions about how the research was carried out so that subsequent sections (which go into greater detail about each element) can be seen in the context of the whole. While united by the focus on the *Migration, Empires and the People* [MEP] module, the research for this thesis has two distinct components: multi-modal ethnographic research conducted with one set of schools and survey research conducted with another set of schools. The difference in methods used in the two samples is described in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of samples and methods

	Ethnographic set of schools	Survey-only set of schools
Schools	Schools A, B and C (Ferryhall, Walton, All Saints)	Schools E, F, G, H, I
Thematic GCSE module	- All 3 schools teaching *Migration, Empires and the People*	- 3 Schools teaching *Migration, Empires and the People* - 2 Schools teaching the alternative option *Health and the People* -1 School teaching the alternative option *Power and the People*
Classes	2 Classes at Ferryhall School 1 Class at Walton Academy 2 Classes at All Saints School	Not disaggregated by class
Methods	• Unstructured classroom observations • Student focus groups • Student Survey A • Pilot of Student Survey B (only administered after the module) • Interviews with teachers	• Revised version of Student Survey B (administered both before and after module)

As the Table 3 demonstrates, the variety of methods employed and the depth of contextual information was greater in the ethnographic set of schools than in the survey-only set of schools.

Also important to note at the outset of this chapter is the relationship between empire and migration in the study. As touched on in Chapter 1, empire and migration have tight links in Britain (Patel 2021). I was initially surprised to see how much these two topics were twinned in British discourse (MEP was just one instance of this). While imperialism in South(ern) Africa is of course also bound up with migration (especially the migration of white imperialists and indentured South Asians), the term 'migration' has not been a prominent framing of colonial narratives in SA. That this framing is more prominent in Britain is due to the political importance of co-articulating histories of empire and histories of migration in the context of white hostility to post-imperial immigration to Britain. Given this twinning, I had the ambition to collect data on both themes of the module (although I was always more inclined to questions of imperialism) but eventually I needed to prioritise one of these themes. My underlying inclination to look at imperialism drove a greater overall focus in the dissertation on that theme and this is reflected in the final and much-revised research questions. In Table 4, I connect each of these research questions to the data sources, to the most relevant elements of conceptual framework and to particular chapters in the dissertation.

Table 4: Mapping Research Questions to Data, Concepts and Chapters

Research question		Key data	Link to conceptual framework	Key chapters
1.	"What role does 'balance' play in structuring messages to students about empire?"	- Review of classroom materials, textbooks and other relevant literature	- Focuses on encoding - Builds a picture of the discursive environment in which students are making meaning, i.e. points to contingencies in student discourses	Chapter 5: The Balance Sheet as Discursive Formation Chapter 6: Change and Continuity at GCSE
2.	"What discourses of empire do students express over the course of the module?"	- Student focus groups - Student Survey A - Student Survey B	- Focuses on decoding - Centres students' discourses and establishes what these are before asking more complex questions about these discourses	Chapter 7: Students' Discourses, Decodings and Identities at the Ethnographic Sites Chapter 8: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Student Discourses
3.	"How are students' discourses changing over the course of the module if at all?"	- Student focus groups - Student Survey A - Student Survey B	- Focuses on decoding - If the political contention in this conjuncture is that students learning about imperialism will produce particular changes, then this should be investigated empirically - Tracing changes allows for a more granular investigation of the roles of identity, agency and contingency in students' decoding	Chapter 7: Students' Discourses, Decodings and Identities at the Ethnographic Sites Chapter 8: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Student Discourses
4.	"How do these discourses relate to identity, agency and contingency?"	- Classroom observations - Student focus groups - Student Survey A - Student Survey B	- Focuses primarily on decoding, but relates this to encoding - Builds on the findings from the previous two questions to centre identity, agency and contingency	Chapter 7: Students' Discourses, Decodings and Identities at the Ethnographic Sites Chapter 8: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Student Discourses
5.	"What role does 'balance' play in structuring students' discourses of empire? What does this tell us about the present conjuncture?"	- Previous chapters' findings	- Focuses primarily on decoding, but relates this to encoding - Builds on the findings from the previous four questions	Chapter 9: Discussion Chapter 10: Conclusion

Lastly, in this introductory section to the chapter I wanted to address the difference between the character of the methods (especially the quantitative aspects of the survey) and the character of the conceptual framework (discursive) as this requires further explanation. In the early stages of this project, I had a greater emphasis on the question of what 'impact' history education had on students' views of imperialism. Surely, this was the million-dollar question? The residue of this emphasis remains in the thesis with Research Question 3 investigating 'change' and with my use of

a baseline/endline survey design. However, 'impact' became less central to the thesis over time. As I began to see more of the complexity of the classroom dynamic, I became more sceptical about the validity of a small project such as mine looking to answer the question of 'impact' with any kind of certainty. (No matter how long I spent on this project it was still a limited one-woman-band affair in terms of data collection.) 'Impact' was also no longer the story that was most urgent to tell. Emphasising impact can encourage focusing on a narrow range of inputs and outputs: 'if you teach *this* content then students will feel *that* way' with some variables in between. Firstly, this seemed to reaffirm rather than challenge the passive view of students undergirding the culture war media debate. Also, returning to the sections on identity and agency in Chapter 3, the question of impact is vulnerable to becoming 'one-sided' in Hall's sense. That is, it restricts attention to the empty subject-positions created by discourse, to how the subject is 'hailed', and marginalises *why* the subject might invest in one position over another or how the subject may refashion these positions. Secondly, focusing too narrowly on the classroom 'inputs' seemed unhelpful as I became more interested in the broader theme of balance which extended beyond the classroom. Although this interest in balance was stoked by what I saw in the classroom, understanding why it had such force seemed to require looking outwards to a range of other sites (discussed in Chapter 5). The concept of a discursive formation was attractive here because it allowed for a re-focusing away from delineating precise cause-and-effect and towards seeing the *entanglement* of all these multi-sited messages about 'balance' as a key feature of the whole. In sum, the turn away from a more rigid, passive version of impact has been a turn towards provisional, agentive decoding by students where they choose how to relate to a discursive formation. To reiterate from the Chapter 3, 'what remains is the requirement to think of this relation of subject to discursive formations as an articulation', to think about the non-necessary linkages between students and a discursive formation by exploring why students might choose to talk about empire in these ways. This

evolution of the thesis (from impact to discourse) contextualises some of the methodological choices described in the remainder of the chapter.

Centring the GCSE: Rationale and Implications

This section illustrates why this thesis focused on GCSE students and the MEP module, beyond merely the fact of that fateful encounter with the MEP textbook during my African Studies MSc described in Chapter 1. England's GCSE structure opened up particular possibilities for looking at impact. Schools in England choose between different GCSE history modules with different themes. This is opposed to, for example, the South African system where schools do not have the same system of choice and instead – broadly speaking – all schools study the same historical themes. This means that it is possible in England to compare GCSE history students who have studied a certain historical topic in-depth and GCSE history students who have not (as opposed to comparing GCSE history students to students who did not choose history for GCSE which may involve other differences between the two groups). In other words, module variation between different schools opened up an opportunity to use a natural experiment design. I pursued this possibility with the survey-only school sample in which different schools were doing different GCSE history modules and thus the group of schools had a natural distribution of 'treatment' groups (studying the MEP module) and 'control' groups (studying other GCSE modules without a significant focus on empire). In order to reduce the variables at play, all the schools in my sample had chosen the AQA exam board for GCSE history. This opportunity for a natural experiment design was one reason for my focus on GCSE level history.

The second reason for focusing on GCSE was the difficulties posed by curricular variation at KS3. I could draw firmer conclusions about the impact of the module firstly if student engagement with imperialism was more extended (a whole GCSE module rather than a single KS3 class). Secondly, firmer conclusions could be drawn if there was a greater similarity of the content across the 'treatment' schools (such as a shared module with shared specifications, see Chapter 6) than was possible at KS3 (which does not have detailed specifications). This focus on data collection at GCSE had three consequences for the research.

The first drawback of centring a GCSE module is that the number of students across England choosing to do GCSE history (which is optional) is much smaller than the number who were taught history at KS3 (which is compulsory). As noted in the 2018 *Race, Ethnicity & Equality Report* from the Royal Historical Society:

> "A number of studies have estimated the proportion of GCSE students taking History is roughly one-third, and there is evidence that pupils in some BME groups are slightly less likely to choose History than White pupils. Department for Education (DfE) analysis has also indicated that Black pupils are notably less likely to choose Humanities subjects in general, and that BME pupils in general are more likely to choose 'vocational' subjects" (Atkinson et al., 2018: 30).

Prior attainment and socio-economic background also limit students' access to history beyond KS3. Harris et al explain that

> "Students with high – or medium-level prior attainment on entry to secondary school are increasingly likely to be entered for EBacc[39] [GCSE] subjects like history. However, those

[39] EBacc is short for English Baccalaureate and refers to a subset of GCSE subjects given special status by the DfE on the grounds that they facilitate future study and career options. History is a EBacc subject.

> with low prior attainment are significantly less likely to be entered. By definition such students will not be found in grammar schools and, because of the persisting correlation between socio-economic advantage and academic outcomes, are rarely to be found in independent schools either. They are far more likely to be found in areas of low socio-economic status" (2019: 242).

In this sense, focusing on GCSE meant looking at a smaller and more skewed sample of research participants which in turn made particular analyses difficult, such as exploring inter-ethnic differences in the survey (see Chapter 8).

Secondly, the GCSE is geared towards high-stakes examinations which affect how class time is prioritised. A more exam-focused classroom environment at GCSE than at KS3 leaves less space for classroom discussions about topics outside of the examinable specifications (such as the present significance of the past). I flag this here to contextualise my findings about the influence of assessment regimes on history education, an influence which is likely stronger at GCSE than KS3.

Thirdly, my initial focus on the GCSE proved particularly limiting when I began to appreciate how important KS3 was in terms of setting norms for how imperialism is understood at GCSE. (Anecdotally, parents of primary school children who are critical of pro-imperialism narratives have also argued that I should have looked even earlier than KS3 with phrases such as 'it starts in primary school, you know'). As my data collection was principally geared towards the GCSE module, I had far less data explicitly related to KS3. To ameliorate this problem, I supplemented my other data collection methods with an exploration of publicly available teaching materials online to further substantiate my case in Chapter 5.

Sampling and Recruitment I: Ethnographic Sample

For this project, I defined my total target population (the widest group from which I could theoretically draw participants for this study) as all the students currently studying MEP. This later expanded to include those who *had recently studied* MEP because teachers in the classroom observation sample suggested that I speak to their A-level students as well in order to broaden my perspective to more classes. From this total population I also had the pragmatic consideration of needing to be able to attend lessons in different schools on the same day which limited the geographical scope to the south of England.

I began the sampling process by trying to understand more about the total population. Due to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulations it was not possible to get a breakdown from the exam board of all the schools that were teaching the module. Instead, I created a small database of 80 schools that had listed the MEP module in the GCSE curriculum pages of their school website in 2019. The exam board did share that 212 centres entered for the MEP module which is to say that roughly 212 schools taught the module that year. However, the subset of 80 schools was useful in demonstrating the wide variation in which types of schools the module was being taught, although with a higher concentration in London than elsewhere.

The details of recruitment for each of the three schools of the ethnographic sample are given in As shown in the last three columns of Table 5, the three schools differed from each other in significant ways while having MEP in common. This maximum variation sampling was productive, enabled as much by luck as design (see Recruitment Method in Table 5). As Patton explains,

> "When selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful

> for documenting uniqueness, and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (1990: 172).

Here I would add that it is not merely 'uniqueness' per se, but rather it is that this method is useful for understanding the role that difference (in school context) plays in shaping variations of the object of analysis (discourses of imperialism). This resonates with the critical sociocultural approach's emphasis on the role of context in meaning making. The school-level variables which I tried to ensure differed between the schools were: the politico-geographic positioning of the school (further explained below); the school population's socio-economic status; as well as the school's cultural and ethnic diversity. This was because party political ideology, class, culture and race positions us differently towards the British Empire (Thompson, 2014). Similarly, John Darwin writes of 20th century attitudes that "'empire' has meant so many different things to a public at home, fragmented by class, religion, occupation and political allegiance ... It would be hardly surprising to find a residue of these different perceptions in contemporary attitudes and memories" (2015). Politico-geographic positioning was read through the schools' local authority election winners and further supplemented by the area's rural-urban classification from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as well as a short qualitative description of the area (see **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**). The measure of free school meals (FSM) was used as a proxy for the school populations' socio-economic status and English as an additional language (EAL) as a proxy for the school's cultural and ethnic diversity. While FSM and EAL are both suboptimal proxies, they are accessible measures as these figures are available online (Department for Education, 2019). These details of the three (pseudonymised) schools are displayed in Table 5 and banded to protect the schools' anonymity. On the two metrics of FSM and EAL it could be argued that Ferryhall School and Walton Academy are more similar than would be ideal for maximum variation sampling. However, the challenge of recruitment for an

ethnographic (and thus potentially 'intrusive') research project on a specific module played a significant role in limiting the degree of choice and control I had over the sample.

Table 5, but it is necessary to add here that there is volunteer bias in the sample (Salkind, 2010). When I spoke to teacher conference audiences or when the exam board helped me to advertise the research to call for volunteers these efforts were largely unsuccessful and this raises questions of what enabled those in the sample to participate when others did not. The teachers who took part were Heads of Department (HoDs) or senior leaders in the school and confident in their teaching. By comparison, I had gone some way to including another school in the research but when the teacher I had been discussing it with realised I wanted to observe more than a lesson or two, she decided to decline participation. The teacher did not feel comfortable being watched while she taught for an extended period of time. Thereafter, others in her department also declined. In two of the schools in the ethnographic sample, two teachers with fraught relationships with their current MEP class also steered me towards observing the MEP classes of other teachers in the department instead. I was therefore only able to conduct the research with teachers who were relatively comfortable with their MEP classes being observed which effectively excluded a number of teachers and their classes.

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Table 5: Characteristics of Ethnographic Schools

School	Teachers/ Classes	Recruitment method	Periods observed	MEP content covered in-person before pandemic	MEP year and textbook	Geographical location	FSM	EAL
All Saints School	Angela & Erin Two classes observed	I had met Angela at a history education CPD event where she had mentioned teaching MEP and so I asked her if I could speak to her department about potentially conducting this research with them.	Nov 2019 to March 2020 38 periods observed	Reached the final section of the module (4/5ths through the module)	Year 11 (Age 16) Hodder textbook	An urban school on the outskirts of a large city and at the intersection of a number of migrant communities – the area is a cultural hub particularly in music but under-resourced and lacking green spaces. Defra local authority classification: Major urban (1) to large urban (2) Local authority administration: Labour (left wing)	30-40%	50-60%
Walton Academy	Mark One class observed (due to timetabling conflicts with the other schools)	I spoke to the audience at a Schools History Project Conference about looking for teachers teaching MEP who might be willing to have me conduct this research with their class and Mark spoke to me afterwards to say he was open to it.	Jan 2020 to March 2020 12 periods observed	Finished 2/3s of the module, but I was able to access the videos of the Bentwood teacher covering the remainder of the module remotely	Year 10 (Age 15) OUP textbook	A peri-urban school close to a small wealthy, monoculturally white city but the school is also accessible by bus from a larger city which is more multicultural and more socioeconomically stratified. Defra local authority classification: Other urban (3) to significant rural (4) Local authority administration: Liberal Democrat (centrist)	10-20%	<10%
Ferryhall School	Laura & Claire Two classes observed	Someone who worked with Claire on PGCE mentorship mentioned to me that her school taught MEP and so I emailed Claire to ask her if I could speak to her department about potentially conducting this research with them.	Nov 2019 to March 2020 40 periods observed	Finished covering the module by the time the schools shut, albeit by condensing the last few lessons as the shutdown became imminent.	Year 11 (Age 16) OUP and Hodder textbook	A village school in the countryside of one of the proverbially 'posh' counties – the network of villages around the school are wealthy and monoculturally white but the school is somewhat accessible from a large town which is more multicultural. Local authority administration: Conservative (right wing) Defra local authority classification: Rural-50 (5) to Rural-80 (6)	<10%	<10%

Student Consent Procedures I: Ethnographic Sample

After gaining verbal consent from teachers to conduct the research in a particular school, I emailed the headteacher with information about the study, outlining the discussion I had had with the history department and asking for their consent for the study to take place. I then came in person to each class and explained the research to the students, giving them each an envelope containing:

- a brochure which was designed with GCSE students in mind that explained the research
- assent forms for students
- a more detailed information sheet for parents
- a form to **opt out** of my noting down *their child's contributions during class observations*
- and a form to **opt in** to consent to *their child's participation in focus groups*.

I highlighted that all the information that I collected would be anonymised. Later, I collected assent forms and parental opt-out forms and in cases where assent/consent had been declined I did not note down anything in relation to those students for the duration of the research project. Parental consent and student assent forms were collected during focus groups and I also checked in with students that they were happy for me to audio-record the discussion.

Ethnography

Classroom ethnography is defined by Watson-Gegeo as "the intensive, detailed observation of a classroom over the period of its duration (e.g., a semester or year) ... supplemented by interviews with teacher and students" (1999: 136). This method resonates strongly with my conceptual framework in that it "emphasises the sociocultural nature of teaching and learning processes, incorporates participants' perspectives on their own behaviour, and offers a holistic analysis sensitive to levels of context in which interactions and classrooms are situated" (Watson-Gegeo,

1999: 135). In keeping with a more ethnographic orientation, while observing lessons I did not use a structured protocol – such as those used to assess various measures of teaching quality (Gitomer, 2018) – but instead I wrote fieldwork notes. I preferred typing on a laptop to physical writing but, even with typing, I was not able to transcribe classroom dialogue verbatim for a whole lesson. My notes were often brief descriptions of classroom activities ('*practicing exam questions*') or extraneous classroom discussion ('*first 15 min of class: students ask Miss about what covid means for their exams*'). During times when discourses of interest to the study were being articulated I tried my best to approximate verbatim or close summaries of speakers' contributions. I noted down when possible which student spoke but often only managing 'S' to indicate it was a student talking instead of the default of the teacher talking. It was especially difficult to distinguish between students in the notes when students were animated and many were contributing at once. The below is an example of my notetaking at All Saints demonstrating how I either abbreviated students' names or used S for 'student' if I had not seen which student had spoken. The unattributed text signalled the default which was the teacher speaking.

Br: Christianity is a way of 'civilising' them, makes them more human in their eyes

Brilliant

The idea that the Christian faith is a civilised faith, they aren't stealing stuff but spreading the word of god, the ultimate gift

S: it's to control them

Ml: it's a successful way to build an empire, human connection is made stronger if you follow the same religion, you kind of have to - you feel like you have something in common because you have a shared thing between ppl who otherwise wouldn't have something in common

Very cynical but very accurate I think

In addition to observing history lessons, I spent time in the school reception, in staffrooms, travelling on the buses which students used and walking around the neighbourhoods in which each school was situated. I wrote fieldwork notes about these spaces beyond the classroom on the train on my way home.

- *Walking to AS [All Saints], angry man shouts from across the road demanding to know if I teach there, I hurry on*
- *Mums across from me in the village café complain about unhealthy treats at class parties in FH [Ferryhall]*

I also noted down teachers' reflections on the module which they might mention to me at the end of a lesson:

- *Laura seems she is not loving MEP, too much detail, too much knowledge 4 students, need them to see interconnections and the story – but says MEP is only 1 section of one subject across 10 different school subjects*

Although my in-person fieldwork was interrupted by the pandemic, I was able to spend multiple terms in each school.

In the findings chapters, my use of quotations drawn from the interviews, from focus groups and from written responses to surveys – outstripping the number of references to my classroom observations or to ethnographic fieldwork notes – creates the impression that these were the only methods important to the thesis and that the ethnographic element did not play a significant role. Those methods did give me more direct access to student discourses about imperialism given that student discourses made up a relatively small proportion of classroom dialogue. However, my observations shaped the research in more subtle ways. Sitting in class at a desk, listening to the teacher, taking notes, and occasionally participating in class discussions, I was playing the role of a student. This process changed my relationship to the research in that it gave me access to what I

would describe as the emotional turbulence of the classroom. I found the students around me so vulnerable and powerful; vulnerable in that they exuded self-consciousness and powerful in that individuals could change the classroom dynamic immediately. Their palpable anxiety to perform in front of their peers, by clowning or by exaggerated disengagement, juxtaposed with their ability to frustrate and humiliate their teachers through these same performances made being in the classroom emotionally intense for me even outside of questions of imperialism/difficult histories. During discussions of imperialism, the emotional intensity could be further increased as students were left confused, distraught or angry from hearing about colonial violence or colonial ideologies. During these discussions, students could also be deliberately provocative with 'politically incorrect' humour. I was also often moved by teachers' narratives and then frustrated when students did not respond in the same way. Even boredom transmits an emotional resonance into the space, a kind of rejection of the teacher and the (present conditions of the) learning project. Therefore, in addition to giving me insight into how the module became translated into teaching in different ways at different schools (insight into the various pedagogical encodings which students were decoding), my observations illustrated a further contingency: the emotional intensity of learning and teaching.

This had implications for how I positioned teachers in this research. I felt in awe of the teachers I observed, not only of their skill but their stamina, that they would teach lesson after lesson in the middle of all this emotional intensity. Added to this were the conditions of austerity and massive workloads, parental expectations, and the pervading sense in which examination outcomes would shape these young students' lives. As someone interested in education and a young woman I am often read by others as someone-about-to-become-a-school-teacher. However, if I did attempt this path I know that I would be one of the many Early Career Teachers to leave after a year. I wouldn't be able to 'hack it' as they say. Where I've intersected with university teaching – and

although the higher education sector has plenty of its own issues – it does not have the same default of long stretches of back-to-back teaching, of being in the thick of it, let alone considering all the additional complexities of working with minors. In my own teaching in Oxford's African Studies Centre, I often felt extremely self-conscious, constantly worried that I would lose the confidence of my students. However crucially, after each class or lecture ended I would not go straight into teaching another, but retreated into other – often less emotive – work in the quiet of my own office, my home or a library. So while my description of being 'in awe' could be seen as patronising, it stems from knowing that I couldn't and wouldn't want to be in the same position as the teachers I observed. During this period, I was also noticing how frequently teachers are singled out in public discourses as the problem: too conservative, too woke, 'getting it from left and right' as it were. This – in combination with feeling enormously grateful to these teachers for allowing me to watch their classes and feelings of camaraderie between (history obsessed) adults situationally outnumbered by minors – made me reluctant to criticise teachers' classroom discourses and their implications for students' meaning making. Reconceptualising the thesis over time has helped me become more comfortable thinking critically about teachers' classroom discourses, but I have retained my general aversion to what I see (through the lens of my fieldwork experiences) as simplistic and unfair portrayals of teachers as the antagonists of progress. Rather, my final conceptual framework developed post-fieldwork has allowed me to speak to the *contingencies* under which teachers and students invest in some discourses over others and how they navigate a powerful discursive formation. This feels compatible with honouring what it means to learn and teach in the emotional turbulence of schools.

Focus Groups

The focus groups enabled me to get to know individual students, their backgrounds, their nested perceptions of their school, of history education and of the MEP module and finally to understand their discourses about empire. This method resonated with my critical sociocultural framework as it allowed the latter (their discourses of empire) to be contextualised by the former (how they are situated). As Stewart explains, "focus groups provide rich and detailed data about perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions of group members in the members' own words" (2018: 688). The ability of focus group participants to develop their own momentum gave students opportunities to articulate their own concerns about these topics with potentially less imposition of my frameworks than would be the case in interviews or questionnaires (albeit members were still responding to each other and within the context of their own group norms). In this way, students would bring up issues in their lifeworlds which I had not pre-planned to ask about directly such as: the Colston statue, conservative attitudes in their families or YouTube clips of politicians talking about empire. The focus groups (and Survey A) not only helped to answer the research questions, but they also helped to shape the questions in Survey B which I designed at a later stage of the research.

Procedurally, I would begin focus groups with gentle questions about why they chose history for GCSE and their favourite topics in their formal history education so far before asking more challenging questions about what they thought of the module's themes of empire and migration. In some cases, I had focus groups where students were all part of the same class but in other cases the focus groups combined students from different classes. In all the schools, with the vicissitudes of who was in attendance on a particular day, the size and shape of the focus group would change from one iteration to the next. As the only time to have the focus groups in two of the schools was during the lunch break, I provided students with sandwiches during the focus groups. In the third

school, I also provided refreshments for equivalency (tea and biscuits) although here the focus groups took place in the morning during assembly or during breaks.

The focus groups were designed to foster a more relaxed environment than in one-on-one interviews on the assumption that students would take comfort in being together. This was because I had conducted one-on-one interviews for my MPhil research with young people in Belfast and I knew that interviews could make participants feel isolated or heavily scrutinised without the presence of more people to break the tension. While the focus groups were more dynamic in All Saints and Walton where the participating history students gelled easily, in Ferryhall it may have been more advantageous to have conducted one-on-one interviews instead. As Laura noted, it was a year group which seemed particularly wary of what their peers thought of them. Additionally, in all the focus groups students were sensitive to the presence of their peers which could manifest as agreement with the group (in comparison to what was shared in surveys). More information about the number and size of focus groups can be found in Table 6. The final rounds of focus groups were cancelled due to the pandemic and were substituted with Survey A. For the write-up of these focus group findings in Chapter 7, in addition to using pseudonyms I merged data from individual students into composite figures for further anonymisation. Where it would otherwise identify particular students to their teachers (see the 'Teacher Interviews' section of this chapter), I also changed certain aspects of students' biographies in the write-up, such as which countries students' families had immigrated from.

Table 6: Student Voice Data in Ethnographic Schools

	Focus groups	Surveys

All Saints School	One focus group with Erin's Year 11 class (5 students) One focus group with Angela's Year 11 class (2 students) Two focus groups with both Erin and Angela's Year 11 classes (7 students) One focus group with Year 12s (5 students) One focus group with Year 13 students (6 students)	Survey A (9 students) Survey B (4 students)
Walton Academy	One focus group with Mark's Year 10 class (8 students)	Survey A (7 students) Survey B (5 students)
Ferryhall School	One focus group with Claire's Year 11 class (4 students) One focus group with Laura's Year 11 class (5 students) One focus group with both Laura and Claire's Year 11 classes (2 students) One focus group with Laura's Year 12s (15 students)	Survey A (7 students) Survey B (2 students)

Survey A

Survey A was more directly an attempt to compensate for the loss of the last focus groups than Survey B (I had intended prior to the onset of the pandemic to conduct a questionnaire like Survey B). I piloted an early version of Survey A with undergraduate history students from my college as this allowed me to ask students questions about a particular history module. This was useful as I realised my questions about which films/series on historical topics respondents watched

were not very informative as understanding the meanings that respondents drew from these texts would take too many tangential additional questions.

Survey A was administered to the ethnographic sample soon after the closure of schools. The first questions were intended to remind students of their history syllabus, and the MEP module in particular, in order to prime them for the subsequent questions. Such reorientation work was necessary due to the disorientation of the pandemic. This reorientation included ranking each section of the module in terms of their utility to students' own lives which also generated insight into how students experienced different parts of the module and the meanings students made from them.

As explained in the above 'broad strokes' section, I often asked similar questions both on empire and migration in the surveys, particularly in Survey A. I first asked students about the empire theme: how the module materials presented empire and how they felt about the way their teacher presented this theme. This disaggregation allowed for distinctions to be made between different encoders, such as teachers and exam boards/textbooks, which was helpful as many students in the sample appeared to trust the former more than the latter. I also asked students about the utility of the module for developing their views on empire or understanding the contemporary debates around it. This was to give students the opportunity to articulate the provenance[40] of their views on empire and whether MEP played any role in shaping them. I went on to the ask the same questions about the migration theme before finishing with a question about any possible

[40] 'Provenance' is a term I had adopted from the vocabulary of the AQA (and OCR) exam board whose assessment methods include asking students to discuss the relevance of a historical source's 'provenance' (origins) to the narrative the source constructs. See also the section on 'Difficult Histories and Disciplinary Approaches' in Chapter 3.

improvements which could be made to the module/its teaching. For further detail on the administration of Survey A see 'Student Consent Procedures II' and for information on the number of responses see Table 6.

Survey B

Survey B was more distant from the MEP module than Survey A and also involved a greater number of rounds of experimentation in its design. I had initially conceptualised this component of the research as a version of the Political Compass to explore changes in students' views ('impact') by administering the survey before and after the module. The Political Compass is a tool popular among university students and some university lecturers (who use it in teaching) which asks respondents to answer normative questions on a broad range of issues. The Political Compass forces respondents to choose positions on each question even if they feel ambivalent about an issue; there are no 'neutral' or 'don't know' options. The results plot respondents' political views along two axes: left-right economic views on the x axis and authoritarian-libertarian views on the y axis (Pace News Ltd, 2021). As well as the impact of the module, this Political Compass design was intended to help show correlations between students' views on imperialism and their other political views.

The very first iterations of Survey B stuck closely to this model with me simplifying the questions to be more age-appropriate as well as adding questions on imperialism. I piloted this as part of a lesson on ideology with a Politics summer school class that I was teaching and in doing so realised that the survey was not yet fit for purpose. The strength of the Political Compass is the disaggregation of the two axes to differentiate a greater variety of views than simply using a

traditional left-right split on a single axis (Pace News Ltd, 2021). However, in the context of this project, the two particular axes (left-right economic views and authoritarian-libertarian views) did not speak directly enough to the issues discussed in the three modules which seemed to be more appropriate foci for the survey questions. I therefore changed most of the questions and removed the more elaborate double-axis/four-quadrant model inherited from the Political Compass. After re-developing the survey, I also became more aware of the critiques of the Political Compass' questions and structure, namely that it tended to 'bunch' most respondents into one quadrant (TLDR News, 2021). Therefore, while it had been a useful springboard, it was necessary to create new questions and structures more specifically tailored to the project.

As mentioned above, in reformulating the questions I prioritised the themes of the three AQA thematic modules (*Migration, Empires and the People*; *Heath and the People*; *Power and the People*) and the contemporary debates which each of these modules spoke to. I also reflected on how the choice of a Likert-scale option revealed very little for a study about meaning-making without further elaboration. Consequently, for certain key questions, I added open-text follow-up questions to these Likert-scale choices to ask students to explain *why* they chose a particular response to a question. For example:

It is more important to celebrate that Britain abolished slavery than to emphasise that Britain once bought and sold slaves.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ◉ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Why do you { Slightly Agree }?

[Type here]

It was not possible to treat every question this way as I needed to keep the survey relatively short to increase completion rates. Reformulating the questions also gave me the opportunity to change some responses from Likert-scale response options to response options which were more specific to the question and to the dimensions of the debate. For example:

How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?

○ (1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies.

○ (2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.

○ (3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful.

○ (4) The British Empire was a crime against humanity.[41]

○ Other _____

This increased comparability across student responses because the difference between e.g. 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' on a particular subject might vary between students based on where they perceived centrist vs extremist positions to be. I might have found greater variance between responses (see Chapter 8) if I had expanded the number of response options to 6 per question instead of having only 4 per question, but particularly after replacing some of the Likert scales with longer more specific responses, including 6 rather than 4 options would have increased the time and reading necessary to complete the survey. One feature of the Political Compass that I retained was to not provide 'neutral' or 'don't know' response options as it was likely that many students would gravitate towards these as 'safe' options (neutral response bias). This can also however generate artificial responses in cases where a neutral option would have best reflected the participants' feelings. I mitigated this somewhat by giving students the option of clicking Other and writing their own response which could have been neutral in orientation, but this raised the effort involved in doing so and only a few students chose Other as a response option.

[41] See below how this response option was later changed.

Posing this question (see above) on the legacy of the British Empire was an ethical dilemma for me. I was initially reticent to ask this question directly because I believed that bringing up such a politically sensitive question would alienate students. I also thought of these discourses (about 'the good parts of colonialism') as inflammatory. Despite reading about British imperial nostalgia and 'development' as a justification for colonialism, early in my fieldwork I still largely saw these ideas as taboo, as not to be professed in public spaces in this day and age. They were things that older people in white South African communities said around a fire after a brandy, but they were not acceptable in the post-apartheid political mainstream. The prominent white South African politician, Helen Zille, was heavily criticised for her tweets defending colonialism in the national press and faced disciplinary action from her own (centrist) party (BBC, 2017). However, through living in England for a longer period of time and paying greater attention to these issues during the doctorate I had gradually come to see the strength of these discourses in the English mainstream. I also became more aware of the normalisation of these discourses in KS3 and GCSE (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6). The results of Survey A demonstrated that a significant proportion of students were articulating discourses of British imperialism as a form of development which benefitted colonised people. I was thus later able to more fully integrate the idea that these discourses were not considered inflammatory in the national context. Nevertheless, I still questioned whether it was worth potentially adding to the perceived legitimacy of what I saw as damaging discourses by positioning them as options in Survey B. In making this decision I considered not only the perceived acceptability of these discourses in the British context but also to what extent surfacing these views among students was important for the aims of the research. I reflected on how I had been surprised that many students' explicit criticism of empire in classroom discussions existed alongside more private articulations of the benefits of empire (or ambivalence about these discourses) in the responses to Survey A. This informed my reasoning that if my aim was to

investigate students' discourses of empire I could not artificially exclude some of these discourses especially as they were, firstly, being used by students and, secondly, so central to the wider discursive environment.

My next iteration of Survey B (after the summer school pilot) was administered to the students in the ethnographic sample and again this led to further refinements. Initially, I had used an additional framing device in an attempt to make the survey more engaging and clearer that I was eliciting students' own views, i.e. outside of an academic/assessment context. This framing device situated the survey as creating one's own fictitious political party and its positions on various topics. However, I decided to drop this framing for the survey-only schools as it added a needless layer of complexity to the survey. I also noticed in the ethnographic sample responses that students seemed reticent to select the response option 'The British Empire was a crime against humanity' and that this phrasing was out of step with the other response options for that question. To draw the desired point of contrast more sharply I therefore changed it subsequently for the survey-only schools to 'The British Empire was an exploitative system which made people in the colonies worse off'. To note, this change did not introduce an inconsistency into the quantitative element of the research as survey responses from the ethnographic sample were not included in the quantitative analysis in Chapter 8.

One final change occurred between administering the pre-module Survey B and the post-module Survey B. I had been working for the Oriel Commission of Enquiry into the Rhodes Statue as a research assistant and during this intervening period the issue had generated a fascinating panoply of imperial discourses (see Chapter 1). I had decided that the agitation around colonial statues was an important dimension which was missing in Survey B and so I believed it was worth the late

inclusion to add a question on this theme despite not having a pre-module baseline to compare the post-module responses to. This new additional question elicited a Likert-scale response to the prompt: "It is good that people are protesting against statues of British colonisers." I framed it around support for the protests rather than whether statues should be taken down or not as the latter debate can split anti-imperialists between those in favour of keeping statues as cautionary 'reminders' of the imperial past (or re-framing or artistically disrupting these statues) and those in favour of taking them down entirely. This change did introduce a discrepancy between pre-module and post-module surveys but this change was consistent across groups in the quantitative analysis. In sum, Survey B was the product of many reflections and changes over the course of the research project.

I used Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis to make sense of the qualitative data from the survey-only sample. Themes here refer to "pattens of *shared meaning* underpinned or united by a core concept ... Themes are analytic *outputs* developed through and from the creative labour of our coding" (Braun & Clarke, 2019: 594–593) [emphasis in original]. The thrust here is that instead of coding data according to predetermined themes, that themes are, firstly, actively developed (not passively discovered) and, secondly, that themes are developed after coding the data, i.e. after I added short descriptive labels to different segments of students' responses. ('Codes' here have a different meaning to Stuart Hall's 'codes' in Chapter 3). After coding the researcher reflects on: what the patterns of shared meaning are in the data set, how they might be organised and whether a particular means of organising the codes into certain themes helps to develop answers to the research questions. In a deviation from Braun and Clarke's model, I did make some use of 'predetermined' themes in my coding. I had suitable over-arching themes developed from the ethnographic sample (*discourses of critique*, *discourses of value* and *discourses of*

ambivalence) which I had 'predetermined' before coding (but they were still actively developed by me the researcher, which is what is emphasised by Braun and Clarke). Moreover, I needed further subthemes to describe and interpret the data in more detail and it was here that Braun and Clarke's process was most useful. I used MAXQDA software to manually 'tag' the segments of students' responses with descriptive codes (such as "Indian Rebellion", "took resources" or "built railways"). I then organised these by iteratively finessing a map of how the codes a) nested into one another and b) into the above over-arching themes (*discourses of critique*, *discourses of value* and *discourses of ambivalence*). Through this process, I had created a structure in which I could develop subthemes (my key analytic outputs of this process) like *violent conquest and suppression*. This subtheme was more specific than its overarching theme (*discourses of critique*) but more general than the individual descriptive codes nested within it (e.g. "Battle of Plassey", "Repression of the Mau Mau rebellion"). This facilitated my discussion of the qualitative survey data in Chapter 8.

Sampling and recruitment II: Survey-only Sample

In the context of the pandemic, the survey-only phase of the research was on a smaller scale than I had hoped and here I describe my original vision as well as how it unfolded in practice. I had planned to use a similar maximum variation sampling method for the survey-only schools as I had for the ethnographic sample, developing a sampling frame with a balance of similar variables as described in 'Sampling and Recruitment I'. I aimed to recruit 12 schools, wanting to compare students who had studied MEP and those who had not (but who were at the same stage of their formal history education to increase comparability, so in effect, this meant those studying *other* GCSE history modules). Thinking within the 'impact' paradigm, students studying MEP were

conceptualised as the 'treatment' group and the other two groups (those studying *Health and the People* and *Power and the People*) as 'control' groups.

I searched online for schools that listed on their website that they taught one of the AQA thematic modules. I sorted these schools into the dimensions of the sampling frame according to the publicly available data about each school's FSM and EAL statistics as well as adding the local authority to which each school belonged. I then emailed the HoD (or in some cases school reception asking to be forwarded to the HoD) asking if they would be happy to facilitate this research. Several factors led to a low response rate. The success of 'cold emails' was more limited compared to the greater trust and connection I had made with teachers through in-person events and connections in my ethnographic sample's recruitment, where I had also exhausted my professional network. The pandemic context also increased teacher workload and thus likely also increased reluctance to participate in additional research. Lastly, the changes to exam coverage in light of the pandemic meant that schools could leave out part of the GCSE history syllabus. Given that thematic modules – such as the three I was interested in – have a large volume of content and can be harder to teach or learn than other modules in the syllabus, the thematic modules were often the ones which were dropped that year. In this context, I had to abandon the detailed sampling frame and instead I tried to use a quota method of sampling which only emphasised that recruited schools should be teaching different AQA thematic modules, ideally with equal numbers of each thematic module. However, I received the greatest enthusiasm for the survey from MEP teachers. This reinforced my sense that MEP teachers were more open, more risk-taking (Kitson & McCully, 2005) and more willing to engage in the wider history education community relative to teachers who chose other thematic modules. Ultimately, I had a smaller, more skewed sample than intended (see Chapter 8 for composition of the survey sample). In hindsight, I could have

broadened my recruitment by looking beyond schools doing the AQA history exam board and included schools doing other history exam boards in the 'control' group. However, similar barriers would have applied to those utilising other exam boards and moreover the time-sensitivity of Survey B meant that there was no latitude to pivot the recruitment scope at the point at which these difficulties became clear. Despite needing to 'make do' with this skewed sample, the survey nonetheless yielded rich data. This was true both in its qualitative dimensions (particularly in students' open texts answers about empire's legacy) and in its quantitative dimensions (demonstrating a *range* of positions and a *range* of changes of position). To bear in mind, representative sampling would be more crucial for making claims in the analysis about the accuracy of the relative proportion of these positions and changes than it is for making the simpler point of demonstrating that there is variety of positions and a variety of changes within student responses.

Student Consent Procedures II: Survey A and Survey B

As discussed above, the constraints of the pandemic conditions across the education sector created the need for significant adaption of the research project, including consent procedures. The constraints were firstly an inability to collect data with students in person. Teachers also explained that a researcher videoconferencing with students for a focus group would not be allowed by the schools as this was considered outside the safety of school premises and thus a safeguarding risk. Another significant challenge came in the form of a substantial increase in teacher stress and workload, factors which I had already seen as prohibitive to research engagement before the pandemic. This prompted further reflection on how to conceptualise consent under these conditions. It was possible pre-pandemic to take a cautious approach by treating all students in the study as individuals who could assent but not necessarily consent and instead to seek parental

consent. This was partly because I could take on those administrative burdens myself. In-person I was able to explain the research, give out information packs, collect forms and keep track of who had given me which forms. However, in this new environment of the first months of the pandemic, all communication with students now went via teachers who were battling crisis after crisis in the wider education context.

With regard to consent, the British Educational Research Association [BERA] notes that "researchers may make different decisions as they deem appropriate for children and young people of different ages and capacities" (2018). The guidelines I used in this assessment of appropriateness stem from BERA's 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (2018), the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's 'Research with children: ethics, safety and avoiding harm' (2020) and the General Medical Council's 'Assessing the capacity to consent' (2018). The need to consult multiple sources and triangulate them is due to how the most contextually appropriate guidance – from BERA – is also the most vague, while the most detailed guidance ('Assessing the capacity to consent') is from a medical – as opposed to an educational – context. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children emphasises that while children under the of 16 may consent to research, the researcher must justify their competence to understand what they are agreeing to. Similarly, the General Medical Council states that:

> "The capacity to consent depends more on young people's ability to understand and weigh up options than on age. When assessing a young person's capacity to consent, you should bear in mind that: at 16 a young person can be presumed to have the capacity to consent ... a young person under 16 may have the capacity to consent, depending on their maturity and ability to understand what is involved" (2018).

The General Medical Council also notes that maturity should be assessed relative to the risks involved in the decision the young person is making. As my research was conducted in the latter half of the academic year, Year 11 participants would generally be 16 or older, but many Year 10

participants would be under 16 and therefore I needed to consider whether a GCSE cohort as a whole (that is, including both Year 10s and Year 11s) were sufficiently competent to understand and agree to take part in my adapted research project.

Four factors enabled me to legitimately reconceptualise my consent procedure as taking place with participants able to give consent to research participation themselves for online surveys on these issues. By this point I had spent a considerable amount of time with GCSE student cohorts through my classroom ethnography and therefore I had a good sense of their competencies in the context of the themes of the research. Secondly, I noted that students in this age group in English schools exercised a high degree of autonomy in their participation in the focus groups. While some students attended all focus groups they were invited to, many were more sporadic in their attendance, preferring to go to break or to assembly on some days and attending focus groups on other days in non-linear patterns. This suggested to me that students in these contexts could understand that despite my position as an adult they were not compelled to engage in the research and would not face repercussions for non-participation. Thirdly, I was familiar with the contents and expectations of normal classroom dialogue and classroom materials in GCSE history. Students were asked to engage with difficult political questions and contemporary debates in the normal course of their history education.[42] Lastly, the format of online surveys reduced some of the risks involved in the research. Compared to the 'public' nature of dealing with assent forms and parental opt-out forms in the physical classroom, students could more easily and privately opt out of an online survey by not engaging with it or not completing it. Moreover, when I had thought that I

[42] As the classroom environment was often assessment focused, these discussions often were shorter or less frequent than they otherwise might have been, however, difficult political questions and contemporary debates were certainly still present in the classroom.

would be administering surveys in-person there was a risk that my questions might provoke antagonistic disagreements between students as they would be physically in the same space when answering these questions, potentially comparing answers. However, this risk was greatly reduced if students were receiving the survey by email to complete privately in their own time. The combination of my confidence in GCSE cohorts' competencies; their ability to exercise autonomy with respect to the research; the congruency between the themes of the research questions and the expectations in students' normal academic environment; and the lower risk of the online format affirmed that these participants had the capacity to consent to research themselves and that this is contextually appropriate.

Ethnographic Sample

In trying to reduce the administrative burden for teachers in facilitating the surveys and in trying to ensure that students had access to all the relevant consent information, I included everything in as few emails as possible. I asked teachers in the ethnographic sample if they might forward a message from me to students' school email addresses. This message had a blurb about the survey and an embedded link to Survey A. In this blurb I also explained that the survey was a continuation of the research I had been doing with their class before the lockdown but that there was no obligation to participate and their responses would be anonymised in the write-up. It also included another embedded link to an illustrated information sheet with further information about the survey research. I asked for all students in the class to be sent the survey in order to utilise this as an opportunity to also include students who did not participate in the focus groups as some of these students might be more comfortable engaging in a less personal format. Including the whole class was also an ethical consideration due to my use of incentives which I specified in the message.

Students were offered £10 Amazon vouchers to encourage participation in the survey in the absence of the personal connection of interacting with peers in focus groups. The £10 Amazon voucher was chosen as this was thought to be enough to incentivise but not so great as to act as an inducement. It was also something which could be utilised across different geographic spaces and under pandemic conditions. That many students who received the links did not participate suggests that this did not constitute an inducement. I repeated this procedure with the pilot version of Survey B which was also administered to the ethnographic sample.

Survey-only Sample

I sent a similar blurb to teachers in the survey-only sample of schools who had agreed via email to facilitate the survey research with their GCSE history cohorts. The blurb also had an embedded survey link, brief information about the research, a further information page link, and a statement of the participation incentives. However, there were three differences in consent procedure for the survey-only sample compared to the ethnographic sample. Firstly, the embedded survey link didn't direct students to the survey itself but to a sign-up page with a more detailed consent component than I had used in the previous surveys with the ethnographic sample. As the survey was the first interaction these students had with the research, I included a full consent form on the sign-up page and flagged the information page link again before asking students to enter their school email addresses in order to be sent the survey. I then manually sent out individual links to Survey B students via the school email addresses they had provided through the sign-up page.

This use of school email addresses was particularly useful because they were unique to each student and coded as a combination of parts of their name and their year. This meant that I did

not have access to their full names which increased student privacy but still provided some assurance that the survey was being completed by separate students in the right year. Sending individual links (links unique to each email address) also helped me to keep track of who had completed the pre-module Survey B and to send only these students the post-module version of Survey B. Tying individual links to student email addresses also made it possible to track within-individual changes in responses.

Students completing the pre-module Survey B were sent a £5 Amazon voucher and students who then also completed the post-module Survey B were additionally sent a £10 Amazon voucher for a total of £15. This asymmetry (between pre and post responses) reflected the relative importance of having students complete *both* surveys so that I could assess within-individual changes. This arguably creates a dissimilarity with the previous sample group in which it was possible after doing two surveys to have received a total of £20 (although very few students in the classroom observation sample did both Survey A and Survey B which was in keeping with the general pattern of sporadic participation). In terms of questions of research justice, the surveys completed were not equivalent as Survey A (which was only done by the class observation sample) would take longer to complete than Survey B and thus the difference in overall incentives is not arbitrary.

I was far from the only researcher who had to adapt their project and procedures during the lockdowns. While this involved navigating difficulties, these adaptations also strengthened the survey element of the research in one sense because more private online surveys allowed some students to give less socially desirable answers than they had shared in class or in focus groups. This may not have been the case had I administered the surveys on paper in the classroom.

Teacher interviews

I synthesized the data collected from the schools in the ethnographic sample into three separate reports for each school. These reports contained summaries of anonymised student responses as well as some preliminary analysis. I sent these to the teachers whose classes I had observed as part of an ethic of reciprocity, but it was also useful as a device for exploring the preliminary findings with teachers during our interviews to gain additional or alternative perspectives on the student data. Preceding the interviews, I emailed teachers an online consent form. In Zoom interviews I asked teachers about their reflections on the reports I had sent them, as well as about particular aspects of the data that I was unsure how to interpret. I also asked questions extraneous to the reports, such as asking about their perspectives on the school context, their own personal teaching journeys, and the difficulties of teaching about the British Empire. Interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Limitations

In addition to the generic limitations around research with small sample sizes, two further points to highlight here is the self-selection of participants and conducting only partial discussions of race. Students who participated in the focus groups and surveys or who spoke up in the observed classes were generally students who were particularly engaged with, either, these themes specifically or with their (history) classes in general. By contrast, it is difficult to discern the feelings of more disengaged students. That the participating students were different from their peers was highlighted by a student in an All Saints focus group who – after discussing how she and her friends in the focus group would discuss history topics and occasionally watch relevant clips on their phones

together – explained that, "we would talk about it on the bus, but that's not normal." I tried to mitigate this by sending the surveys to the whole class and offering small voucher incentives in order to potentially bring in more voices.

In the paragraph above I used the phrase 'partial discussions of race' to indicate that race was not absent from my research but rather that it was underexplored. While it was not unusual for black students and Asian students to reference their racial identity or heritage in their remarks, this was not the case for white students. As part of this shared white reluctance to speak openly about race, I did not ask students direct questions about their racial identities and instead relied on students to bring up this dimension. I was also concerned that asking students questions about their racial identities may result in complaints from parents. However, in effect, this meant that I only have explicit student reflections on racialisation from a few of the students, particularly from black and Asian students, and the role of white identities was not brought to the surface. This asymmetry effectively mirrors the wider injustice in which to be white is to not *feel* racialised. This is also particularly problematic within this research project as empire was a racialised project and thus racialisation positions us differently to the imperial past. As a manifestation of this, an Ipsos MORI survey found that white respondents were more likely to frame empire as 'something to be proud of' (2020). I was therefore left with the question of whether I should racialise students in the write-up even where they had not spoken explicitly about this identity in the data. In response to this question, I have tried to discern where racialisation was particularly important for contextualising student discourses and for making the wider arguments of the dissertation in order to reserve this imposition of my reading of students' racial identity to only those instances.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the evolution of the methods that I used in this study and their rationale. I also reflected on how my embodied experience of the classroom affected my findings as well as on the ethical challenges posed by the differences in discursive norms around imperialism across different countries. Over the course of the research project, I adapted my survey questions, my school sampling method and my consent procedures. These iterative phases, especially with regard to the survey questions, are one benefit of extended research projects, enabling the research instruments to be revised and strengthened over time. The mixed methods approach also facilitated a consideration of student discourses from different angles and in different settings, i.e. considering what students say in class in front their teacher; in focus groups in front of their peers; and in more private, anonymised surveys. These multiple sources of data opened up important considerations about the different layers of context in students' meaning-making (e.g. a student's module, her teacher and her neighbourhood) and how these layers interact, considerations which are not as visible in less comprehensive research.

Chapter Five: The Balance Sheet as Discursive Formation

Connecting Key Stage 3 Classroom Activities to Wider Societal Discourses

Over the course of the research project, I realised that to make sense of student discourses in the GCSE I need to look beyond the GCSE, that is, to students' earlier years of history education and to broader logics, norms and contestations in England. These are both explored – through a combination of literature, online teaching materials and insights from the ethnographic phase of the research project – to build an argument that what is referred to as 'the balance sheet' constitutes a powerful discursive formation. It was necessary to discuss 'the balance sheet' substantively in its own chapter (before looking to students' discourses from Chapter 7 onwards) because as I argue it is the most vital component of both the proximate (educational) and broader (societal) contexts of students' make meaning. To return to the language of Hall's encoding/decoding model, this chapter and Chapter 6 which follows it both investigate the frameworks of knowledge shaping how messages to students are encoded while subsequent chapters focus on how these messages are decoded and with what frameworks of knowledge. The sequencing in this chapter is as follows: it begins with an ethnographic vignette supplemented with other KS3 teaching materials; then expands from this classroom view to flesh out the balance sheet discursive formation and its dynamics in broader English society; and finally concludes with the alternatives to this discursive formation that are emerging in the public square of professional history educators (such as the *Teaching History* journal).

Introducing 'the Balance Sheet' as KS3 Worksheet

In two of the ethnography schools, Ferryhall and Walton Academy, learning about the British Empire at KS3 involved a set of oppositions, 'good' elements of imperialism and 'bad' elements of imperialism. At Ferryhall, a teacher suggested that I sit in on a Year 9 KS3 class as it was going to be a lesson about the British Empire, knowing that I had been curious as to what students learnt about this theme prior to GCSE. As these KS3 students were not part of my consent procedures, here I will only discuss the class worksheet itself (see below) and my experience of it rather than students' discourses. In this worksheet, students were asked to colour in the boxes describing the 'good' parts of the empire in green and the boxes describing the 'bad' parts in red.

In contrast to the vast majority of lessons I observed at GCSE, this one at KS3 made me feel deeply uncomfortable. The worksheet placed 'spread cricket and rugby' alongside 'developed theories of racial supremacy'. Despite having at that point lived in England for three years, I struggled with a few of the boxes to figure out whether they were meant to be 'green' or 'red'. I often needed the second sentence in the box to clarify the normative valence of the first:

> "Over 900 million people speak English in the world today, partly because it was spread through the Empire. Before the Empire it was common for there to be many regional dialects within one country."
> "The systems of law and government today in many former colonies were modelled on Britain. The British system of democracy is generally said to be fair and just."

However, in one case I am still unsure whether it is meant to be 'green' or 'red':

> "Money poured into Britain from trade with countries like India and from the slave trade: banks, and cities like Liverpool and Bristol, became very wealthy."

Figure 2: Ferryhall KS3 Worksheet

Many sports were spread through the British Empire, for example cricket, football, rugby and tennis	Money poured into Britain from trade with countries like India and from the slave trade: banks, and cities like Liverpool and Bristol, became very wealthy	The systems of law and government today in many former colonies were modelled on Britain. The British system of democracy is generally said to be fair and just.
Britons developed theories of racial supremacy to justify their role in other countries. These have created a legacy of racism.	Over 900 million people speak English in the world today, partly because it was spread though the Empire. Before the Empire it was common for there to be many regional dialects within one country.	Britain exported a lot of industrial goods to the Empire, e.g. cotton cloth to India. These countries were discouraged from developing their own secondary industry to process their own raw materials.
About 11 million Africans were sold as slaves by British merchants to plantation owners in the Americas. Some African slave traders became very wealthy through selling people they had captured to the British.	Britain today is multi-cultural society. Having an Empire influenced our language, food, culture and religions.	In the colonies the top jobs were often taken by the British. Local people were not allowed to have important jobs and were sometimes viewed as incapable.
India's first prime minister after independence in 1947 was called Pandit Nehru. He claimed 'The British have kept us poor. Our people toil for slave wages in British owned cotton mills'	A massive Indian diamond, called the Koh-I-Noor was taken and added to the British Royal Crown.	Today, the Commonwealth is an organisation of former British colonies which promotes business, human rights and democracy.
Disease was spread by white settlers. The aboriginal population of Australia was reduced by around 90% because of disease brought to the country by Europeans and because of forced settlement.	Britian tried to spread Christianity in its colonies. Missionaries travelled across the Empire to assist colonial people and to preach their faith.	When Britian granted independence it often left behind divided communities who have since fought wars. For example, there was a civil war between Muslims and Hindus in India in 1947 which resulted in a million deaths.
Many poor people living in Britain were able to emigrate to the colonies. For example, many Scottish highlanders suffered from economic decline in the 19th century and were able to travel to Canada to start new lives on the land.	Britian helped development in some areas of the Empire by building railways, schools and colleges. For example, they attempted to connect Cape Town (South Africa) to Cairo (Egypt) by rail. Although the project wasn't completed large sections are still used today.	The British were responsible for many acts of violence in the Empire. In 1857, for example, some Indian sepoys (soldiers in the British Army) were blown from cannons to punish them for refusing to fight with guns that were said to be greased with pig fat.

If 'red', as I would assume anything to do with wealth from the slave trade would be, then this box was an extremely subtle critique of wealth and inequality in Britain's port cities, so subtle it seems unlikely. However, I could not face the idea that it was meant to be 'green', that wealthy British banks and cities were to act as the 'good part' of the slave trade. The unambiguousness with which the various 'gifts' were presented – the English language, British 'systems of law and governance' – felt strange and disorienting. While my curiosity as a researcher was piqued and I was fascinated by this packaging of 'imperial benefits', sitting in my desk at the back of the class I also felt a tension building up in my body. I kept looking up to the clock above the whiteboard in anticipation of the bell ringing and being able to leave the space, decompress and try to make sense of this class exercise.

I had not stumbled on an unusual way of teaching the British Empire. When I ask the Head of Department, Claire, if she had used the same worksheet when she taught KS3 she said no but that she thought it might have originally come from one of the websites where teachers can share and download teaching resources. Looking through these websites demonstrates that the basic premise of the worksheet – 'good and bad aspects of the British Empire' – is a common formulation at KS3 (see Appendix B: Key Stage 3 Balance Sheet Teaching Materials for a range of examples of this). This formulation of pitting 'good and bad' aspects of imperialism against one another is commonly known in history education as 'the balance sheet' (Benger, 2022a).

Variations on 'the Balance Sheet' as Worksheet

By investigating other instantiations of this type of class activity, I found a number of variations on the balance sheet which further illuminate the kinds of dynamics at work in this activity. The Ferryhall worksheet was however the most 'basic' version of a balance sheet without the further layers which I explore below.

One major variation is the use of historians' texts. Another school which uses the same worksheet as Ferryhall (see Example A in Appendix B) prefaces the collection of boxes with two extracts: one from Niall Ferguson's (2003) *Empire* (see Chapter 2) and one from Richard Gott's (2011) *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*. The extracts are positioned as rehearsing a 'positive' and 'negative' view of the British Empire respectively. This is similar to an exercise in Walton Academy described by the HoD, Mark, while he showed me the slides for a KS3 scheme of work on his classroom desktop. Here students were presented with extracts from an anti-imperial historian and a pro-imperial historian and asked to create an argument as to which of these they found more convincing and why. This variation of the balance sheet should be seen within the context that the use of extracts from historians follows best practice in history education. Highlighting these clashes between historians brings to students' attention that these are 'historical interpretations', different constructions about 'the same thing/event/figure' which draw different conclusions. This is an important second-order concept in the subject. 'Historical interpretations' need not be derived from historians, but highlighting historians' interpretations is particularly important within powerful knowledge/disciplinary approaches, as this gives students access to how professionals within the discipline treat the subject matter. As pointed out by teacher blogger

"Matt",[43] the use of extracts from historians does not fundamentally change the dynamics of the balance sheet:

> "[Asking] 'How have different historians interpreted the Empire?' was my attempt to get out of the balance-sheet straitjacket but ultimately it didn't work because we largely taught them the same lessons, and then used two interpretations at the end — Richard Gott and Niall Ferguson — that basically argued the same, simple question. This just led students to doing the same thing — 'I agree with X because Britain did Y'" (Matt, 2021).

This method was therefore one means of trying to move beyond the 'basic' version of the balance sheet by utilising the tools available within the norms of English history education.

However, Mark's scheme of work can tell us something further about manifestations of best practice in history education. Mark himself was critical of imperialism but still included the extract from the pro-imperial historian and positioned it as a legitimate view.[44] It is possible that conducting the balance sheet 'through' historians allowed him to include these views in the classroom while keeping them at a distance, i.e. there was no need to personally affirm them when they could be 'represented' by a historian. This ethic of being 'balanced' and including multiple opposing views (even those with which a teacher personally disagrees) is part of 'a professional code' (in Hall's terms). The requirement to represent 'both sides' and not to foreclose or denigrate one of these 'sides' as part of a professional code of neutrality drives the selection and curation of these extracts. In this way, the actual state of the field, how representative either Ferguson or Gott's work is of imperial history within or beyond British academia is not at issue, but rather their ability to

[43] Matt's surname is not listed on the blog and therefore in the text I refer simply to 'Matt'. The blog's thoughtful reflections on empire have been extremely useful for underscoring a number of arguments in the dissertation.
[44] What I have here referred to as positioning X 'as a legitimate view' is similarly referred to by Policy Exchange as positioning X 'as a respectable view'. Their report distinguishes between (1) not being taught that there are counterarguments against narratives of 'critical social justice' (patriarchy, systemic racism), (2) being taught that there are counterarguments against these narratives, but taught that these counterarguments are *not* respectable, (3) being taught that there are counterarguments against these narratives and that they *are* respectable (Kaufmann, 2022). Teachers' professional codes with regards to critical narratives of empire require (3), that there are counterarguments against these narratives and that they are respectable.

represent a 'side'. The recognition of difference and the respectful presentation of each 'side' upholds the key value in the exercise: balance. This dimension of teachers' professional code will be a recurring theme in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

The incompleteness of the project of neutrality is thrown into sharp relief in the second variation: the language of 'pride' and 'shame'. This terminology was prominent in the 2014 landmark YouGov survey discussed in Chapter 8, but it is also evident in some balance sheet classroom materials. Instead of the terms 'good' and 'bad' used in the Ferryhall version, in Example A the boxes are framed with the affective labels of 'pride' and 'shame' (as well as the option of ambiguity):

> "Decide if each of the boxes below is a reason to feel proud of the British Empire, ashamed of it or both. Colour code then to show your choices."

Similarly, students are asked to complete the sentences:

> "Ferguson argues that we should feel proud/ashamed of the Empire because ..."
> "Gott argues that we should feel proud/ashamed of the Empire because ..."[45]

This articulation of *historians* with *affect* is particularly interesting because disciplinarity is here disarticulated from the objectivity it connotes in powerful knowledge. This allusion to affect is an evocation of difficult history and suggests something of the implausibility of maintaining the ideals of powerful knowledge. In this variation of the activity, emotion is permittable within certain boundaries, in that, subjects can 'feel' as long as the legitimacy of the opposite feeling is affirmed and as long as the 'feeling' fits a pre-defined subject position of *identification with* past imperialists. Consider how the following constructs and limits the positions which students may take towards the British Empire: "Now number all the cards within each colour group to show which you feel

[45] As the worksheet was uploaded in 2021 the language within this version of the worksheet might be borrowed directly from the 2014 YouGov survey.

are the most important reasons to feel proud or ashamed." This presentation of positions is not open-ended; it holds no space for students to here *dis*identify with imperial ownership because the only subject positions available are pride, shame and a blending of these. It only constructs students as satisfied or repentant stakeholders of the British Empire. Other affective positions (of apathy, of anger) or structural positions (of being unimplicated in the British Empire, of being victimised by the British Empire) are not considered. This is all to underscore the point that a surface of multiplicity, of 'balance', still performs its own restrictions where even students descended from societies colonised by Britain are invited to feel pride or shame in the empire and thus ownership of it.

Another dimension of variation concerns the contents of what is described as 'good' or 'bad'. For instance, attempts to convert colonial subjects to Christianity can be positioned in different balance sheets as 'good', 'bad' or split into both 'positive' and 'negative' aspects. Troublingly, British wealth generated by the slave trade is not always positioned critically, but is sometimes positioned as 'positive'.[46] 'Benefits' of colonialism may accrue both to metropolitan and to colonised groups in some iterations, while in others 'benefits' are restricted to Britons (and 'drawbacks' to colonised societies). This latter formulation can be made more explicit where balance sheet activities include reflections on *who* benefitted from imperialism. These types of activities can also end on the

[46] See Example E: "Britain grew rich from slavery, from trading with the empire and gaining cheap raw materials. This gave British people the opportunity to seek their fortune." (Note that Example B takes virtually the same text as Example E and splits the sentences into different boxes, the first 'bad' and the second 'good' respectively). Using the same text as the Ferryhall KS3 worksheet, Example F creates the impression of positivity around wealth from enslavement: "Money poured into Britain from trade with countries like India and from the slave trade: banks, and cities like Liverpool and Bristol, became very wealthy."
Sanghera, probably with a dose of sarcasm or irony, positions slave economies as subjective: "Who gets to decide what is positive or negative? Some might think, for example, that the way British imperialists turned the Caribbean island of Barbados into a leading sugar colony – in the words of one historian 'the most prosperous 17th-century insular colony on the globe' – was marvellous. Yet the descendants of the 600,000 enslaved African men, women and children transported by the British to the island between 1627 and 1700 to create what the acclaimed historian Sir Hilary Beckles has described as 'the most systematically violent, brutal and racially inhumane society of modernity' probably have a different view. History is argument, and what is 'good' or 'bad' is highly subjective" (Sanghera, 2022).

question of whether 'Britain' should apologise for imperialism (I have not found evidence of the activity ending with the question of reparations).

These differences cosmetically overlay an underlying discursive formation. The shared rules between these instantiations of the balance sheet centre around the *division* and *comparability* between its line items. 'Education' can be separated from 'cultural repression' in the first step (*division*) and they can be compared against one another in the second step, as can 'railways' against 'racism' (*comparability*). These line items are each attached to a normative assessment ('good'/'bad'). In the versions of the balance sheet discussed above, there is no anxiety about the colonial archive, colonial ways of seeing or other problems in how we can know the colonial past, but rather individual assertions such as "Britain helped development" (although not interpretations such as "The British Empire was good") are presented as unproblematic facts.[47] I address these regularities of the discursive formation in more detail in Chapter 9 but suffice it to say here that these balance sheets, as a discursive formation, construct the same object (the British Empire) in a similar style (Hall 1997: 29).

Authority to Speak the Balance Sheet

The balance sheets described above inhabit the same institutional spaces (teaching the same topic, in schools, with a similar method as a repeated routine), but the balance sheet discursive formation is not limited to these particular institutional sites. This method for thinking and talking about the British Empire is visible in politicians' statements to the press, in social media arguments and in documentaries. The latter is exemplified by Paxman's big-budget BBC series, *Empire*: "the

[47] Here, I am not trying to suggest that Spivak should be required reading at KS3 but rather to point out a characteristic which shapes the balance sheet, namely a confidence in what is known about the colonial past.

Empire brought blood and tears and dispossession to millions of people, but it also brought roads and railways and education" (Birkett 2012: 55:00-55:25). In these different institutional sites, however, legitimate authority within the discursive formation shifts. In the site of the classroom, teachers draw on these wider discourses and curate the voices of historians in order to construct and mediate the balance sheet.[48] In these classroom spaces, teachers act as the legitimate authority to curate the balance sheet. In other institutional sites history teachers lose this curatorial authority.

In the wider public arena, broadcasters, journalists, publishers and the Twitterati play this mediating role, curating who is positioned as wielding intellectual authority. A vivid example of this is that in the BBC's *Sunday Politics* with Andrew Neil, the two parties selected for the 'Head to Head' segment on controversies surrounding Gove's history curricula reforms were two Cambridge-affiliated historians, David Starkey and Richard Evans (Historyworks, 2013). Despite the topic being about *school* history, the showrunners invited informants who were not based in schools or the DfE. These other mediators, e.g. broadcasters, often make the same types of selections which teachers would make in a classroom setting, e.g. historians which are both 'respectable'[49] and are engaged in publishing more accessible history texts (rather than only publishing paywalled journal articles in technical language). To have the appearance of the respectable historian (including being raced, gendered, classed in a particular way, preferably also wearing tweed) may enhance credibility in many institutional sites.[50] Such markers of respectability

[48] Teachers may also draw on historians to reject the balance sheet, as does, for instance, Allen (2022) drawing on Satia and Benger (2022a) drawing on Chatterjee.
[49] David Starkey is no longer widely considered a 'respectable' historian after comments he made during the 2020 summer of Black Lives Matter (Flood, 2020).
[50] That pronouncements about history education in the public space stem so much from historians and politicians and so little from teachers or students signals something profound about the hierarchy of knowers and knowledge in the public space. Pronouncements from historians about what is (not) happening in schools are made confidently and given legitimacy through numerous platforms and with no evidentiary burden to *prove* this is what is/not happening. This is an instantiation of the reverence that cultures of powerful knowledge (and British society more broadly) hold

in combination with the 'correct' institutional affiliation and the desired narrative fit (within a 'culture-war' milieu) can even compensate for the lack of relevant disciplinary/sub-disciplinary background. However, the grounds of authority (to speak the balance sheet) can be more diverse and paradoxical than I have set out above. To be racialised as 'BAME' and to have heritage in a postcolony can sure up the legitimacy of speakers in particular contexts (although as discussed later in this chapter black and brown speakers addressing this topic are also routinely dismissed and abused). Noticeably the Conservative MPs Nadhim Zahawi (who was born in Iraq) and Kemi Badenoch (whose family immigrated from Nigeria) were both on the forefront of the push for teaching imperial 'benefits' as part of a balance sheet formulation in March 2022. For instance, Badenoch said: "There were terrible things that happened during the British Empire, there were other good things that happened, and we need to tell both sides of the story" (Alibhai, 2022). These aspects of positionality might lend legitimacy to the discourse that postcolonial subjects are/should be grateful for colonialism. Conversely Tharoor, as an Indian politician, can be positioned within a balance sheet formulation as providing an (anti-imperial) Indian perspective to contrast with a (pro-imperial) white British perspective like Ferguson (see Example J in Appendix B). Thus, multiple positionings of speakers can license the discursive formation, albeit licensing it in different ways.

The 'balance' of the balance sheet requires an *impartial* umpire who decides which points stand for each 'side' and declares when balance has been reached. Disciplinary credentials (i.e. the status of a professional historian) are one means through which speakers can be situated as impartial.

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for the academy above schools. To use a slightly melodramatic description, the power to define what is or is not occurring in schools without ever needing to consult schools is the ultimate act of the academy's domination over them. Much of the mythology in the press, perpetuated by historians, about the wholesale absence of empire from schools is testament to discursive power. "Certain descriptions, even if they appear false to us, can be *made* 'true' because people act on them believing that they are true" (Hall 1992, 203). This mythology of the wholesale absence of empire from schools has therefore in a sense been 'made true'.

However, the balance sheet itself can anoint its speakers as impartial. While Tharoor and Ferguson can be positioned as providing each side respectively, arguably a greater status can be conferred by claiming the space of providing *both* sides. For instance, instead of simply extolling the 'achievements' of the empire – as suggested by the title of the *Daily Express* article: "Rees-Mogg passionately defends 'WONDERFUL' achievements of British Empire" (Bradley, 2018b) [emphasis in original] – Conservative MP Jacob Rees-Mogg actually positions himself as inhabiting a reasonable middle ground, surveying the balance sheet as a whole. The sentiment from which 'wonderful' is transposed into the title was: "The British Empire had good and bad bits like all sorts of things. The bad bits were terrible. But some of its good bits were really wonderful" (Bradley, 2018b)(also quoted in Chapter 1). Although the *Daily Express* chose not to curate his comments in this 'balanced' way (preferring a more overtly jingoist gloss), Rees-Mogg is here attempting to project 'balance'. Status can accrue from projecting neutrality, nuance and sophistication, from being above the fray. I want to dig deeper into these issues of 'balance' and 'impartiality' by using Aikin and Casey's formulation of 'bothsiderism'.

Bothsiderism

Aikin and Casey describe bothsiderist reasoning – "thinking one must always hear 'both sides' of the story and find 'balance'" (2022: 251) – as a meta-argumentative strategy which can be fallacious (also known as the Fallacy of Middle Ground). Teaching features in their examples of fallacious bothsiderism:

> "A Texas high school teacher asked students to list the positives and negatives of American chattel slavery, in order to give a 'balanced view.' In parallel fashion there are regular calls for high school biology classes, when covering the topic of evolution, to 'teach the controversy,' a phrase co-opted by creationists to give their pseudo-scientific views a veneer of plausibility as one part of a debate" (2022: 250).

Also on the theme of problematising impartiality, Hall described how imperatives of 'balance' reproduced structures of power in the context of British news broadcasting (1999). The journalistic professional codes which Hall described were severely tested in the US during the Trump era, precipitating discussions about whether bothsiderism was necessary or damaging for the profession (Kaiser, 2020). However, these accounts neglect the affective and self-making attractions of 'bothsiderism'.[51]

Bothsiderism allows for the projection of one's own sophistication in comparison to its opposite on which it depends for its own self-definition: dogmatism. This opens a range of delegitimising strategies against those who resist and critique the balance sheet. Crowcroft positions Satia's work as mere polemical activism with no scholarly value (2022a). Elkins comes in for a similar critique, with Crowcroft chastising her for leaving out the benefits of liberal empire (2022b). He ends by constructing a future "when the discovery of dispassionate truth is once again the main pursuit of the academy." This illustrates what I mean by bothsiderism as self-making: In this way Crowcroft positions himself as a dispassionate truth-seeker because he recognises 'both sides' and is thus different from these alleged ideologues. If a bothsiderist may be dogmatically bothersiderist then this could be seen as a case where, as discussed in Chapter 3, 'what is excluded from the identity then comes to trouble and destabilise it.' I return to this theme in Chapter 7.

The (Im)Balance Sheet

[51] Aikin and Casey do mention an affective component very briefly, that suspending judgment through bothsiderism can be linked to the sceptics' ideal of achieving peace of mind through suspension of judgement. However, I am suggesting something more intimately bound up with how one sees oneself (impartial) in relation to others (partisan).

Despite the importance of balance and even-handedness to the power of the balance sheet discursive formation, a variation within the discursive formation might be termed – to co-opt a formulation of Tharoor's – 'the (im)balance sheet'. This is the performance of bothsiderism but with implicit or explicit attempts to elevate one 'side'. This method is demonstrated by conservative commentators Rowan Dean and James Morrow speaking on Sky News Australia in the aftermath of the death of Queen Elizabeth which brought questions of imperial memory back to the centre stage. Dean complained that:

> "We educate people [in Australia] that the empire was bad ... If you look at countries like India and Pakistan which have struggled since the colonial era. It is fine to say that there were bad things that happened, of course there were bad things that happened, but look at the rule of law, the establishment of infrastructure and so on" (Kaonga, 2022).[52]

Here this elevation of 'imperial benefits' is accomplished through comparing paternalistic 'development' under colonialism with 'failed' postcolonial states.[53] Despite the elevation of 'imperial benefits' being present in among the right-wing commentariat, I have not found evidence

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[52] As Dean and Morrow's Sky News Australia segment demonstrates a number of moves typical in this discourse, I have included a longer transcription of it here. These moves include: using the example of violence during the independence era to delegitimise decolonisation; accusing those critical of empire of being 'biased'; claiming that schools teach history in a 'biased' anti-imperial way; asserting the value of imperial 'gifts'; using flattering comparisons to other empires (especially the Belgian Empire); positing 'successful' postcolonies (usually referencing white majority settler states or occasionally Asian Tigers such as Hong Kong and Singapore).
James Morrow: "If you are frank about the historical record guys, decolonisation was a bigger disaster [than British imperialism] for so many countries around the world. It led to so much more bloodshed, violence, all sorts of chaos that the empire itself didn't cause."
Rowan Dean: "Oh I want to talk about this as well because it drives me nuts that we educate people [in Australia] that the empire was bad. I am all for it, let's start a new movement. Bring back the British Empire, bring it back. You look at countries like Zimbabwe, if you look at countries in Africa like Uganda where they decolonised as James says, disastrous results. If you look at countries like India and Pakistan which have struggled since the colonial era. It is fine to say that there were bad things that happened, of course there were bad things that happened, but look at the rule of law, the establishment of infrastructure and so on and look at the opposite that has happened since the British Empire withdrew."
James Morrow: "But not only that Rowan, the British Empire was a great engine of civilization–
Rowan Dean: "– And let's teach that, teach that! If you look at other empires, the French, the Belgians – my God – all of these other countries, the Spanish, no other European power created so many successful successor states to the empire."

[53] As Satia notes, "How we remember the British Empire matters. It shapes *how we assess the seeming 'failures' of postcolonial countries* to 'move on' from their colonial past, how we make sense of Britain's efforts to reinvent its place in the world in the current Brexit crisis, and how we think about imperial activity today" [my emphasis] (2020: 11).

of this slant in history education in England (neither at KS3 or GCSE) in terms of clear attempts to *elevate* the 'good' above the 'bad', although this could be obscured by selection bias.

By contrast, the elevation of imperial 'drawbacks' is evident in the balance sheet teaching materials in Appendix B. In certain instances, the 'imperial benefits' elements seem perfunctory and subject to small acts of sabotage. For instance, Example I goes through the balance sheet motions, but it includes a slide consisting of images of toiling 'tea pickers', 'spice workers', 'opium farm workers' and 'tea carriers' under the heading 'Beneficial for whom?' Each slide in the rest of the PowerPoint is haunted by the enquiry question epithet: "Who benefits from Empire?" Example J similarly seems to have the trace of 'a finger on the scale' in contrast to the ideals of balance and pure bothsiderism. In Example J's comparison between Ferguson and Tharoor, Tharoor's interpretation is given additional weight in an exercise about "What aspects of a person's life do you think could affect their interpretations about the past?" The handout notes that: "Tharoor grew up in a country that had become (poorer) because of the empire, whereas Ferguson grew up in a country that had become (richer) because of the empire. Ferguson grew up in a country that (celebrated) the work of the empire, whereas Tharoor grew up in a country that had recently become (free) from it." (The bracketed words are the correct options from a list of words given on the worksheet which students choose from to fill in the blanks). While this could be encoded with the subtext merely that 'everyone is biased', it could also be encoded to connote that Tharoor's is the more legitimate voice. These small acts of sabotage in the design of the KS3 materials accomplish ostensible balance while incorporating some resistance.

Enforcement of the Balance Sheet

This resistance is limited not only because of the professional codes in operation, or because of teachers' own ambivalences about empire, but also because resistance can meet enforcement of the discursive formation. Enforcing the discursive formation can take more powerful forms than the critical online reviews of anti-imperial history books mentioned above. In November 2020, a grouping of the right-wing of the Conservative party known as the Common Sense Group mobilised against discussion of the links between National Trust properties and slavery/colonialism. This mobilisation targeted Corinne Fowler who directed the project *Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted* where primary school children explored these links. By February 2021 the Telegraph reported that *Colonial Countryside* was a 'political' project, and that on the authority of the Culture Secretary "further bids for public money to cover the cost of the *Colonial Countryside* project would be turned down" (Hope, 2021). The Royal Historical Society countered the following month in an open letter: "If anyone is being too 'political' here, it is politicians who violate the principles of arm's-length governance by seeking to dictate what research our heritage bodies can and cannot support" (Royal Historical Society, 2021). Threats to funding are not the only means of intimidation, because the online space and its implications for offline safety can also be used to discipline those who speak of empire in ways that contravene the balance sheet. Fowler explains "I have had threats to my personal and digital security, a lot of hate mail to my place of work, a lot of malicious emails, suggestions for how to kill me under *Daily Mail* articles ... At one point I couldn't go walking alone" (Fazackerley, 2021). Like the gendered fantasies of killing shared online in relation to Fowler, the forms this abuse takes can emphasise the ways in which authors critical of imperialism deviate from popular imaginings of the respectable historian. Sanghera has been open about the racist abuse he received after the publication of *Empireland*, as has Olusoga. Sanghera explains:

> "when you have brown people like David [Olusoga] or me talking about empire, it triggers people in a really deep way. David challenges the hierarchy of empire. But he also challenges the way the imperial story has always been told, which is a 50-year-old white man on TV, often getting off a train in India; a nostalgic view. Suddenly there's brown people taking ownership of this story and it's really triggering for so many people" (Flood, 2021).

In the same article it is also noted that the same type of abuse is not meted out to a prominent white historian of empire:

> "By contrast, William Dalrymple, a historian who writes on similar topics to Sanghera and Olusoga in his books and has been scathing about Britain's 'vast ignorance of everything that is most uncomfortable about our imperial past', says he has not received a single piece of hate mail from a British person" (Flood, 2021).

While Olusoga points out that "most black people in the public eye are subject to racist abuse online" (Greenstreet, 2021), speaking critically of imperialism seems to amplify this abuse even further. Sanghera argues he received far more abuse in response to his discussion of imperialism than in response to his writing on other controversial topics. While I go on to argue that Sanghera's work has a complex relationship to the balance sheet formation, it is clear that speaking about the British Empire publicly in ways and from bodies perceived as illegitimate is a dangerous business and enforcers of acceptable discursive formations can retaliate in vicious ways.

Retaliation against real and imagined criticism of imperialism also affects schools. As part of the general punitive online environment described by Fowler, Olusoga and Sanghera, teachers have been targeted on social media for allegedly propagating 'wokeness' in classrooms (Fazackerley, 2021). With more specific regards to empire, in addition to the remarks by Zahawi and Badenoch in the press, the DfE's (2022) non-statutory guidance on political impartiality makes particular mention of the need to address the British Empire in a 'balanced' way. The Policy Exchange report also operates within the discourse, accusing schools of not teaching 'balanced' accounts of empire (see Chapter 1). Concerns that empire was *not* being taught in a 'balanced' way are not

new. In the mid-2000s, Chris McGovern, the director of the now defunct lobby group called the History Curriculum Association, expressed concern that a unit developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority for KS3 ('How and why is the legacy of British rule in the Indian subcontinent interpreted in different ways?') was not a good faith attempt at the balance sheet. He explained that "The general tone of the unit is anti-British, with little about positive consequences of imperial rule ... Instead pupils have to work out 'how the British profited from their Indian empire' and 'the relative importance of the various benefits Britain experienced as a result of their Indian empire'" (MacLeod, 2006). This concern about whether 'balance' was being achieved in classrooms is therefore not unique to this conjuncture.

The foregoing has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which the balance sheet as a 'regime of truth' is maintained. "Those who produce the discourse also have the power to *make it true* – i.e. to enforce its validity, its scientific status ... According to Foucault, when power operates so as to enforce the 'truth' of any set of statements, then such a discursive formation produces a 'regime of truth'" (Hall 1992: 205). Although such explicit steps to sure up the discursive formation suggest its vulnerability (if it were completely cemented as common sense then there would ostensibly be no need for the multiple offensives described here), the evidence presented here suggest it is nonetheless still dominant. In this punitive environment it is understandable for teachers (and students) to be wary of challenging this regime.

The Balance Sheet as Solution to Contradictions

What is particular to Hall's conceptualisation of discursive formations is the organisation of different (contradictory) elements into a provisional larger shape. There is, to return to the description in Chapter 3, a unity created out of diversity:

> "It is connective across different positions, between apparently dissimilar, sometimes contradictory, ideas. Its 'unity' is always in quotations marks and always complex, a suturing together of elements which have no necessary or eternal 'belongingness'. It is always, in that sense, organised around arbitrary and not natural closures" (Hall 2021: 10).

The contradictions produced by the articulation of elements with no necessary belongingness can be made visible in closer readings of the balance sheets themselves. For instance, the 'good' of bequeathing the colonies popular rule is articulated with the 'bad' of crushing uprisings demanding popular rule.[54] For example, one worksheet – entitled "Was the Empire Good or Bad?" – consisted of boxes to be labelled by students as 'good', 'bad' or 'both' and two of these boxes were:

> "**Government**: Many former colonies used the democratic system of Parliament introduced by Britain after the Empire ended which allowed all people to vote for who they wanted to lead them."
> "**Rebellion**: A lot of people in the colonies were killed if they fought back against British rule – for example the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in 1956 and the Amritsar Massacre in India in 1919" (Enabled Learning, 2020).

While the exercise does not force subjects to see these as precisely morally equivalent or for democracy to be 'worth' the bloodshed, it does make the claim that imperialism *produces* democracy and that this is compatible with imperialism as the *denial* of self-determination.[55] The result is almost Orwellian: dictatorship is democracy.

However, the most obvious, overarching articulation also deserves reflection: the combination of imperial 'benefits' and imperial 'drawbacks'. This combination allows the formation to accomplish

[54] Of course my framing of 'demanding popular rule' is a vast oversimplification of anti-colonial uprisings, with different aims and different conceptions of post-colonial governance structures even within movements. This framing however allows me to draw out the contradiction more sharply. One could argue that the opacity of this contradiction may be produced by anti-democratic en/decodings of these uprisings: i.e. 'empire bequeathing popular rule to colonial subjects disenfranchised by empire' can still be seen as a valid narrative in the face of violent repression when combined with the racialised assumption that anti-colonial movements are only able to bring about dictatorships or chaos and are incapable of generating forms of popular rule without imperial midwifery.

[55] This contradiction is also commented on by Benger: "the development of democratic governance in some colonies is often listed as a 'good' of empire, but this does not account for the fact that often democracy only came about through *resistance* to empire" (Benger, 2022b).

a number of pragmatic aims. It allows for the 'safe' incorporation of criticism of colonialism, even acknowledgement of atrocity and exploitation, while it maintains the legitimacy (or at a minimum the indeterminacy of the legitimacy) of empire. An unqualified endorsement of the British Empire is brittle and vulnerable to criticism, while the balance sheet is responsive to criticism, absorbing and domesticating it. The balance sheet thus appropriates critique of empire by placing it alongside 'respect for the empire' and legitimating the latter. The balance sheet is in this sense crucial for the survival of 'respect for the empire' as a valid affective/intellectual response in mainstream English politics. Aikin and Casey argue that through bothsiderism the strength of the evidence presented is largely immaterial compared to the ability to maintain the status of the topic as 'controversial', as a topic on which legitimate speakers (see the section on Authority to Speak the Balance Sheet) can disagree.

> "The bothsiderist makes room to bring the disparate views in, makes sure that they are given hearings, and ensures that audiences appreciate the fact of the ongoing debate ... This should be the default attitude with matters of controversy and disagreement. The problem is that the policies of discursive inclusion have consequent presentations of meta-evidence for onlooking audiences and participants. And the meta-evidence is that in light of continued controversy, we do not have sufficient reasons to call the matter closed. Either the evidence is conflicted, incomplete, supports multiple (and so no) sides, or the deliberative process has been mismanaged ... And in light of this meta-argumentative conclusion, modest cognitive and practical results follow. We should suspend judgment, continue to include disparate views in the discussion, and refrain from hasty actions based on one conclusion as opposed to others. Again, there are many matters for which this reasoning is appropriate, but there are others for which it is inappropriate. Including considerations in favor of chattel slavery is a failure to appreciate that the issue is closed. Including testimony from climate change deniers not only misrepresents the state of play in the critical discussion over the science, but it impedes decisive action in light of what those discussions have shown" (Aikin and Casey 2022: 266-267).

It is therefore to some extent less important that the green boxes in Ferryhall's KS3 worksheet portray *convincing* 'imperial benefits' than that they *exist*. This is why 'spread cricket and rugby' can be listed alongside 'developed theories of racial supremacy'. The green boxes regardless of

their content contribute to cementing empire as having an inconclusive normative status which in turn contributes to a lack of urgency or certainty regarding ameliorative action.

To put this thought in terms of literary criticism, Jameson posits that the structure of cultural texts can provisionally resolve societal problems. As he puts it "the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (Jameson 2002: 64). The narrative form of the balance sheet – representing 'good' and 'bad' – is the solution to contradictions in representations of imperialism (progressive and despotic, a contradiction inherent in the idea of liberal imperialism). It also provides a means of being able to be critical of others who commit the same acts of imperialism without apparent self-contradiction, to argue that these other empires lack the 'good' elements which accrue in particular to the British Empire. Jameson discusses the need for "a symbolic answer to the perplexing question of how my enemy can be thought of as being *evil* (that is, as other than myself and marked by some absolute difference), when what is responsible for his being so characterized is quite simply the *identity* of his own conduct with mine, the which ... he reflects as in a mirror image [*sic*]" (Jameson 2002: 105). The balance sheet thus preserves the possibility of critiquing the Belgian Empire or Russia's present empire-building without interrogating any uncomfortable similarities with the British Empire. Jameson is however pessimistic about these 'solutions'. This symbolic act of synthesis of the contradiction which the text tries to perform is always fragile. "Real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm" (Jameson 2002: 64). Jameson and Hall therefore both see discursive solutions to our problems as provisional and ephemeral, albeit for different reasons (Jameson highlights the limits of the aesthetic realm as an intervention, while

Hall emphasises the shifting ground of any intervention). The balance sheet thus remains only a provisional solution to the contradictions of imperial memory.

Alternatives to the Classic Balance Sheet: Reflections on *Empireland*

If the current solution (the classic balance sheet) is provisional, this raises the question of what alternatives to the classic balance sheet are emergent. One avenue is to frame empire as inherently illegitimate. Satia argues that:

> "Balance sheets attempt to show that the 'pros' – trains, dams, the rule of law –outweighed the 'cons' – occasional violent excesses, racism – despite the ambiguous impact of many alleged 'pros' and the deeply flawed premise that we can *judge an inherently illegitimate and immoral system by anything other than that illegitimacy and immorality*" (Satia 2020: 4) [my emphasis].

There are spaces in England where empire is encoded in teaching as illegitimate and immoral (such as at All Saints). As the Ferryhall HoD, Claire pointed out in an interview, there are those who believe the empire 'should be taught like the Holocaust'. This alternative of illegitimacy or global/unqualified critique is however not the paradigm in ascendancy in post-BLM Britain.

Although Satia's *Time's Monster* is mentioned by Allen in his piece for *The Economist* "What British pupils should know about Britain's rule of India: a history teacher's view" (2022) and by Benger (2022) discussed below, it is eclipsed in the English history education community by a book released the one year after it, Sanghera's *Empireland* (2021). Written in a more accessible style with less abstract arguments than *Time's Monster*, *Empireland* was better suited to fulfilling the needs of busy teachers in a moment when the profession was (and continues) grappling with imperial memory in a particularly acute way. A great strength of the book is its evocation of how the imperial past is present in Britain in ways big and small (this is highlighted in the subtitle '*How*

Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain'). The publisher Penguin made a particular effort to distribute *Empireland* to schools:

> "In partnership with TES, we're giving secondary schools across the UK the chance to apply for a free Lit in Colour book donation for their library, made up of 100 different Penguin books by Black, Asian and minority ethnic authors ... In addition to the 100 books for the school library, each school will also receive a class set (30 copies) of *Empireland* by Sathnam Sanghera, an interactive activity pack based on the book, and 5 free audiobook downloads ... We'll be donating books to 500 different schools in total" (Penguin, 2021).

By this calculation, 15 000 free copies of *Empireland* were received by schools. Despite a somewhat naïve opening to the book which extolled how easy the creation of an 'Empire Awareness Day' would be in schools,[56] the book proved popular with history teachers. Many teachers posted on Twitter about how they and their students have engaged with the book, how it has shaped their teaching, and how they wanted to encourage other history teachers to read *Empireland*. Sanghera was also invited as a plenary speaker at the Schools History Project 2021 conference and in the same year his Zoom discussion with the History Teacher Book Club sold out. The proceeding in-depth discussion of Sanghera's work is not only due to this influence in the English history education community, but his texts – *Empireland* and further articles on the subject in *The Times* – allow for the exposition of a particular set of discursive moves in relation to the balance sheet. These moves are not unique to this body of work, but Sanghera explicates them in their developed and explicit form. After discussing these moves in Sanghera's texts, I explain their significance in history education discourse more broadly.

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[56] Sanghera argues for reviving an annual Empire Day which took place in Britain from 1916 to 1958, but instead of celebrating empire uncritically, 'Empire Day 2.0' would be a more neutral 'Empire Awareness Day'. Primarily I refer to this as naïve because Sanghera frames what in practice would involve extremely complicated logistics to carry out in schools (the loss of a day of teaching examinable content for many classes, the development of new lesson plans in every subject department) as easy and undemanding. He writes that "the simplest thing would be to persuade schools to allocate chunks of the timetable to the cause" (2021: 3). He also reinforced this in an online interview, noting "this is something that could be implemented relatively easily I feel" (Penguin Platform, 2021: 10:15-10:17). However, in my reading of teachers' responses to *Empireland* the only hint of irritation I've come across is in Matt's blog which while finding the book excellent also quips "*Saying* you should be teaching X and Y as part of the Empire is easy. Actually *teaching it well* is harder" (Matt, 2021b).

In addition to contemporary Britain's implicatedness with the imperial past, the other major argument in *Empireland* is a critique of the balance sheet approach. Sanghera positions his project against the balance sheet:

> "...the biggest argument of all: was the British empire good or bad? This 'balance sheet' view of history, with 'colonial crimes' such as the use of poison gas and the deaths of millions in famines being weighed against the supposed elimination of 'native crimes' such as sati, foot-binding, infanticide, slavery and cannibalism, is futile and misleading. History and the people who made it were complicated. You can't apply modern ethics to the past. To read history as a series of events that instil pride and shame, or a balance of rights and wrongs, is as inane as listing the events in your own life as good and bad. ... this debate has a gravitational force of its own. It's impossible to discuss [the] British empire in the twenty-first century, or even admit to ignorance or curiosity about it, without getting dragged into this binary consideration" (2021b).

Here there are substantive differences between the forgoing balance sheet discursive formation and Sanghera's argument. The comparability implied in the archetypical balance sheet project is rejected by Sanghera who argues that the exercise is a nonsense:

> "How much sense does it make to 'balance' 'colonial crimes', such as the deaths of millions in the Indian and Irish famines and the genocide of the Aboriginal Tasmanians, against the claimed 'positives' of empire such as, say, the claimed eradication of sati in India (where a widow sat on her husband's funeral pyre) or the introduction of railways across the globe?" (2022).

In this way Sanghera mobilises against the balance sheet, but as I describe below Sanghera offers an alternative which retains many of its core dynamics.

This contradiction is made possible because Sanghera frames the balance sheet as *necessarily* ending in one normative judgement or another. He laments that "You can't explore the issue casually, or express curiosity, or admit ignorance: you need to take sides." Satia enacts the same misrecognition of the balance sheet; she points to the impossibility of enacting any actual weighing up through the balance sheet because "it presumes there is a point at which the story is over, the

accounts are closed" (2020: 277). However, contra Sanghera and Satia, I argue that actually weighing up 'the pros and cons' in instantiations of the balance sheet is the exception rather than the rule. The archetypical balance sheet discourse (or 'classic balance sheet' as I refer to it in the title of this section) resists coming to any conclusions other than the need to acknowledge 'two sides' and the superiority of suspending any 'one-sided' judgements. While in some KS3 balance sheet exercises children are asked to argue for a 'side' in aid of developing their argumentative essay/reasoning skills (and even here reaching a conclusion is not mentioned in the majority of cases in Appendix B), this overlooks that in these exercises the teacher does not 'choose sides'. Even resistance through (im)balance sheets go through the motions of teacher neutrality. This suspension of judgement is the adult and mature instantiation of the balance sheet, compared to the (here) childish necessity of choosing 'a side' in a writing exercise. Returning to Sanghera, this misrecognition of the balance sheet (as a problem only of comparisons coming to a judgement landing on one side of the binary) enables him to make some of the same moves as classic balance sheet discourse whilst seemingly speaking against the balance sheet. These moves include (1) dismembering effects of empire, (2) bothsiderism and (3) occupying the space of neutrality.

By 'dismembering' effects of empire,[57] I mean the centrality of a framework which asks 'what did empire do' (or 'what did empire cause') and *separating* these effects into different buckets, each

[57] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o uses the term 'dismembering' in a related but more expansive way in *Something Torn and New* (2009). He describes how colonised societies are dismembered by becoming separated from their land, from their sovereignty, from their languages, and from their memory and that, in this context, political struggles can be read as striving to become whole again. My usage relates to his more expansive concept in that he emphasises how in the separation of the colonised from their memory, the coloniser defines knowledge and maps a new memory for them. I refer here to this 'new memory' as *itself* involving separation, dismembering and disaggregating what might otherwise be a whole, but retaining from his argument that this new memory is "the colonizer's memory ... his way of defining the world, including his take on the nature of the relations between colonizer and colonized" [*sic*] (2009: 108).

with its own normative status. This element of the balance sheet discursive formation survives in a central image used by Sanghera to discredit the balance sheet:

> "It is puerile to reduce imperial history to a matter of 'good' and 'bad'; trying to weigh up the positive and negative in this way is like defending the morality of kicking a random old man in the shins one afternoon because you helped an old lady across the road in the morning" (2021a).

While it deviates from the classic balance sheet in that one action does not affect the (im)morality of the other, this image still suggests that imperialism caused 'good and bad things', these are distinguishable as separate actions and actions with distinctly different normative statuses. For instance, Sanghera notes that "the wealth of empire, acquired through both *moral and immoral means*, officially and unofficially, made some individuals very rich and helped certain cities, institutions and businesses flourish" [my emphasis] (2021, 137). This dismembering and the reassertion of the normative status of these dismembered elements is made most visible when contemplating 'contemporary legacies':

> "I hope this book has demonstrated how the British empire is absolutely embedded within us and how there are many more serious and troubling imperial legacies[58] [than statues] ... The 'balance sheet' approach to British empire is ludicrous: I don't 'love' or 'hate' empire any more than I did when I started. *But when you're considering the contemporary legacies of this complicated history, they can be weighed up.* And I'm glad empire gave us our multiculturalism, our internationalism, a certain tradition of anti-racism, and laid the foundations of the welfare state, and while I delight in the fact that our language, art and cuisine reflect our complex history, our imperial legacies and the ways we fail to see them are a burden" [my emphasis] (2021, 208-209).

This dualism (between gladdening and burdening legacies) is also evident in how Sanghera describes the need to attend to the 'dark chapters' of the British Empire, which implies the

[58] In this section he also lists the 'more serious and troubling imperial legacies' developed in the book: "More important than statues is that the museums which are so part of our national life refuse to engage honestly and sincerely with the question of how they obtained their imperial artefacts. The way we fail to acknowledge we are a multicultural society because we had a multicultural empire makes our national conversations about race tragic and absurd. The manner in which our imperial history inspires a sense of exceptionalism results in dysfunctional politics and disastrous decision-making. Our collective amnesia about the fact that we were, as a nation, wilfully white supremacist and occasionally genocidal, and our failure to understand how this informs modern-day racism, are catastrophic" (2021, 208-209).

existence of their opposite. This dismembering and these dualisms affirm the same coordinates of balance sheet discursive formation, the dualisms of 'dark' and 'light', the 'good' and the 'bad'. As Hall explains in the context of his discussion on dualisms within West and the Rest discourse:

> "Both versions of the discourse operated simultaneously. They may seem to negate each other, but it is more accurate to think of them as *mirror images* ... feeding off each other. Each required the other. They were in opposition but systematically related: part of what Foucault calls a 'system of dispersion'" [emphasis in original] (Hall 1992, 169).

These elements (kicking and helping, the dark and the light) are thus still reproducing the system of dispersion at work in the balance sheet through a particular set of mirror images. Therefore, *Empireland* reproduces the dismemberment of the balance sheet by splitting empire into mirror images connoting 'good legacies' and 'bad legacies'.

Secondly, these mirror images provide 'both sides' for bothsiderist reasoning, which was previously described in this chapter as: a finding that 'the evidence is conflicted, incomplete, supports multiple (and so no) sides... and in light of this meta-argumentative conclusion, modest cognitive and practical results follow. We should suspend judgment... .' This meta-argumentative conclusion can be reached by the juxtaposition of 'good legacies' and 'bad legacies' alone, but *Empireland* additionally frames empire as subject to conflicting evidence in other senses too. The book discusses a number of interesting debates and ambiguities around empire: when did it start/end, its changing shape and mechanisms across time and geography, and how to describe the macroeconomics of imperial relations[59] among others. These debates are then articulated – and as Hall reminds us articulations are 'non-necessary' – with the argument that complexity precludes judgement. "There is the realization I was hit with when I started this project: that empire is a really

[59] The emphasis in this section is on the difficulty of determining accurate figures, rather than on more general areas of consensus on the economics of empire. That this difficulty is then used as a reason for non-economists to only "focus on the detail, rather than the macroeconomic picture" is illustrative of an ethic of incomplete evidence precluding judgement (2021).

difficult thing to comprehend ... empire cannot be dismissed or celebrated as entirely exploitative or benevolent" (2021: 200). Neither one of the mirror images of exploitative empire and benevolent empire can dominate and both require expression for balance. Thus despite critiquing the balance sheet (as a device which he frames as ending in an unbalanced one-sided conclusion), Sanghera calls for a 'balanced' teaching of empire, a teaching in which both sides find expression (2021: 208-209, 213).

Again, the strength of the evidence is immaterial to the meta-argumentative conclusion. The book is similar to those instances of (im)balance sheets discussed above in that one 'side' is elevated. Sanghera's work focuses on 'dark chapters' with descriptions, in particular those of Jallianwala Bagh and of the slave owner Thomas Thistlewood, which are devastating.[60] Despite positive references to imperialism as harbinger of multiculturalism/internationalism, substantively there is little description of imperialism in *Empireland* which connotes imperial benevolence. For this *Empireland* has been critiqued by some for ignoring the 'good' which Britain achieved in the colonies (Fernando, 2021). In fact with regards to the most famous of imperial benevolences, Sanghera directly challenges the construction of railways as a 'gift'.[61] In this sense, *Empireland* plays by the rules of bothsiderism, that it is the existence of the opposing arguments rather than their strength which demand the suspension of judgement.

[60] Even after engaging with violent histories for more than eleven years at various universities, *Empireland* moved me to tears more than once.

[61] He explains that the British "did not build the railways there as an act of charity" but as a strategic means of troop mobilisation and expanding access to markets for British goods; whose profits were guaranteed by Indian tax-payers; constructed with a colour bar and child labour; and in some cases paid for with money ringfenced for famine relief (2021: 194).

Lastly, Sanghera positions himself in a space of neutrality. While explicating his positionality in the chapter "Imperialism and Me", he emphasises early in the book that he is outside the dogmatism of party politics and other partisans:

> "[Taking sides] extends even to party politics, with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn announcing in the run-up to a general election that under his party children would be taught about the 'historical injustice' and 'colonialism' as part of the national curriculum, while Michael Gove announced early in his tenure as Secretary of State for Education that history lessons in schools needed to 'celebrate' the legacy of the British empire. The pressure continues as I tell people what I'm reading. I mention I'm consulting Jan Morris, Niall Ferguson or Jeremy Paxman and get told they're not to be trusted because they're imperialists or racists. I mention works by Pankaj Mishra or Shashi Tharoor and get told I can't trust them because they're Marxists. Both sides label the other as oversimplistic and posturing, whereas their own position is nuanced and thoughtful" (Sanghera 2021: 40-41).

However, the 'centre' can still, for Sanghera, be a space that 'is nuanced and thoughtful'. In a later article in response to Badenoch, Sanghera affirms the possibility and desirability of 'neutral' responses to empire by describing the key problem with Badenoch's remarks in the following terms: "she is not someone who can be considered to be acting neutrally" (2022). He suggests that neutral parties exist, particularly historians engaging with empire dispassionately. In this way, Sanghera's legitimate speaker in this realm coincides with that of powerful knowledge.

Claims to neutrality are fragile and can be rejected. Although Badenoch attempts to make use of the wellspring of balance, stating 'we need to tell both sides of the story', Sanghera criticises Badenoch and her government for "pushing a specific, nostalgic view of imperial history" (2022). Conversely, despite *Empireland*'s careful navigation of neutrality, its assessments have been positioned in certain platforms as biased; instead of giving both 'good' and 'bad' a fair hearing, it is seen as focusing entirely on the 'bad' (Fernando, 2021). Sanghera's criticism of Badenoch (who speaks to the 'good and bad' of empire) as well as right-wing criticisms of *Empireland* (which also speaks to the 'good and bad' of empire) reveal a paradox about bothsiderist accounts of empire: that interlocuters can accuse the speaker of nonetheless choosing sides even when the speaker

explicitly positions empire as 'both good and bad'. Bothsiderism is therefore not a guaranteed route to being accepted as credible and neutral even among those who emphasise the importance of 'both sides'. Speakers' emphases, the perception that they elevate 'a side', and their positionality may all be used to discredit them and characterise them as motivated. This demonstrates that the arms race for nuance is not easily won, but is full of mutual suspicion and perceptions of subterfuge.

While influential in its own right, *Empireland* is a useful reflection of more diffuse movements in the English history education community around what could be called 'the balanced anti-balance sheet', i.e. an alternative posited against the balance sheet but which affirms the need for neutrality and balance. The following examines discussions within history education as they relate to teaching empire, the balance sheet and the post-2020 moment. Most of these references from 2021 and 2022 mention *Empireland* directly. While I highlight certain parallels with the forgoing, to maintain focus this discussion has neglected the differences between these speakers and Sanghera as well as the differences between these speakers themselves.

Professional Conversations in History Education

The 2020s Balanced Anti-Balance Sheet

In a moment where calls were being made for a more visible presence of imperial history in schools and a growing discomfort with the weighing up exercises at KS3,[62] there was a need for

[62] In a 2021 blogpost for the HA, Kennett explained, "Like many of you I have been thinking a lot about how we teach the British Empire this year. The Black Lives Matter protests and reflections that followed it showed we have a lot of work to do in the way we approach our colonial history" (Kennett, 2021). Similarly, in a webinar for the Be Bold History Network, Riley displayed the famous image of the Colston statue being thrown into the harbour while noting that "we've been challenged to think about the teaching of empire through what's happening on the streets really ... [these] are all part of this *this period of altered possibility* really in engaging with the British Empire" [my emphasis] (Riley 2021, 5:27-6:12). Riley also mentions the active role of students in this, not only from Fill In the Blanks but

alternative discourses of empire which were nonetheless sufficiently apolitical to accord with professional codes of teaching. Above I have argued that the new 'balanced anti-balance sheet' discourse symbolised by *Empireland* "came across all the grooves that have articulated it already" (Hall and Grossberg, 1986: 54) in that it embodied the same dismembering, bothsiderism and claims to neutrality as its predecessor. However, this 'new' discourse predates *Empireland*. Historians had previously critiqued 21st century iterations of the balance sheet in England (Lester, 2016; McDougall et al., 2017; Wagner, 2019). These critiques intersected with the school history education community when the historian Jon Wilson gave a webinar in early May 2020 for the Be Bold History Network, "Teaching the Empire: Moving beyond the 'balance sheet'."

Wilson firstly acknowledged the professional code which encouraged balance sheet approaches:

> "As historians and history teachers and so forth, we're supposed to be balanced, we're supposed to be kind of measured people so we're kind of told take a balanced view of controversial events and so you end up with this approach to the history of British Empire which I think is it is out there quite a lot in schools is even out there in universities" (2020, 0:35-1:08).

He distinguishes between other histories which are treated impersonally and argues that empire is singled out as 'our' history and is thus over-personalised. Wilson thereafter makes similar moves to *Empireland,* arguing that empire was too diverse to make global comments about it and that

more diffusely: "I'm sure many of you have just heard the demand for a more culturally responsive history from your own students" (Riley 2021, 14:11-14:23). Woods also describes the increased interest of adults in the school community in this period, which she welcomed: "In June 2020, in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the subsequent momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the growing debate around Whiteness in the National Curriculum, I was contacted by a number of concerned staff and parents, asking about what exactly was taught in the history classrooms at our school. ... I was thrilled that colleagues and parents were paying closer attention to a curriculum that my team and I had worked hard to shape over the previous few years, and of which we were very proud" (Woods 2021, 62). However, Benger illustrates how this surge in focus on the empire is a double-edged sword, that it has lifted the stagnancy of the topic and invigorated it but "on the other hand, the public discourse surrounding the British Empire has taken a disturbing turn, becoming embroiled in a so-called 'culture war'. ... This situation is mirrored in school history in the UK. Never has there been more of a drive to confront Britain's imperial past. Perhaps inevitably, however, this has been accompanied by the attempts of politicians to direct how this is to be done" (2022: 8).

discussion of empire is too politicised: "The British Empire ends up being a proxy for arguing about Britain now" (2020: 5:27-5:34). Jones and McGarva explain in the Be Bold History Blog how the webinar was transformational for the way they taught empire at KS3 (2020). Evoking powerful knowledge, they state: "[Empire] was different everywhere. Therefore, for Wilson, questions about morality and the balance sheet are rendered not only impossible, but totally useless. We concluded *we should never ask our students to consider questions that historians might dismiss as 'useless'*" [my emphasis]. This led them to change their KS3 enquiry question from "How 'inglorious' was the British Empire in India?" (comparing Tharoor and Ferguson) to questions which highlighted this diversity of empire. Matt's blog agrees with Wilson, that:

> "I would also argue that a key problem we run into is students who personalise the Empire — it is the *British* Empire and we are British, so there is a tendency to be defensive of it. It is *our* Empire. A key challenge is to depersonalise it and see it in the abstract" [emphasis in original] (2021b).

Also for Be Bold History, Riley gave a webinar on the same topic in March 2021, recommending *Empireland*, and sharing some of Wilson's recommendations: "We treat [empire] historically, that we avoid kind of moralizing empire. We avoid using empire as a proxy for arguing about Britain" (2021, 25:48-26:00). As I described earlier, the balance sheet *could* (e.g. with 'pride' and 'shame' framings) point to affect and subjectivity contra powerful knowledge, but here history education norm entrepreneurs mobilise against this with appeals to dispassionate disciplinarity.

However, while warning against 'moralising' empire there is nonetheless an emphasis on its 'dark chapters'. In a 2021 blogpost for the HA, Kennett follows the emerging pattern: of noting that the diversity of empire makes global statements about it unworkable, citing *Empireland* for why the balance sheet is problematic, and drawing attention to the need to discuss aspects of empire that are "not easy", or in Epstein and Peck's terms, 'difficult history'. Kennett also argues for a focus on experiences of empire. For Matt 'experiences' mean the experiences of the colonised: "the points

of view of people who experienced the Empire, not just those who led and ran it" (2021b). Articles in the HA's secondary education journal, *Teaching History*, take a similar tack. Liburd, in an article about the Porter-MacKenzie debate (on the extent of the impact of the British Empire on Britain), acknowledges the contentiousness around empire, before charting a way of teaching the topic which steers clear of 'development'/benevolence tropes or global normative statements about empire but instead focuses on histories which may be 'uncomfortable' (2021). Although the foregoing statements affirm the need to be dispassionate and non-judgemental, there is also a subtle resistance here, in as far as many of these texts go on to construct primarily unflattering accounts of empire. It is not only that these discourses do not pit the 'good' versus the 'bad', but that these discourses exclude explicit reference to any touchstones associated with the 'good' (such as imperialism as 'development' or mentions of railways or other imperial 'gifts').

A Principled Stance: Benger's Alternative

Taking a different approach, the most substantive engagement with the balance sheet within the history education community, comes from Benger's 2022 article in *Teaching History* entitled "Beyond the balance sheet: navigating the 'imperial history wars' when planning and teaching about the British Empire" (2022). The introduction of the article not only evokes neutrality but its emphasis on 'rigour' is reminiscent of the professional response to Gove's initial reforms (see Chapter 2):

> "Concerned by the growing tendency of politicians and press to revive the moral balance-sheet approach to British imperial history and by some evidence of its resurgence in schools, Alex Benger set about devising a framework which would keep pupils' analysis rigorously historical, rather than moral and politicised" (2022: 8).

Additionally, Benger also assumes, in similar ways to Sanghera and Satia, that the political cache of the balance sheet for its proponents is in weighing-up the balance sheet and coming to a conclusion

(2022: 9). However, the proceeding argument focuses on the ways in which Benger makes important interventions in this space.

Benger jeopardises his neutrality by taking a principled stance on empire:

> "As Satia argues, the very premise of this question ['Was empire 'good' or 'bad'?'] is problematical because it accepts, without question, the *principle* that imperialism can be judged ethically 'good' and justifiable, should the balance sheet turn in its favour. Anti-colonial thinkers in the past, and indeed the stated principles (if not necessarily the practice) of international politics [reinforce that] imperialism cannot be justified under any circumstances" [emphasis in original] (2022: 14).

Benger's appeal to principles rather than to balance marks a distinct shift.

Claire from Ferryhall gives us insight into why this represents such a shift. In an interview she explained that empire cannot be taught 'like the Holocaust' because 'there is a debate about empire' in wider society. This refers to a professional code of responding to public discourse. Hall discusses this responsiveness in relation to broadcasters:

> "His [*sic*] sense of 'the state of play' in public opinion provides a sort of warrant for his [*sic*] performance. It offers a rough-and-ready way of referring to 'what people in general are thinking and feeling about an issue.' It is my impression that in their everyday professional practice, broadcasters are *more consistently* regulated by their sense of their audience than by any single other source" [emphasis in original] (Hall, 1974: 25).[63]

'The state of play in public opinion' (assuming here 'public' is nationally construed) is a powerful metric for regulating professional narratives, in other words the idea that teachers should reflect national debates in their teaching. Benger rejects this metric for that of principles and international law, both non-congruent with national public debates.

[63] For this reason, Hall describes decoders as both receivers and indirect *sources* of the message, capable of feeding back into the production of messages through encoders expectations of decoders. Therefore teachers, textbook authors and exam boards' expectations of their audiences/stakeholders influence their messages and discursive practices.

The key distinction between Benger's approach and that of the balanced anti-balance sheet is that Benger carves out a space for making global statements about empire. He draws on the work of Catherine Hall and of Partha Chatterjee to argue that instead of empire being primarily defined by its diversity across time and space (as emphasised by Sanghera and Wilson) there is an important commonality to empire across time and space:

> "By definition, colonised and coloniser could not have been equal in a colonial context. A diversity of *experiences* of colonialism was therefore underpinned by similarities in the overall *dynamics* (patterns) of colonial power, even if this might have played out differently in different places and for different people" (2022: 16).

This creates new possibilities which are reflected in Benger's pedagogy. "I settled on the following set of analytical concepts which I wanted pupils to consider when characterising the dynamics of colonialism: "political dominance; economic exploitation; culturalism and racism; resistance" (2022: 16). Instead of holding space for benevolent empire, this set of analytical concepts are those of critique.

Lastly, Benger makes visible the links between the wider historiography and the emergent concern to represent the experiences of the colonised (described above). He explains that from the 1970s post-colonial studies as well as 'the new imperial history' asserted the need to address "the perspectives and experiences of the majority of the colonised" (2022: 9). These shifts have also, Benger notes, brought into the frame how disciplinary knowledge was itself shaped by colonialism, although historians are still positioned in his piece as the trailblazers for teachers to look towards. His remarks demonstrate the paradox of powerful knowledge, that if teaching is to be led by the disciplines then this would mean embracing the self-reflexivity of the disciplines. (In this Benger has a more expansive conception of the disciplines than typical of powerful knowledge in history

education.) He plays on this paradox by drawing students' attention to textbooks and his own teaching as themselves being interpretations (thus they are situated and they can be contested).

How then might Benger's innovations be conceptualised? They are part disciplinary, i.e. drawing on historians and broad developments in the discipline. In this Benger appears to be merely advocating for the primacy of one accepted professional code (disciplinarity) over another accepted professional code (responsiveness to the state of play in public opinion). As he puts it, he "wanted to take an approach towards teaching the British Empire that was inspired and supported by the insights of historical scholarship, rather than by the extremities of public debate" (2022: 8). However, a further element to these innovations, one which is more taboo and is thus necessarily relegated to the background, is that Benger's innovations are also driven by a conception of "rigorous ethical thinking" (2022: 15). Ethical considerations in history education are not unique to Benger's discourse, but they are typically only held at arm's length in English history education. Here, this ethical thinking is imbricated with disciplinarity (he uses historians to build parts of his ethical argument) but is not reducible to disciplinarity (after all, he selects these historians carefully and ignores other pro-imperial or 'balanced' historians). Whether arguments such as Benger's can influence professional codes through appeals which are both familiar (disciplinarity) and less familiar (ethical thinking) to those codes remains to be seen, but this is not without precedent as I describe below.

Diversification and Decolonisation

Inclusion and diversity have successfully become part of history education's professional code.[64] This manifests, for example, in the diversification of how the Tudor period is taught, with Miranda Kaufmann's *Black Tudors* as a touchstone (Apps, 2019; Kaufmann, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Woods, 2021). These imperatives of diversity and inclusion require teachers to make choices between which topics, historical actors and historians to highlight in class along criteria that are not themselves clearly or only disciplinary. Woods synthesises these different rationales for diversification as: drawing on Priggs, doing "good history" (disciplinary); reflecting the demographics of modern British society (responsiveness); socialising students to "learn to value the achievements of societies that do not mirror their own" and striving to "end the stereotyping and racist attitudes that continue to hinder the life chances of BME adults" (ethical) (2021: 63-64). Woods notes how questions of ethics and social justice have driven the work of Whitburn and Mohamud (authors of one of the two MEP textbooks). My point here is that even in the English history education space, ethical considerations (in terms of 'diversity') have been validated as a professional concern and that this precedent potentially facilitated the emergence of other ethical considerations, such as Benger's principled stance on empire which hinges on a discourse of ethics. However, broader favourable conjunctural conditions enabled cosmopolitan discourses of diversity to thrive (see Chapter 1) but it remains to be seen whether this principled stance will have favourable conjunctural conditions to thrive and become *the* alternative to the balance sheet and supplant the balanced anti-balance sheet.

[64] However, this is not to overstate its transformational impact on practice. As Lyndon-Cohen notes, often this has been a "painfully slow process of change" (Lyndon-Cohen, 2021). By 'successfully become part of professional code' I refer to its presence and acceptance in spaces of professional discussion in the English history education community as a legitimate aim for the profession, rather than to imply that it is a completed project.

This alternative of the principled stance could theoretically develop through a discourse of 'decolonising the curriculum', but this route is less clear than it might seem. The literature on decolonisation is vast and to address this concept in depth is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The myriad conceptualisations of the term is part of what makes addressing it difficult. This multiplicity has also been problematic in the professional spaces under discussion here as the term entered the history education vocabulary. The forgoing has emphasised a tension between the desire to abide by professional codes of neutrality while also (in more conflicted and submerged ways) offering critiques of colonialism. This is nowhere more acute than in the decoupling of 'decolonisation' from global commentary on empire, what Benger terms "the overall *dynamics* (patterns) of colonial power" [emphasis in original] (Benger, 2022b: 16). Instead, 'decolonising' can be articulated with arguments for remaining neutral on empire's normative status. For example, Sanghera reflects on how "in embarking on this project I'm making an effort to decolonize myself" in the same project which remains agnostic on colonialism (2021: 174). Decolonising has often been taken up in the history education community as synonymous with 'including multiple perspectives'. As Woods notes, "In the recent emergence of a more mainstream debate on this subject, the terms 'diversification' and 'decolonisation' have at times become interchangeable" (Woods 2021: 66). Thus decolonisation is articulated within (and perhaps is simply a renaming of) the professional code of diversity and inclusion.

However, important work by teachers has argued for deepening conceptualisations of decolonisation within the profession. Specifically, decolonisation has been framed as reflecting on the silences within the archive and the marginalisations reinforced by the discipline, while working towards the recovery of marginalised voices through new methodologies (Lyndon-Cohen, 2021; Woods, 2021). These may include suggestions of global critiques of colonial dynamics – e.g. "what

impact this country has really had on the wider world" (Woods 2021: 65) – however these are not elaborated explicitly as global critiques of 'the overall dynamics of colonial power'. It is currently unclear to what extent decolonisation framings are in practice also combined with neutrality on (or avoidance of) empire's normative status. Aside from Benger's piece, the mainstream consensus of neutrality on empire is generally not explicitly critiqued in the history education community, even (paradoxically) within discussions of decolonisation.[65] A discourse of decolonisation therefore does not in itself entail a Bengerist stance on empire.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an exposition of 'the balance sheet' and how its manifestations in KS3 and more widely in English media and politicians' discourses constitute a discursive formation: with articulations joining together seemingly contradictory descriptions of empire; with legitimated speakers; and with mechanisms of enforcement. The bothsiderism of the discursive formation domesticates critiques of imperialism, making them safe to engage with, and allows the speaker to retain claims to neutrality/professionalism. However, unqualified critiques of imperialism's core dynamics appeared incompatible with the professional codes of teachers.

Into this space came the development of a balanced anti-balance sheet framing of empire which both critiqued the balance sheet and shared key aspects with it. This had a significant impact on professional conversations in English history education. As many of the 'old fashioned' or classic balance sheet materials listed in Appendix B were uploaded to the internet recently, it seems this

[65] This also attests to another professional code in the history education community: that of solidarity and a public emphasis on areas of consensus rather than on disputes.

new framing (of the balanced anti-balance sheet) has not entirely eclipsed the previous one. My analysis of the discursive formation brought professional codes of teaching to the fore. In news programs as with teaching history:

> "the particular choice of presentational occasions and formats, the selection of personnel, the choice of images, the staging of debates are selected and combined through the operation of the professional code. ... It may even be said that the professional codes serve to reproduce hegemonic definitions specifically by *not* overtly biasing their operations in a dominant direction: ideological reproduction therefore takes place here inadvertently, unconsciously, 'behind men's backs' [*sic*]'" (Hall 1999, 515-516)[my emphasis].

In other words, 'balance' as a key part of professionalism – whether incarnated as 'Was empire 'good' or 'bad'?' or as the balanced anti-balance sheet – paradoxically circumscribes the terms of discussion while lending that discussion the appearance of openness.

I described a third turn (illustrated by Benger) which was shaped by the grooves of what came before (appeals to disciplinarity), but which moreover showed a deeper engagement with the ethical dimensions of teaching. This type of engagement was itself preceded by the embedding of diversity and inclusion into ideas of professionalism and by the ambivalent rise of 'decolonising' frames. The following chapter locates the MEP module within the map of balance sheets and anti-balance sheets developed here.

Chapter Six: Change and Continuity at GCSE

Textbooks, Teaching and Innovation in Migration, Empires and the People

"In schools, textbooks were filled with stories of Britain's great empire-builders, such as Cecil Rhodes" – Migration, Empires and the People textbook (Bruce et al. 2016: 241).

The previous chapter used framings of empire in KS3 teaching materials and in professional discussions within history education to map a number of debates around 'the balance sheet' as

these debates came into sharper focus in the early 2020s. Here I use that map to situate different iterations of MEP as it is shaped by the exam board, by different textbooks and by different teachers. I first situate the module in its general context before examining the way each of these 'levels' (exam board, textbooks and schools/teachers) shaped the MEP module. This chapter further develops the context of students' discourses by illustrating the range of narratives of empire that are made available by the module for students to then decode.

Migration, Empire and the People: The Basics

Diversity and inclusion have, as I argued in the previous chapter, become part of the professional codes of history education and this is crucial to understanding the positioning of MEP. There are multiple dimensions to the concept of 'diverse histories' in the context of English history education, such as the "inclusion of women, disabled people, LGBTQ+ histories and working-class history – as well as wider world history or the inclusion of Black and Asian British history" as explained by Burn and Harris in the 2021 History Association (HA) survey (2021: 3). Of these, wider world history, Black British history and Asian British history have become especially important in recent professional conversations. For example, in the HA survey, the section on "Teaching diverse histories within Key Stage 3" highlighted the teaching of migration (commonly 20th century migration to Britain); the British Empire; the transatlantic slave trade; the history of a non-European nation; and Black British or Asian British history. MEP features all of the above. Considerations of diversity in curricula were given further weight through the 2020 summer of Black Lives Matter, but they pre-existed this period.[66] Mohamud and Whitburn's *Doing Justice to*

[66] Even if discourses of diversifying the curriculum pre-existed the summer of 2020, the HA survey evidence suggests that after 2020 there was an uptick of interest in changing to the MEP module (or equivalents from other exam boards) (Burn & Harris, 2021). However, the survey also suggests that during this period the initial emphasis was on

History: Transforming Black History in Secondary Schools came out in 2016, as did the two textbooks for MEP. The module was first taught in September 2016 and first examined in June 2018. The 2021 HA survey categorises MEP as one of four GCSE modules offered by AQA "that could be said to include 'diverse' content (in the sense of including some content related to the history of indigenous populations or of non-Western countries)" (Burn and Harris 2021: 33). This framing of the module contextualises why, in a focus group conducted by the exam board, many teachers who adopted this module cited they did so in order to further social justice (AQA 2021). The following looks at the two major themes of the module at a very broad level before discussing in more depth the module structure set out by the exam board.

As the title of the module suggests, it knits together the themes of migration and empire. This is, as described in previous chapters, a reflection of how migration and empire are 'twinned' in progressive discourse in England. As immigration is constructed by the right as an invasion of strangers from strange lands, suggesting that migration may be linked to a shared political body (empire) is to strike the foundations of that construction (Patel, 2021). MEP is in this sense structurally aligned to critiques of English xenophobia. Critiquing the erasure of imperialism by anti-immigration discourses' is not new. In a 1968 televised debate Hall raised this exact critique against his interlocuters (in Akomfrah 2013, 1:08:23–1:08:30). Later he reflected,

> "One of the striking things for me in the sixties was that the British looked in the faces of these black and brown people who they had been ruling for 400 years, as if to say, 'Well, I don't really know where you've come from or why you've come here or what we have to do with your future?' It's amnesia about the empire which settled because, of course the paradox that these people came at the very moment when Britain was thinking it was drawing down the flag and was rid of them" (in Akomfrah 2013, 1:08:30- 1:09:17).

implementing changes at KS3 with intentions to later switch GCSE modules after making these KS3 changes. Nonetheless, this makes MEP a particularly important case study to explore.

This critique has remained relevant into the 21st century, particularly in the context of Brexit. While the module could be positioned as a corrective to this form of erasure, it is important to note that the module does not limit 'migration' to discussion of migrations associated with the British Empire. Starting in the 700s, it also does substantial work in reframing 'white Britain', so to speak, as the product of immigration. Winder, author of *Bloody Foreigners: The Story of Immigration to Britain*, described this immigration rather irreverently:

> "Ever since the first Jute, the first Saxon, the first Roman and the first Dane leaped off their boats and planted their feet on British mud, we have been a mongrel nation. Our roots are neither clear nor straight; they are impossibly tangled" (2004: 2).

Making a similar point more subtly, the module takes as its starting point the Viking conquests of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Moreover, MEP attends to Others subjected to racist and xenophobic attitudes who migrated to England without direct connections to the British Empire, such as Russian Jewish communities. Lastly, as well as immigration the module speaks to emigration from Britain – which is absent from other GCSE modules on migration, such as Edexcel's Migrants in Britain – and the establishment of white settler communities as agents of colonisation.

The plurality of *empires* in the module's title also suggests an expansive approach to the theme of imperialism, extending beyond the British Empire. While the British Empire is the most extensively covered empire in the module, it also discusses the North Sea Empire (an 11th century polity of lands in what is now England, Denmark and Norway) and the Angevin Empire (those parts of France and the British Isles ruled by the Plantagenets in the 12th and 13th centuries). In the same way that the module expands the conceptualisation of 'migration' from merely a post-war phenomenon, the module creates opportunities for freeing the concept of 'empire' from only referring to European colonisation of other continents over the latter half of the millennium. Here,

however I am only discussing empire in terms of the British Empire which – aside from brief references to other empires – is the only empire featured in Parts 2, 3 and 4 of MEP.

Exam Boards, Modules and Specifications

The bones of a GCSE (or A-level) module are its 'specifications'. These are "a syllabus that sets out the key skills, understanding and knowledge that students are expected to have gained by the end of their course" (AQA, 2014). The exam board creates a proposed module's specifications which are then reviewed by the regulating body Ofqual who validates that the specifications meet the requirements as set out by the national curriculum. If Ofqual accredits the module, the exam boards can offer it to teachers and publishers can produce textbooks based on the module specifications. Crucially, specifications form the basis for student assessment when students are examined on the module at the end of the GCSE. In other words, in their GCSE exams students must demonstrate knowledge of the topics listed in the specifications. The process of developing new specifications is long and involved. Not only is there Ofqual to contend with, but new modules need to garner sufficient uptake to be commercially viable. The choice between GCSE history modules might be taken at the level of a multi-academy trust (i.e. the same GCSE modules taught across several related schools), by a school's history department (i.e. the same GCSE modules taught by all GCSE history teachers in one school) or in rarer cases at the level of individual teachers (i.e. teachers in the same school might teach different GCSE modules).

On their website, the AQA exam board explains the steps they take in developing specifications for new modules:

> "The first thing we do is spend a lot of time building our understanding of what teachers and schools want. We talk to other stakeholders in the education community too, for example representatives of Higher Education, employers, subject associations and learned societies. We also look at what is relevant in today's education landscape. There is always a

> wide range of views, and we do our best to take on board the most important areas for each subject" (AQA, 2014).

A further factor which could be added to this list concerns the advocates – within and beyond the aforementioned groups – who call for greater diversity in the modules offered by exam boards. They are referred to by Mohamud and Whitburn 'pugilists', those fighting for change in history education (2016). These calls have become more prominent and widespread since 2020 with exam boards being criticised for exclusions in their GCSE history offerings (Leach et al., 2020).

This multiplicity of different voices describing what might *theoretically* make successful new modules contends with the relative safety of tried-and-tested formulations. Innovative modules with specifications full of 'new' topics compete against modules which speak to teachers' existing subject knowledge and whose markets can be taken as a given. A module on Imperial China would be a riskier venture than one on the Cold War. As Julie Curtis, a teacher discussing risk aversion in module choice, explained, "As teachers, we can't just experiment with children ...We need to make sure that we're doing things where they still are going to get good A-level results" (in Hazell, 2020). These riskier ventures rely on teachers spending considerable time developing novel areas of subject knowledge when austerity has reduced the funding available for professional development. They can also be more challenging for students, requiring them to study regions and events which are little discussed in Global North media and which many students may be less familiar with. Where many students lack 'everyday knowledge' about a topic, teachers may be concerned that by 'starting from scratch' students will perform worse in assessment. Despite these challenges, modules are developed which focus on 'new' areas, such as OCR's module on African Kingdoms c.1400-c.1800. However, at the time of my fieldwork in 2020, only one school was teaching the module, five years after it had become available (Hazell, 2020). In his landmark paper, "The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity" (2003), Stephen Ball described the

rise of performance culture in education where the performance of teachers and students is frequently measured and evaluated, with intense pressure to meet certain targets. A history education system limited to a narrow range of traditional topics (Royal Historical Society, 2018) is perhaps the 'long tail' of performance culture.

However, revisions of the national curriculum force the hand of exam boards to change modules and specifications. When the national curriculum is altered in ways that make previous modules redundant, the exam boards need to produce new modules to suit these alterations. Gove's reforms increased the amount of British history required in the GCSE (from 25% of the curriculum to 40%) and increased the required chronological breadth in the GCSE (Burn, 2015: 53–54). MEP was designed to account for these new requirements and as a result the module is couched as 'British' history and spans a very wide temporal scope. While a slightly longer explanation is available on AQA's website (2022), below are the core specifications for MEP which indicate the list of topics covered by the module:

Part one: Conquered and conquerors
Invasion: Vikings and Anglo-Saxons; reasons for Viking invasions; creation of the Danelaw; Alfred and Wessex; King Cnut, Emma of Normandy and the North Sea Empire.
A Norman Kingdom and 'Angevin' Empire: relationship between England and France; Henry II; invasion of Ireland; losses under King John.
The birth of English identity: the Hundred Years' War and its impact for England's future development.

Part two: Looking west
Sugar and the Caribbean: piracy and plunder; the development of the slave trade, including John Hawkins; settlements in Barbados and West Indies; the economic and social impact of the slave trade on Britain.
Colonisation in North America: causes and consequences of British colonisation; Raleigh; Jamestown; contact and relations with indigenous peoples; commodities; Pilgrim Fathers; indentured servants; the War of Independence, loss of American colonies.
Migrants to and from Britain: Huguenot migration; Highland clearances; the Ulster plantations.

Part three: Expansion and empire

Expansion in India: causes and impact of British control; East India Company; Robert Clive; Warren Hastings; Indian Rebellion (1857); the social, political, cultural and economic impact of empire on Britain and India.
Expansion in Africa: causes and impact of British involvement; trade and missionary activity; South Africa; Egypt; the Scramble for Africa; Cecil Rhodes; the Boer War (1899–1902); imperial propaganda.
Migrants to, from and within Britain: Irish migration to Britain; Jewish migration to Britain; transportation; migration to and within the Empire, including migration of Asians to Africa; migration from rural to urban settings.

Part four: Britain in the 20th century
The end of Empire: the impact of the First and Second World Wars; the impact of Suez; nationalism and independence in India and Africa, including the role of Gandhi, Nkrumah and Kenyatta.
The legacy of Empire: 'Windrush' and the Caribbean migrants; the work of Claudia Jones in the UK; migration from Asia and Africa, including the role of Amin in Uganda; the Commonwealth; the Falklands War.
Britain's relationship with Europe and its impact: the impact of the Second World War; economic, social and cultural interaction; the end of the Cold War and membership of European Union; European and non-European migration.

A few further parts of the specifications are relevant to empire and are helpful to quote here before proceeding to an analysis of the specifications. "[The module] considers the causes, impact and legacy of Empire upon the ruled and the ruling in the context of Britain's acquisition and retreat from Empire." It also mandates "ideas such as imperialism, social Darwinism and civilisation" as factors which "influenced Britain's dealings with the wider world." Key questions in the module include: "Why did Britain gain and lose an empire and with what effects? ... What is the significance of key individuals and events in the development of empire and British identity?" Below I discuss some of the salient features of these specifications in more detail.

The specifications for Parts 1 to 4 intertwine more familiar and less familiar topics in the context of English history education. This pitches the module in a way that offers something new and distinct to cater to a constituency of teachers and students who want to engage with 'diverse' histories whilst offering assurance that the module is legible, speaking to existing frameworks of knowledge. The section on Viking and Norman invasions (overall, topics which are fairly familiar) reference

individuals about whom teachers may not have engaged with specifically elsewhere: King Cnut and Emma of Normandy. Similarly, piracy prefaces the canonical topic of the transatlantic slave trade. Classic empire topics, such as the Raj and the Scramble for Africa, share a section with Jewish migration to Britain and Asian migration to Africa. The World Wars provides the initial scaffolding of Part 4 before introducing two relatively new figures for English history curricula, Nkrumah and Kenyatta.

A further feature to note is the articulation of slavery with imperialism. While the transatlantic slave trade can appear in balance sheets at KS3 (although some balance sheet exercises are limited to the Raj), the transatlantic slave trade is often treated as its own topic at KS3. The vast majority of schools surveyed by the HA teach it as "a specific topic/enquiry ... [covering] 'the development of the "triangular trade"', 'the experiences of enslaved peoples', 'forms of resistance or rebellion by enslaved peoples' and 'other forms of opposition, including the campaign for abolition'" (Burn & Harris, 2021: 13). Whilst these KS3 lessons may consider the nexus between the slave trade and the British Empire, connecting the two is not guaranteed. Cultural representations from the dominant US film industry may encourage the construction of frameworks in which slavery is associated with the North American mainland in ways that occlude the role of British imperialism. The module's placement of the transatlantic slave trade within and alongside the British Empire creates opportunities for students to see these two phenomena as mutually constitutive (although this does not guarantee that students will decode them as such).

Another important feature of the section on the transatlantic slave trade is its inclusion of "the economic and social impact of the slave trade on Britain." The HA survey notes that "Consideration of the 'legacies of the trade in enslaved peoples' was only included in the curriculum of 13% of respondents' schools" (Burn and Harris, 2021: 2). While 'legacies' is not

necessarily synonymous with 'the economic and social impact', this inclusion of 'impact' in MEP could play a similar role to what is intended by Burn and Harris by 'legacies'. MEP's emphasis on the transatlantic slave trade's impact on Britain therefore seems uncommon or, at least, beyond what is usually included at KS3. As Eddo-Lodge's comment in the Literature Review highlighted, there is a need to encode British (rather than only American) entanglement with the transatlantic slave trade, not only as actors in the trade but as beneficiaries. 'The economic and social impact of the slave trade on Britain' also opens up questions about the role the trade played in wider transformations of the British economy and British society, such as the Industrial Revolution.

The language of 'economic and social impact' extends beyond the transatlantic slave trade. The MEP specifications also highlight "*causes and consequences of British colonisation [in North America] ...causes and impact of British control [in India] ... the social, political, cultural and economic impact of empire on Britain and India ... causes and impact of British involvement [in Africa].*" While both balance sheet approaches and the specifications of MEP essentially pose the question of "what was the impact of empire", in contra-distinction to balance sheet approaches, there is no overt 'good/bad' or 'positive/negative' framing in the specifications. *There is therefore no inherent need in this framework to dismember the effects of empire into buckets of 'good' and 'bad'.* Arguably the language provided ('social, political, cultural and economic impact') offers an alternative organisation to the balance sheet. While there is mention of 'progress' in the specifications ("Students will develop an understanding of ... whether change brought progress") this is not directly tied to empire nor is there guidance as to which changes do or do not constitute 'progress'. The reference to social Darwinism effectively mandates discussion of the role of racism in the British Empire, but 'civilisation' (named just after social Darwinism) is more ambiguous. 'Civilisation' can be framed in multiple ways, including through a critique of 'the civilising project'

of empire or through balance sheet dismemberings into 'good' and 'bad' effects of this civilising project. Despite these few nodes – like social Darwinism and civilisation – the specifications largely do not prescribe the contents of the mentioned 'impact of empire'. (The situation is slightly different for the 'legacy of empire'.)[67] Because the precise effects of empire are not prescribed in the specifications, this creates space for variability in how these effects are narrated by the other encoders I discuss in the remainder of this chapter: teachers and textbooks.

Before turning to textbooks, I want to draw attention to arrangements of agency and actors in the specifications. The specifications' wording raises questions about agency in that a focus on the impact of *British colonisation/British control/empire/British involvement* could imply a sole preoccupation with the agency of colonisers. However, in the North America section there's more opportunity for indigenous agency in the framing of "*contact and relations with indigenous peoples"*. However, this only creates the opportunity for narratives which highlight the agency of Native Americans, it does not prescribe this. The reference in the specifications to Britain's *retreat* from empire might suggest an over-emphasis on British agency from the centre in causing decolonisation.[68] However, direct references to 1857, to nationalism and to particular anti-colonial leaders encode the resistance and agency of colonised subjects in the specifications. Nevertheless, this agency is reactive (to imperialism) and crucially the specifications do not make reference to

[67] The *impact* of empire features in Part 2 and Part 3, but the wording shifts in Part 4 (which concerned with the 20th century) to 'the *legacy* of empire' explicitly conceived of in terms of Caribbean, Asian and African migration to Britain; the establishment of the Commonwealth; and the Falklands War. 'Impact' and 'legacy' are separated elsewhere in the specifications: the module "considers the causes, *impact* and *legacy* of Empire upon the ruled and the ruling in the context of Britain's acquisition and retreat from Empire" [my emphasis] (AQA, 2022). While the legacy of empire being pitched as immigration to Britain speaks to the intervention mentioned earlier (undermining the 'strangers' construction of Commonwealth migration), importantly other contentious aspects of empire's legacy (e.g. global inequality, the *persistence* of racial stratification) are not explicitly mentioned.

[68] In John Darwin's assessment, accounts of decolonisation which centre a "shift in political thinking at home" are insufficient (1999: 546). Instead, he argues that: "the historian must unpick the threads of a bilateral colonial or semi-colonial relationship in the larger fabric of regional or global diplomacy, and weigh the strength of local nationalism against the pressures of international competition or alliance politics in an era of emergent superpowers" (1999: 553).

these spaces or societies prior to their contact with/colonisation by the British. For example, while "*contact and relations with indigenous peoples*" could include agentive narratives of Native Americans, Native Americans only become relevant at the point of contact and relation with the British. This can be seen as a consequence of the module's necessary positioning as '*British* history' in order to fulfil the requirements of the national curriculum. Moreover, only white male imperial figures are named as individuals in Part 2 and Part 3: Walter Raleigh, Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, and Cecil Rhodes. In the sub-sections devoted to imperialism, the narrative largely follows the movement of British actors through geographic and temporal spaces. However, this is not true of the module as a whole; the focus on migration entailed that at other times the narrative follows the movement of people to Britain who were not (yet) British. Nonetheless, the overriding sense is that the narrative structure is defined by a British imperial timeline in which indigenous peoples make appearances but do not set agendas. Howe expressed the hope that "British history – or that of other former colonial powers – could form the centre of a worldwide web of interconnecting stories; but in tracing those connections, the centre itself would be decentred" (2010: 2). Despite the specifications going some way towards enabling this 'worldwide web of interconnecting stories', the specifications' construction of this wider British history has not 'decentred' imperialists.

Contrastive Textbooks

Two textbooks are available for the module, one from Hodder (Mohamud & Whitburn, 2016a) and one from Oxford University Press (Bruce et al., 2016). Both were used in different classes in my ethnographic fieldwork (see Table 7). Students occasionally used textbooks in class, but more often these were used for homework or revision. Sometimes students were given class handouts which were copies of pages/sections from the textbooks. Textbooks also have an indirect effect on

teaching as they can provide the basis for teachers' conceptualisation of the module, especially in the early stages of switching to a new module.

The two textbooks have different reputations and some differences in content. In terms of the former, the ethic of diversity and inclusion in Mohamud and Whitburn's well-known wider body of work in the history education community lent weight to the Hodder version which they authored. The Hodder textbook was seen by teachers in my fieldwork as having done more to capitalise on the opportunities in the specifications to teach diverse histories. This is what attracted All Saints' history department to the Hodder module. However, OUP were quicker to release its textbook (June 2016) than Hodder (November 2016). Walton Academy used OUP's version because the Hodder textbook was only released after the September start of the 2016 school year (the year the module was first taught), although the Walton HoD commented that Hodder's version would have been preferable because the narrative in the OUP book was from a 'British perspective'. As the most well-resourced school of the three, Ferryhall could afford to use both Hodder and OUP textbooks.

Table 7: Distribution of Textbooks at Ethnographic Schools

School	MEP Textbook
All Saints	Hodder
Walton Academy	OUP
Ferryhall	Hodder and OUP

Differences in the two textbooks' narratives need to be contextualised by their differences in length. Hodder's textbook has more content than OUP's version which facilitates the inclusion of more detail, fuller explanations and a broader representation of individuals. There are, however,

also instances where the OUP version contains material that is not present in the Hodder version. Moreover, the structure of the module presents challenges. Spanning great chronological and geographical breadth presents a dilemma: are the narratives best kept short to try to prevent the content from becoming overwhelming (especially given high-stakes examinations) or best made lengthier to provide more context to unfamiliar times and places? As the two texts display different strategies in this regard, comparing them has an element of 'apples-and-oranges'. However, the tightness of the OUP text does illuminate what is regarded as 'essential' and how these selections partly stem from the specifications, partly from traditions and partly from innovations as I describe below. The Hodder textbook by contrast best illuminates how the specifications and Gove's reforms create important discursive constraints that are not overcome even by having additional wordcount in which to innovate. Firstly, I focus on a core aspect common to both textbooks before discussing some important differences between the books. In this analysis I exclude Part 1 and those parts of the text which speak only to migration without empire.

The textbooks flesh out the specifications and in so doing they make the implications of those specifications clearer. The textbooks demonstrate the implications of (necessarily) positioning MEP as a 'British' history module with the specifications moreover positioning 'Britain' as the protagonist ("Why did *Britain* gain and lose an empire?"). These structural factors shape the textbooks' narratives around British imperial actors, their goals and their challenges. The narrative is set within British/settler logics in that events are made sense of through these logics. For example, these narratives seek to explain how the troubles of settlers in North America were ameliorated by importing indentured labourers; how Britain's growing empire required soldiers and this need was met by Indian men; how Protestant Britain's insecurities contextualise the suppression of Catholic Ireland. Occasionally, these logics are framed as subjective, that supporters

of empire 'felt' a certain way about an event rather than this being projected as a neutral comment on an event.[69] (However, framing responses as subjective was more commonly the case for the perspectives of colonised subjects: that Native Americans 'saw' colonisation as an invasion of their land, or that sepoys 'felt' badly treated and 'felt' they were fighting for freedom.)[70] Although the text intermittently flags shifts in and out of the perspective of the coloniser/colonised with words such as 'felt', this does not ultimately destabilise the broader framing of the text around British motives and British projects. The sources in the text – i.e. quotes used for illustration as well as for activities (e.g. "to what extent does the source show X") – are often drawn from British imperial figures. It is possible this is partly due to wider asymmetries in the historical archive, but more imminently these sources function to illustrate the core of the narrative, which is British imperial logic. This is similar to the 'official mind' of the Cambridge School of imperial history. By using the term 'imperial logic' I mean to include here not only the motives of policy makers and civil servants but also the unofficial and disorganised projects of early settlers. However, similarly to the critiques of the Cambridge School's overemphasis on the official mind (discussed in Chapter 2) here I am drawing attention to the limitations of an emphasis on imperial logics.

The language of imperial logics is naturalised through the positioning of 'Britain' as the protagonist of the narrative. As described above, there are intermittent references to imperial subjectivity (that imperialists 'saw' things in a certain light, 'felt' a certain way about events) and there are some further attempts to denaturalise these logics (OUP puts 'discovered' in scare quotes while Hodder

[69] For example: "The British settlers ... saw it as a land of opportunity" (Bruce et al. 2016, 209). "British manufacturers believed that..." (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016b, 68).

[70] For example: "The British arrival in North America could be interpreted in different ways. For example, Native American tribes would have seen the British as 'invaders', who took territory by force and wiped out several tribes by passing on diseases that their immune systems could not deal with," (Bruce et al. 2016, 208).
"The Sepoys were very unhappy. They felt that they weren't treated very well" (Bruce et al. 2016, 208).
"The labourers of Stony Gut in the Jamaican parish of St Thomas were agitated in October 1865 because of what they saw as unjust treatment of a man from their area" (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016b, 46).

does the same for 'new land'). However, in many other places, the language of the text takes an imperial perspective without drawing attention to this perspective-taking. 'Successes' are successes for the British (Empire),[71] Australia and Canada are 'loyal' because they are colonies loyal to the British (Empire), 'contributions' are contributions to the British (Empire),[72] men are 'great' because they are great empire-builders.[73] This demonstrates the difficulties in trying to narrate empire-building without seemingly validating it as a project. As Hall explains:

> "Every discourse constructs positions from which alone it makes sense. Anyone deploying a discourse must position themselves as if they were the subject of the discourse. For example, we may not ourselves believe in the natural superiority of the West. But if we use the discourse of 'the West and the Rest' we will necessarily find ourselves speaking from a position that holds that the West is a superior civilization" (Hall 1992: 202).

These texts therefore face a number of structural problems: how 'the Rest' is inserted in a discourse of empire-building; the limitations of space; the particular (British) foci of the specifications; and the question of how to resist reducing 'the Rest' to passive puzzle pieces in Britain's imperial picture.

In the texts, 'the Rest' is chiefly seen through the lens of which of their resources are of interest to Britain, their strategic importance to Britain and the challenges they pose to Britain. There are other types of descriptions of these places – for instance, descriptions of the political structures of the Powhatan Confederacy and descriptions of the cosmopolitan history of South Asia preceding the decline of the Mughals – which show an effort to break out of the exclusive focus on British imperial logics. However, these are addenda – interruptions to the core narratives – because they are not in the specifications and they are less likely to be in the specifications as they are not

[71] E.g. "Describe the successes of the Pilgrim fathers" (Bruce et al. 2016, 209).
[72] E.g. Lord Delamere's "contribution" to the British Empire (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016a, 73).
[73] E.g. Rhodes is described as "one of Britain's greatest empire-builders" (Bruce et al. 2016, 232).
Clive of India is also positioned as "a *great* leader [who] enabled the company to *progress* further across India [and who would] *contribute* to the growth of British control in India" [my emphasis] (Bruce et al. 2016, 220).

'British history'. Structurally therefore the textbooks cannot stray too far into pre-or-post-colonial Native American, African, Asian and Oceanian histories which feature only briefly in the text. The tight focus on the *imperial* narrative allows the contents in Parts 2 and 3 to still be legible as 'British history' (i.e. this tightness prevents the descriptions of events outside of Britain in Parts 2 and 3 from being open to the charge of not 'truly' being 'British history'). These moments of 'other descriptions' – moments outside the unfolding of British (imperial) history – can only appear on the periphery of the narrative. In this way, the concerted effort of MEP to move beyond the insularity of 'Our Island Story' largely becomes trapped within a new insularity of 'Our Empire Story'.

Turning to the differences between the texts, one mechanism that is distinctive in the Hodder book which allows the text to more frequently break out of a unitary focus on imperial logic is the introduction of life stories (under 'Contacts') of colonised or otherwise marginalised subjects (e.g. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Bryant among others). However, many of the Contacts added in the Hodder textbook (in addition to those listed in the specifications) are also imperial figures, e.g. Smith, Macartney, Trevelyan, Johnston, Delamere, Barnato. The OUP book contains only the life stories (under 'Key Biographies') of those in the specifications (such as Hawkins, Raleigh, Clive, Hastings, and Rhodes – as well as Gandhi, Kenyatta and Nkrumah), only adding Disraeli beyond the empire specifications. Therefore, while the OUP book speaks about the age of imperial propaganda as one in which "textbooks were filled with stories of Britain's great empire-builders, such as Cecil Rhodes" (Bruce et al. 2016: 241) a similar cast of names appears in these more recent textbooks, albeit with a few significant additions, particularly in the Hodder book.

In a similar vein, both Hodder's additional space and the particular expertise of the authors also enables greater representation of the agency of marginalised actors. Discussions of black resistance to enslavement and black abolitionists speak to the authors' expertise in black history but beyond this too they include for example women activists, Powhatan political ambition, Indian cultural influence on East India Company [EIC] officials. Built into the specifications is a recognition of agency through including 1857 and later nationalist movements and figures. The Hodder book also references the racialisation and racial hierarchies of colonisation more frequently as well as giving greater recognition to the bidirectionality of cultural influences between colonised and coloniser.

'Trade' plays a large role in both texts because the specifications describe 'economic resources' as a key factor in the module. The specifications include: the economic impact of the slave trade; the economic impact of the British Empire in India; the role of commodities in the colonisation of North America; and the role of trade in imperial expansion in Africa. In Chapter 8, I describe the role of 'trade' in students' discourses, but here I want to highlight that trade is presented in various ways in the textbooks. At times, especially in early encounters, it is represented as mutually beneficial e.g. "The Powhatans ... tolerated the settlement because they benefitted from trade with them" (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016a: 30). Trade is also often represented neutrally, e.g. "the colonies successfully traded products such as bread, clothing, books and guns with each other" (Bruce et al. 2016: 210). The brevity of descriptions of trade can obscure particular aspects of these economic relationships. For example, the OUP book mentions the trade in opium with China but not British coercion in this trade. At times the dynamic of selling *manufactured* goods to colonial subjects while extracting *raw materials* is problematised (Bruce et al. 2016: 229) and at other times it is not (Bruce et al. 2016: 226, 230). Similarly, working conditions and racialisation

entered only inconsistently into descriptions of the economic relations of colonialism. At points in the narrative (see table below) these relations are rendered unproblematically as 'providing jobs' to colonised subjects. Broadly speaking, the Hodder book demonstrates the asymmetry of colonial 'trade' more often than the OUP book. For example, the Hodder book poses the question in an activity: "How could the British ideas of imperialism and business continue to bring misery to the lives of African people, even if they were not being enslaved?" (68). The Hodder book also notes that "The balance of trading between [India and Britain] was heavily in Britain's favour" (61). However, in both books, as the module's narrative moves from newly independent colonies in Part 4 to Britain's economic relationship with Europe, the long-term economic consequences of colonial 'trade' (such as gearing economies away from manufacturing and towards extraction in many former colonies, encouraging reliance on monoculture cash crops, etc) do not find a place in the textbooks. This is not surprising given that these are not part of how the module conceptualises the legacies of empire (see footnote 67).

Both textbooks contain descriptions of colonial violence, in particular: violence against enslaved Africans; reprisals after 1857 and reprisals in response to Mau Mau campaigns; and the slow violence of the South African War/Boer War concentration camps. The Hodder book goes beyond the specifications in that it also includes the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and violence against participants in the Quit India Movement. Moreover, the Hodder book also demonstrates how imperialism is implicated in the disasters of The Great Famine in Ireland and the partition of India and Pakistan while OUP's book does not.[74]

[74] While here I have drawn attention to the ways in which the Hodder book contains more critical elements than the OUP book, there are also cases where the OUP book contains critical elements absent in the Hodder book. In the section on the colonisation of North America, OUP's narrative of the effects of colonisation on Native American communities extends into the present (highlighting that these communities now only constitute a tiny percentage of the total population of North America). By contrast, the Hodder textbook's narrative ends in the seventeenth century with

While the textbooks represent 'impact' in different ways, they are both influenced by traditional representations of imperial impact. This is most clear with the OUP's adoption of balance sheet framings:

> "Identify the advantages and disadvantages about [*sic*] colonisation of North America to: the British; the Native American tribes" (Bruce et al. 2016: 209).
> "Assess ways in which the British takeover of India could be viewed both positively and negatively" (Bruce et al. 2016: 226).
> "Make two lists: one of the positive things that British rule brought to India, and one of the negative things about British rule" (Bruce et al. 2016: 227).
> "Create a poster called 'The British in India'. Using no more than ten words show both the positives and the negatives of British rule there" (Bruce et al. 2016: 229).[75]

In a similar way to how students would work through the above activities, in Table 8 I have summarised which imperial phenomena are given positive valence in the OUP book and which are given negative valence.[76]

Table 8: The Balance Sheet in the OUP Textbook

Topic & Page Numbers	'Advantages'	'Disadvantages'
Native Americans (208-209)	- "Good relations initially existed with native tribes such as the Powhatan, and there were some intermarriages"	- Not treated with respect - Massacres, destruction of crops and villages - Spread of diseases - British expansion into Native American territory - Forced migration inland - Destruction of ways of life - Native Americans now form only a small minority in contemporary USA

conflict between the English and Powhatans. However, most often the space afforded to the Hodder book gives it more room for critique, e.g. the Hodder book mentions neo-colonialism while this is absent from the OUP book.

[75] That an activity encourages students to boil these '(dis)advantages' down to single words implies that words such as 'health', 'jobs', 'education', 'law' or 'railways' can immediately be understood as 'advantages' (and words such as 'famine' and 'exploitation' can immediately be understood as 'disadvantages'). I will return to this process of abbreviation in Chapter 9.

[76] Direct quotations are used in parts of the table to help illustrate the valence or framing.

India (226-229)[77]	- "Created jobs for both Indians and the British in shipping, transportation and sales" - "British businessmen owned the factories and mills, but provided work for local Indians" - "Introduced an irrigation programme in the countryside" - "Developed coal mining, something that had not existed [in India] before" - "Introduced a vaccine and treatment programme to fight killer diseases" - "Improved sewage systems and water supplies" - Built "railways, but also canals, roads, factories, mines and farms" and dams and hospitals - "The British created a legal system based on the one in Britain. They felt that their legal system was the most advanced in the world and should be used as a model for other nations where possible. High courts were set up in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay and parts of Indian law were built into the new legal code. Hindu and Muslim judges made sure that the British did not forget about Indian traditions and customs when dealing with legal matters" - "Thousands of schools and colleges were opened, English language learning spread, and western education meant that Indians adopted more modern, democratic, liberal views"	- Food crops were replaced with cash crops and therefore "many blamed the British for helping to cause the famines" - "Some argue that [building infrastructure] was done simply to exploit the country and make huge profits, which were taken back to Britain"[78] - "British customs were forced onto people, and local traditions, cultures and religions tended to be ignored." - "Indian workers were often exploited" - "The country's raw materials were taken back to Britain" - "Native lands were seized" - "If there was ever any resistance, the British army usually came down very hard on the rebels" - [In a source from Nehru] "Their parliament makes laws for us and they appoint a viceroy to rule over us. The British are arrogant, despising our brown skins. Worst of all, the British have kept us poor. Our people toil for slave wages in British-owned cotton mills and on British tea plantations" - [In a source from Gandhi] "The most important jobs are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently towards us and disregard our feelings"

[77] One element I've left out of the 'Advantages' column because it precedes these pages is from the earlier discussion of Hastings, that Hastings "wiped out thieving gangs who were running wild in the countryside" (221).

[78] In another example of twinning opposing views which are explicitly labelled as subjective, this is followed by: "Others say that the investment created a legacy that still survives today" (227).

	- "New knowledge in science, humanities and literature were opened up to Indians too, as well as the opportunity to study in Britain" - "Helped settle ancient feuds between rival areas and regions" - "The British invested a lot of money into India"	

The OUP textbook therefore utilises the traditional, explicit balance sheet format in its interpretation of 'impact' even though the framing of 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' is not present in the specifications. This iteration of the balance sheet displays some innovation and sophistication in comparison to the examples from KS3 discussed in the last chapter. For example, whilst building infrastructures (especially railways) or 'providing jobs' were positioned as unambiguous 'benefits' in KS3 materials, at times this GCSE version opened up different interpretations of these phenomena. In other words, instead of 'both sides' being constituted by a formulation like 'violence was bad, but railways were good', here 'both sides' could be represented internally to these elements: e.g. 'some say railways were good but others say railways were bad'. However, other 'imperial benefits' such as Western-style education and English language learning are still positioned as straightforward 'advantages' in the same way as the KS3 materials.

The OUP balance sheet activities and Table 8 mirrors the geographic dynamic mentioned in the previous chapter where India is the epicentre for questions of imperial impact (this is also evident in the specifications). The section on the impact on Native Americans is far shorter than that on India and Africa is interestingly not given the same explicit balance sheet treatment despite the specifications stipulating '*impact of British involvement [in Africa]*'. While 'jobs' are glossed as 'advantages' in the section on India, labour is positioned as more coercive in the African context:

"Some [Africans] were forced to work as cheap labour in mines or on huge British-owned farms growing tea, coffee, cotton or cocoa for export back to Britain" (230). The section on Native Americans might be a case of an imbalanced balance sheet given not only the shorter length of the 'advantages' mentioned but also the disaggregation of '(dis)advantages' to settlers and to Native Americans respectively in the activity which could make this discrepancy in '(dis)advantages' more visible. However, in the India section, more space is afforded to 'advantages'.

The OUP narrative also differs from a Bengerist principled stance against imperialism because the illegitimacy of empire is represented as 'one side' of a bothsiderism: "Some argue that any foreign interference in another country is a bad thing, while others would say that it is a good thing if a nation's rule of another country brings improvements" (229). While in one place, this discourse of imperial benefits adds the phrase "whether the Indians wanted these things or not" (228) this does not delegitimate the imperial project. The text holds space for the validity of an ends-justifies-the-means approach regardless of popular consent.

A major innovation in the Hodder textbook is that there is no explicit balance sheet. There is the affirmation of 'balance' as a value in other parts of the book, e.g. "Write a *balanced* answer to the question: How far had the English switched from being plunderers to planters in the New World by 1700?" [emphasis in original] (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016a, 34). But 'balance' is not expressed in balance sheet forms like OUP's activities of explicitly separating 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' of empire. There is no equivalent section on the impact of colonisation on Native Americans in the Hodder book.[79] The '*impact of empire on Britain and India*' is also addressed in

[79] Rather than emphasising the specification '*consequences of British colonisation'* for Native Americans, the Hodder book focuses more tightly on *"contact and relations with indigenous peoples"* by describing fluctuations in the relationship between Powhatans and the Virginia colony between 1607 and 1615.

a different format. It is partly addressed by an activity asking students to fill out a table "on the effects the nabobs had on India and Britain" (63). In Table 9 I have filled out the India section using information from the Hodder book in pages 61-63.[80]

Table 9: The Nabobs'/East India Company's Impact on India in the Hodder Textbook

	Impact on India
Economic prosperity	- "The balance of trading between [India and Britain] was heavily in Britain's favour" - Access to "products of the Industrial Revolution"
Political power	- Conflict with the East India Company - Gave the right to collect taxes in Bengal to the East India Company - Loss of political power to the East India Company - Subjected to harsh treatment by the East India Company
Cultural development	- "Cultural ties"/ "cultural mixing" - "Hastings saw the value in a lot of Indian culture, and he built a Muslim school called Madrasa 'Aliya in Calcutta, as well as encouraging studies of Indian languages and literature"

As an autoethnographic aside, I noticed how – when filling out Table 9 – I mentally labelled each bullet point as either an 'advantage' or a 'disadvantage'. As I had done this directly after making Table 8's list of positives and negatives, those in the discipline of psychology might describe this

[80] Which content belongs in which category is slightly less obvious in the Hodder activity (economic, political, cultural) than in the OUP example ('positive/negative').

experience as the result of a 'priming effect'. I mention it here to illustrate something of the resilience of balance sheet habits even when the explicit framework is different.

Subsequent to the 'effects of the nabobs' activity in Table 9, there is also further discussion on the impact of empire in the Hodder textbook.[81] The theme of education is presented with ambivalence, on the one hand resisting 'imperial benefits' discourse by discussing its Macaulayist dimensions: "Macaulay believed that Western education in India would create a race of 'brown Englishmen'. The term 'Macaulyist is still used today in India to insult people who value Western values over Indian traditions" (64). However, on the other hand, this discourse of 'benefits' is affirmed elsewhere by asserting that after 1857: "some of the key aspects that gave educated Indians new opportunities under British rule [included the fact that] quality colleges were established in India" (66). The suggestion that quality education only arrived with British education is similar to the education theme in the OUP text (see Table 8). British rule is also positioned as modernising gender relations, "British laws that allowed for the remarriage of Hindu widows angered many Hindus. The British also banned the ancient Hindu practice of suttee, which was when a widow threw herself on top of her dead husband's funeral pyre during the cremation ceremony" (65). In the same section are discussions of the doctrine of lapse and missionary activity[82] as early 19th century impacts (prior to 1857). Post-1857 reforms are focused on narrating

[81] Prior to the nabob activity is a sentence which is difficult to interpret. It is unclear whether a sentence in the discussion of the outcomes of the Hastings trial – "The Governor-Generals would now be men chosen in London, sent out to give the Indians *the benefit of British liberties and justice*, as well as to make Britain powerful and wealthy" [my emphasis] – is meant as a subjective statement, reflecting the rhetoric of the British establishment of the time, or meant to reflect a 'real' benefit.

[82] Missionaries are represented with more ambivalence in the Hodder book than in the KS3 materials listed in Appendix B which tends to represent missionaries in an unqualified positive light. In the Hodder book, missionaries were subject to distrust and were presented with an edge of cultural repression in the India section, but were more warmly represented in the section on Mary Slessor and in the comment that "many missionaries sincerely wanted to improve the lives of African people as well as changing their religion" (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016a: 69).

the rise of an anglicised, Western-educated professional Indian class (as this will become important later in the narrative on nationalism).[83] In addition to 'quality colleges', other aspects of these post-1857 reforms could be decoded as 'imperial benefits', e.g. encouragement to study in Britain. However, none of these are overlayed with an explicit 'benefits' or '(dis)advantages' framing. The trope of the railways also does not feature in the way configured in balance sheet framings. As well as making colonial labour on the railways visible with the example of the Uganda Railway, colonial infrastructure projects are presented as instrumentalist: "better transport and communications were essential for profitable trade and farming in the new territories" (73). The Hodder textbook therefore has a very different way of presenting 'impact' to the OUP book, resisting balance sheet framings although at times reflecting 'imperial benefits' discourses without explicitly giving these phenomena a normative label such as – for example –'advantages'. In terms of decoding, the text *could* be used to configure 'advantages' and 'disadvantages' but this is not explicitly encouraged by the text.

The balance sheet may also shape the textbooks in a more subtle sense in terms of what type of violence is and is not represented. While violent repression of uprisings is represented (see above) there is a lacuna in terms of representing the everyday structural violence of colonialism. What it might mean to have lands seized as a subsistence farmer and be forced into waged labour, to work

[83] Both texts put this somewhat clumsily at times. "The British-style education systems in some of the colonies (such as India) meant that many people there were now becoming teachers, lawyers and doctors. They learned about political ideas, like democracy and freedom, and wanted this for their own countries" (Bruce et al. 2016, 250).
"Eventually many Indians were trained as lawyers in Britain and in India. This created a group of Indians that understood the law and knew how to make convincing arguments" (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016a, 66).
In both cases the phrasing might be an outcome of the simplifications within the genre of school textbook writing, however with these simplifications the statements could be decoded as saying that 'political acumen and charisma can only be accessed through Western-style education'.

in a mine on the Rand or a mill in Bengal is absent.[84] The texture of the lives of 'ordinary' people in these 'jobs', mission schools, cities, farms, and courts struggles to come through. While the discourse of 'imperial benefits' emphasises development, what it means to 'be developed' – to be subjected to imperial development – is missing. Violent repression of uprisings appears as a 'con' in classic balance sheets, but because 'development' traditionally falls in the 'pros' column, the everyday violence of imperial 'development' is not legible and so it is absent from these accounts. The relationship between empire and sexual violence, gender-based violence and homophobic violence is also largely absent. Gender appears mostly where it would appear in a classic balance sheet narrative: with reference to suttee. Theoreticality these other experiences of violence could be accommodated in the specifications, e.g. *the social, political, cultural and economic impact of empire on Britain and India ... impact of British involvement [in Africa]*. However, tradition, or as Hall puts it 'the grooves' of prior articulations, hampers the recognition of such experiences as relevant to questions of 'impact' of empire. Here the force of the balance sheet as a discursive formation becomes clearer; it does not *have* to be present to exert influence.

In sum, both textbooks offer enough 'raw material' for a balance sheet decoding although they diverge dramatically in as far as the Hodder textbook does not use a balance sheet framing explicitly while the OUP textbook does. Despite the specifications making some room for innovation (by not mandating a balance sheet framing), the OUP textbook reverts to tradition. This follows a number of other metrics in which the Hodder textbook pushes the envelope further in terms of diversity and inclusion than the OUP book, albeit the Hodder book achieves this partly

[84] The two spaces in which these dynamics of everyday colonial violence do become relevant are in the sources from Nehru and Gandhi in the OUP book, see Table 8, and in the Hodder book's discussion of Indian labourers' fatalities working on the 'lunatic line' in East Africa. Given the extensive ground the textbooks needed to cover, these references may have been all that was possible within the module's constraints.

through developing a longer text with more content overall. Both textbooks are somewhat hamstrung by the specifications which are in turn hamstrung by the criterion of 'British' history. Ultimately this problem of 'Our Empire Story' is the price meted out for the subversive use of Gove's directive for more 'British' history where the exam board used this as an opportunity to develop a new 'British' history module marrying migration and empire.

Teaching the Module

In the same way that the specifications ensured that there would be certain commonalities across both textbooks, they also ensured commonalities across the ethnographic sites in terms of what topics were covered in class. Classes using the same textbook also had a further commonality; through the textbook, students in different schools could access the same encoded message. However, the very different contexts of these sites and the different norms at each school meant that classroom lessons were differently encoded at each site. This section discusses how teachers at each school curated, altered and elaborated the specifications in different ways in their respective classrooms.

The ethnographic sites had prominent socioeconomic differences as well as different discursive environments. At Ferryhall, it was not unusual for some students to use laptops in class, while in All Saints teachers would complain about the age of the projectors. The corners of the whiteboard in All Saints were often annotated in dry-erase pen by students over break time with phrases like 'Eat the Rich' or 'Black Power'. The large pinboard at the back of Ferryhall was decorated with student projects and enquiry questions including "Was the British Empire a Good Thing?" Ferryhall had the reputation of being 'the good school' among the nearby villages, pushing up real estate prices, while Erin worried that the gentrification of the urban space around All Saints was

displacing the immigrant communities who had traditionally prioritised faith schools like All Saints. Walton sits awkwardly in-between, being – as Mark called it – 'a true comprehensive' and sitting precisely in the middle of the school rankings of its locality. The green surroundings of Walton, close to quaint tourist attractions, put it at a remove from the homes of most students in Mark's class who lived in a bustling, hyper-diverse city and took the bus morning and afternoon from one of these worlds to another. At this crossroads it is perhaps not surprising that Walton students had the most mixed politics of the three schools (see Chapter 7). Yet despite Mark's open attitude towards students' views – being relaxed about students' contrarian opinions – the Walton students' culture of conviviality meant that their divergences did not tend to surface in the classroom in my observations.

A key similarity across these different spaces should be emphasised at the outset: that all these teachers expressed concerns to 'do justice' to this history, to borrow the phrase used in the title of Mohamud and Whitburn's book (2016b). By this I mean that these teachers had wanted to present marginalised historical actors with dignity, to point out domination and to make connections between past and present injustices. The three HoDs – Claire, Angela and Mark – had intentionally chosen MEP for their GCSE curriculum despite its novelty and the challenges in teaching it because they felt that the module's themes were particularly important for students to engage with. As Angela said to her class: "This is the best course you will ever do in school." Even Laura who was the least enthused about the module out of the five teachers (juggling senior leadership and a swathe of still somewhat unfamiliar MEP content) would take care to use appropriate terminology, would chide students for making flippant remarks (e.g. potato famine jokes), and comment on the relevance of the content of the module for the present. Below I want to expand further on how teachers tried to 'do justice' to this history through critical narratives.

Teachers made use of the opportunities for critique offered by the module. In the Looking West section, the Ferryhall teachers emphasised Britain's ill-gotten gains from the slave trade (rather than an abolition-centric narrative).

- Claire: "That's how Britain becomes rich: through America and slavery."
- Laura: "From an economic point of view, slavery made Britain rich basically, large profits were made by investors. Even kings were involved in this – he was a partner of the royal African company. But it wasn't just the investors and anybody who was directly involved. There were also people profiting indirectly, people who worked in the docks, the mills, people selling sugar and tobacco. Approximately 60 million pounds were made in the last 50 years of the 18th century."

Teaching the Expansion and Empire section, Mark asked students to discuss the causes of the Indian Rebellion[85] of 1857 and his students brought up EIC taxation, interference with local customs, and the Enfield rifle cartridges. Mark then added (with the caveat that this is what he personally thinks is an important factor): "I think we can see the British developing this idea of being a separate and superior race of people and this also is an underlying cause of the rebellion." Teachers at All Saints emphasised the importance of the three ideological concepts in the Expansion and Empire section.

- Erin: "social Darwinism, white mans' burden, imperialism – These words are gifts. Once you understand them you won't be able to unsee them in society."
- Teaching the same concepts, Angela explained that: "White men believed they were superior and so they had a burden to help others become what? 'Civilised.' The assumption is that non-white non-Christians were inferior to whites."

[85] The terminology used here is a useful means of drawing comparisons between the school's discursive environments. Mark's classroom handout simply said 'Causes of *the Rebellion* of 1857' [my emphasis]. Erin shared with her class her frustration that this terminology is not yet the clear norm: "More people don't call it a 'rebellion' but a 'mutiny' but I'm intentionally calling it a rebellion against British rule. I can't tell you how often all them from other schools all said in the exams 'mutiny'." One of her students elaborated why this was significant, "mutiny is seen as a negative thing, like a crime. It's wrong. But if it's a rebellion, it shifts the blame to the oppressors. If it's a rebellion there's a reason; if it's a mutiny is just against an authority." Laura however mentions different terms without choosing one in particular for the class: "sometimes it's called the Indian Mutiny, the Indian Rebellion, the Great Mutiny – depends what side you're on what you call it" and continues to switch between terms, potentially looking for a neutral way to present the topic, e.g. "I'm going to show you a little video first about what this mutiny, this event, was all about."

Far from the picture sometimes constructed in left-leaning media of classrooms silent about the ills of the colonial past, these teachers did not shy away from discussing the links between imperialism, racism, violence and accumulation.

However, as the specifications emphasised the perspectives of imperialists – 'imperial logics' – this was also a large emphasis in the classroom. In the section on piracy and the Americas, All Saints' teachers emphasised British motivations of wealth accumulation. Walton students discussed the effects of US independence on the British. In Ferryhall students were asked to "write 1-2 sentences saying how India being in the empire supported British military strength." Similarly to the textbooks, teachers spoke about the 'success' of settlers, the 'achievements' of EIC officials and the 'loyalty' of allies to Britain. Thus, the focus on imperial logics that is baked into the specifications is also seen in classroom discourses. While imperial logics can be revealing, this focus left less room for exploring the perspectives of colonised peoples. As mentioned above, the narrative of imperial logics casts colonisers as the structural protagonists. There is good reason for teachers to align their teaching with the specifications and textbooks: the more closely aligned these are, the more complete and efficient their content coverage can be and this in turn facilitates students' efficient revision for assessment. (Here, I emphasise efficiency as there is only a finite amount of teaching time in which to cover multiple modules.) However, teachers were not held entirely captive by the specifications or textbooks.

This scope to deviate was most pronounced in Walton where Mark had created a number of lesson plans and materials which not only contained further detail but flouted the emphasis on British perspectives. He developed a lesson and worksheet which asked students to consider the perspectives of Akan peoples at different points in the development of the transatlantic slave trade.

He also created handouts of a reading from Saidiya Hartman describing conditions at Cape Coast Castle. While discussing imperial logics in Looking West, he said to his class that:

> "Of course, just as a reminder, in this part we're studying now we're only telling half the story, of the English and why they left. We're gonna come back to a more important part of this story – how did they interact with the Native Americans, a more important, fascinating and a tragic one I think."

For this, he developed further resources on encounters between Native Americans and English settlers which delved into the motivations and differences between different named Native American groups and individuals. In each of the above themes, the materials went beyond what the specifications would require and drew attention to perspectives outside of the lens of imperial desires/setbacks/successes.

Ferryhall also went beyond the specifications in Part 4 (Britain in the Twentieth Century) by focusing on the contemporary Windrush Scandal (as an entry point to the *Windrush and the Caribbean migrants* in the specifications). Connections between past and present, particularly the legacies of empire, were a frequent means through which teachers went beyond the specifications. Claire would speak to how the debt incurred by the policy to compensate former slave owners was only paid off recently. Similarly, Erin drew parallels between inquiries into Amritsar and Grenfell. Angela compared how the EIC "capitalised on people's misery" to how some were profiting from the emerging covid-19 crisis.

Central to the dissertation is the question of what heuristics are used to frame empire and the role of the balance sheet as one available heuristic. The most crucial heuristic teachers used across the

three schools was grounded in how the module would be assessed using 'factors'.[86] E.g. "Which factors caused the Indian Rebellion?" "What was the main factor causing migration to America?" 'Impact' was also common, such as "What was the Impact of British Colonies on Native Americans?" 'Long term' and 'short term' was another means of organising answers when practicing exam questions e.g. Laura poses the question "Explain the significance of the loss of the American colonies on the British empire" and reminds students that: "you'll get extra points for mentioning short term impacts (like movement to Canada) and long term impacts (like pursuing colonies elsewhere like Australia)." The heuristic of greatest interest here is the balance sheet. While the balance sheet was absent from the MEP specifications, it still surfaced in Ferryhall as a way of organising information and arguments (see a comparison of the schools' usage of the balance sheet in Table 10).

Table 10: Balance Sheet Framings Across Ethnographic Sites

	Ferryhall	Walton	All Saints
Balance sheet framing in classroom materials at KS3 (See Chapter 5)	Yes	Yes (through excerpts from historians)	No
Balance sheet framing in MEP textbook	Yes	Yes	No
Balance sheet framing in classroom activities	Yes	No	No

Ferryhall's GCSE classes did the activity in the OUP textbook to "Identify the advantages and disadvantages about [*sic*] colonisation of North America to: the British; the Native American tribes." However, Claire added that "There's a lot more advantages to the British and more

[86] Factors included: religion, war, economic resources, government, ideas (e.g. imperialism, Social Darwinism and civilisation), science and technology, and the role of individuals.

disadvantages to the Native Americans, but there are a couple of the others." She and Laura highlighted that this was an imbalanced balance sheet before conducting the activity. A student in Claire's class quipped, "Native Americans didn't have any advantages. They were just pillaged." However, the OUP textbook was used by the teacher as an authoritative source to show the student that there were advantages of periodic good relations and intermarriage (see Table 8).

The most substantial balance sheet framing was focused on India in a Ferryhall lesson organised around the question "What was the impact of the Empire on India and Britain?" with the learning intention: "To understand if the Empire had a positive or negative impact on India and on Britain." A clip from BBC Teach captioned "What legacy has the British Empire left behind?" and photocopies of the OUP textbook served as the material for this lesson. The clip was an excerpt from Jeremy Paxman's 2012 BBC documentary *Empire* and bears remarkable similarity in its framing to Sanghera's balanced anti-balance sheet:

> "The Empire brought blood and tears and dispossession to millions of people, but it also brought roads and railways and education. There is no simple judgement to be made on three turbulent centuries of history ... For good or ill, much of the world is as it is today because of the Empire. From the way it looks to the sports people play. From the religion they practise to the language they speak. It has changed the very genetic make-up of Britain. If only we can look at it clear-eyed, it can tell us a lot about who we are. It's a story that belongs to all of us. We've been through pride, we've been through shame, mostly nowadays we seem to be in denial, but if we really want to understand who we are, it's time we stopped pretending the Empire was nothing to do with us" (BBC Teach, 2016; BBC Two, 2012).

A reference to the clip in the survey-only school sample (see Chapter 8) suggests that the clip is used in other schools as well. It is possible that such clips from Paxman have been playing the role of *Empireland* for nearly 10 years before *Empireland*, urging Britons to reject pride, shame and denial and instead have a 'clear-eyed' and balanced idea of this span of time and how empire created multicultural Britain. Laura mirrored these themes after the clip had played:

> "It's quite controversial, empire. Especially when we look at the not so nice side of it, especially the way indigenous people were treated. It reveals some of the worst sides of our history. However, there were positive impacts to empire. And without a doubt, you know, we can't ignore that empire has shaped our society and the world that we live in today. So we've got to see it for what it is, but also not fail to recognise that there are parts of our world and parts of the impact of the empire, which can be seen in a positive light, as well as recognising the horrors and the issues that came up with empire and we've gone through this phase that was picked out the video was always trying to brush it under the carpet or say that the British didn't do those things, that didn't happen, or just to not mention it, because it's much easier to not mention some of the horrors that came out of it. And we're gonna look at the positive and the negative things that came out of empire to get a nice clear picture."

As the class tried to pick out 'positives' and 'negatives' from the textbook photocopies, the conversation centred on questions of for *whom* these are 'positives'.

Laura began reading from the textbook: "'India was the colony that many people in Britain treasured, most even calling it the jewel in the crown', I'd probably highlight that as a positive thing in my eyes."
She asked a student to identify another impact from the photocopy to which he replied, "They took raw materials from India like spices and sold them for a high price in Britain."
"Are you going to say that's positive?"
"Yeah, positive."
"For who?"
"India."
"Was it positive for India? Who made the money?"
"The British."
"The British made the money. So, a positive impact for the British was that they made lots of money. It very much depends on whose eyes you're looking through – but most of them I'd say are positives for the British. What else?"
"Jobs," adds another student.
"Yeah, definitely more jobs, more opportunities. However, they might be exploiting them as well."

This serves to demonstrate that – potentially inspired in part by the earlier activity in Looking West – disaggregating between [the many] 'positives' for Britain and [the few] 'positives' for the colonised becomes a form of subtle resistance, allowing for a surfacing of asymmetry and imbalance. However, this strategy can involve affirming imperial logics through the ways in which 'positives' of empire for Britain are constructed e.g. positioning the Raj as 'the jewel in the crown' and this being a 'positive'. This illustrates the point described earlier by Hall in reference to the 'West and the

Rest', that using certain discourses draws us into their ways of reasoning – 'every discourse constructs positions from which it alone makes sense' – such as what counts as 'positive'.

Britain in Africa is also discussed in explicitly balance sheet terms at Ferryhall. The South African War/the Boer War is framed as 'shameful' due to the use of concentration camps, but this is counter-balanced by the way in which the poor state of British recruits for the war stimulates social welfare reforms to improve public health. While giving instructions for students' homework, Laura described how "on 'Consequences of the Boer War', there's a 'good' paragraph in here. So if you want to say there was a positive from the war – not in South Africa for the Boers but in Britain – you get new social reforms." There was also a 'balance sheet adjacent' activity where students debate whether Cecil Rhodes statue in Oxford should be removed. In keeping with the imbalanced balance sheet approach, the section in the classroom materials on the 'impact' of the palm oil trade draws attention to the question of 'who benefitted most': "Some Africans did prosper, but ultimately the trade mostly benefitted the British." A comparison of the Suez Canal and Uganda Railway asked of both cases "Who benefitted the most?" in which the answer in both cases was Britain (in the case of the latter, South Asians who remained in East Africa were also listed as beneficiaries). These threads all culminate in an exercise to help students cement their knowledge which asked, "What was the impact of the British Empire on India and Africa?" and instructed students to divide their answers between 'positive' and 'negative'. Elsewhere students were asked to practice answering exam questions with the example "Explain the significance of the British Empire in India" where they could *either* organise their answer in terms of long-term/short-term impacts *or* 'positive'/'negative' impacts.

Walton and All Saints did not develop explicit balance sheet activities for MEP in the way that Ferryhall did (see Table 10) but instead only explicitly used the other heuristics such as factors and long-term/short-term. However, I want to emphasise that Ferryhall made use of this 'optional' heuristic in a wider context in which this is a norm. The balance sheet is supported by tradition, by the OUP textbook and other resources like BBC Teach. More specifically for Ferryhall, the balance sheet potentially provides a means of avoiding complaints of 'bias' from parents in a Conservative region of England. These contexts contribute to making the pedagogical choice to use balance sheet framings in the classroom. One further point of context that contributes to this pedagogical choice which I want to pursue in slightly more depth is assessment.

Ferryhall placed far greater emphasis than Walton and All Saints on practising exam questions, learning the conventions of how the exam board would assess their knowledge, and using cognitive science to facilitate memorisation. The inclusion of this 'optional' heuristic of 'positives/negatives' might be due to the belief that it could be useful in assessment, helping students to further remember and organise information. It also reflects a more general aspect to assessment where students are asked to give answers which explore multiple, contrastive avenues (different factors, contrasts between long-term and short-term). GCSE history writing frames for students often use the format of "on the one hand, ... on the other hand..." There might be 'leakage' of this general principle to bolster the perceived need for 'positive/negative' impacts. For example, source questions don't typically require multiple contrastive avenues (i.e. they don't suit "one the one hand, ... on the other hand...") but Simon, a top achiever at Ferryhall asked his teacher when practising answering source questions "can you be like on the one hand it is and on the one hand it isn't?" This suggests a leakage of this general principle, that Simon is assuming that this would add

'nuance' that could be rewarded with higher marks thus demonstrating the perceived generic value of 'balanced' answers.

This need for 'for-and-against' argumentation is also associated with the genre of history essays. Detached bothsiderism might be part of the foundations of this genre of writing. As Calder and Robert Williams argue in their article "Must History Students Write History Essays?":

> "Gentlemen in the late Georgian and Victorian eras were not educated to do anything in particular except be droll and astute spectators of life and the human condition. ... The essay form promoted in these daily papers flaunted the independence of the gentleman... the essay was the perfect form to express the detached impartiality of the educated man... the essay asks students to pretend to be something they are not (genteel, detached, disinterested)" (2021: 931- 933).

This 'late Georgian and Victorian' expectation to write impartially, as though one has no stake in the matter at hand, may persist in contemporary disciplinary models of history education. Moreover, Kennett also reflects that the appeal of the balance sheet may lie in teachers' desire to pre-empt and practice the types of assessment from GCSE: "this is the [balance sheet] approach that so many of us take, for example, Was the Empire good in India? I think part of that is that we are obsessed with the balance of GCSE questions" (2021). Benger agrees: "The adoption of a balance-sheet approach in schools is perhaps understandable, especially when many examination questions emphasise the notion of the 'balanced answer'," adding "when many popular histories of the empire, on TV and in books, are framed in these terms and when the government frequently insists on 'balance' and political neutrality in school teaching" (2022: 12). While Chapter 5 discussed some of these latter broader appeals of projecting 'neutrality', the former – the ways in which history is *assessed* – may be a more specific means through which the balance sheet is legitimated and sustained as a pedagogical tool.

One last aspect of teaching the module is explored here: although Walton and All Saints did not do explicit balance sheet exercises, the module could nonetheless provide the 'raw materials' for developing a balance sheet narrative in these classes. This is because aspects which were not necessarily explicitly labelled as 'imperial benefits' could still be decoded as 'imperial benefits'. For example, in Walton students were given handouts of Clive and Hastings and asked to write down "two things about their background and their achievements." In a similar moment of confusion as at Ferryhall, James asked "achievements – are they good or bad?" Students were meant to identify parts of the handout such as "[Hastings] reorganised tax systems, tightened anti-corruption laws, and wiped out thieving gangs who were running wild in the Indian countryside." These 'achievements' were therefore congruent with traditional constructions of imperial 'benefits' such as 'good governance' or 'eliminating thugee' (or at a more general level, 'imposing law and order on chaos'). At All Saints, these raw materials reflected those in the Hodder textbook as the book formed the foundation of some of the teaching, e.g. the book's framing of "governor generals chosen in London to give the Indians the benefit of British liberties and justice" was read out in class verbatim by the teacher. The teacher also went on to explain a section from the Hodder book:

> "They said we'll have more Indians governing over India, so they say you can be equal if you are part of the Indian civil service, or you can be doctors, lawyers, officials. So you have this new ruling class in India that becomes more and more in sync with British values. You have more Indians travelling to England to get education and so when they come back they can enforce all these ideas."

These discourses *could* be decoded as the 'benefits' of being colonised by the British. This question of how students experienced and decoded these messages is the subject of the next chapter.

Conclusion

This discussion of how teaching is shaped at various levels of the education system serves to underline three key points. Firstly, this chapter highlighted the significance of *both* the exam boards' specifications and the teachers' (and textbook authors') creative labour in going beyond these specifications in various ways. While specifications set priorities, which I've here highlighted emphasise 'imperial logics', teachers can and do perform encoding work that alters the messages to students, by for instance, as Mark did, carving out space to centre the motivations of Africans and Native Americans rather than only the ways they were 'impacted' by empire. However, this chapter also reveals how balance sheet framings can come into play even when not explicitly required by the specifications. Thus factors beyond the exam board can re-insert the balance sheet into textbooks and classrooms: the current state of wider societal debates, professional codes of neutrality, traditions of pedagogy on this topic, and the broad conventions of assessment. In this way the balance sheet becomes 'sticky', living on at GCSE even though it was not an explicit part of the module specifications. The final key point is that even without explicit balance sheet activities, certain MEP content resonates with the themes that – in KS3 or elsewhere (see Chapter 5) – are glossed as 'positives' or 'good things' about empire, such as British-style education and legal systems. However, over the course of the module more attention was paid by teachers to critical themes such as racism and violence than to the phenomena typically glossed as 'positives'. These factors meant that in all three schools there was a diversity of discourses of empire – a diversity of raw materials – which students could arrange into different shapes and could use to construct their ideas of empire in different ways.

Chapter Seven: Students' Discourses, Decodings and Identities at the Ethnographic Sites

Introduction

The history classroom at All Saints in which I had my focus groups with students was adorned with posters of civil rights and anti-apartheid activists. I looked forward to the lessons in this room every week; the students reflected back their teacher's enthusiasm for the subject as they riffed off each other in boisterous discussions. As one student, Deborah, put it, "you'd think we all go out on the weekends and stuff." It was a warm escape from the outside: from the arguments in the reception over school exclusions and the tense exchanges between local store owners and local rough sleepers.

In our break-time focus group Chido reflected on her time at All Saints as a place apart: "in schools that, you know, history is taught when it glorifies the British Empire, like I guess more privileged areas – that's how the exam board wants it to be taught. It makes me really grateful that I went here because in any school you can learn this stuff but it's *the way* that we are taught it here." The others mhm-ed in agreement. "that made us realise – well obviously we knew it wasn't great but ... yeah, I think it's also what outlook you have on life and the influences around you because obviously the school is quite multicultural and I feel like because of that position we are in, we need to be more aware of certain things." Earlier that day during the double lesson, their teacher Erin had pointed out that "everyone in this class is from a former colony." Nigeria, Jamaica, Ireland, India, Ghana, Pakistan and not only former British colonies but Congo and Philippines too.

Akuba picked up from where Chido left off, "I also feel like it makes me really grateful that I went here because in any school you can learn about migration and empire. So some people can learn about it and see the British Empire as something that was great that had a really good influence in the world but then we learn it and we see that, um, it was not as great as it perceives itself. The British Empire – they just really went there and just took resources. Even like for example in my country Ghana that used to be the Gold Coast. It's no longer the Gold Coast anymore because of them taking the resources."

These students articulated what many participating in debates about teaching colonial history in England had erased: that the way subjects interpret history isn't merely a matter of state curricula but is bound up with the specific social circumstances and identifications from which subjects approach that history. I discuss this in relation to how students at All Saints, Ferryhall and Walton Academy framed the British Empire, how they decoded the MEP module and the role this module played in their lives.

Students' Discourses of Empire: Discourses of Critique, Value and Ambivalence

Reflecting the wider environment of disagreement around empire, students expressed a range of discourses around empire including 'advantages' and 'disadvantages', although instead of using this language (or 'good'/'bad', 'pride'/'shame' etc) I refer to *discourses of value* and *discourses of critique*. This is both to emphasise how 'discourses' constitute the object of research in this dissertation and to develop new ways of describing these discourses. These new terms shift attention towards questions of what students (actively) value about empire and how students (actively) critique empire, rather than naturalising the articulation of 'good' and 'bad' to particular colonial phenomena. Another aspect of the wider environment reflected in students' responses

were concerns about 'balance' and complexity, as students also expressed *discourses of ambivalence*. These were either combinations of *discourses of critique* and *discourses of value* or other expressions of empire as two-edged or more colloquially: as 'a mixed bag'. In other words, *discourses of ambivalence* signalled balance sheet-type framings of empire.

Students emphasised *discourses of critique* more than they did *discourses of value* by speaking to empire's violence, racism and exploitation. These discourses were prevalent among students in all three schools. (While much of this chapter will discuss how these critiques become qualified, this should not entirely eclipse the 'alternative headline' that the students who participated in my research were largely anti-imperialist in their outlook.) I will discuss the relationship between students' views and MEP in more detail in later sections, but sufficed to say here that often the module provided resources for articulating critiques. Akuba alluded to a memorable class in All Saints where students watched a film clip depicting The Jallianwala Bagh massacre:

> "They [the British colonists] were going in different countries like India where they had peaceful protests, they were killing innocent children, women and unarmed civilians, many different countries the British Empire just really went there and just took resources."

However, often critiques were constructed in more general terms where the influence of the module was less evident. Chelsea, from Walton selected 'The British Empire was a crime against humanity' in the survey options (prior to my alteration of the wording of these options). With Bengerist elements to her argument, she explained that "the British empire dehumanised millions of human beings in order to look more powerful. Everyone deserves to be free and independent." Hannah, from Ferryhall, put it more dryly: "No one who was invaded by Britain enjoyed it."

Discourses of value were only very rarely the sole emphasis in students' responses; more often they were 'balanced' with *discourses of critique* or mentioned alongside an emphasis on *discourses of critique*. Moreover, they were only emphasised in the surveys, not in the focus groups or in classroom discussions. In the ethnographic sample, only two students emphasised *discourses of value* without significant qualification: Dale and Kyle. In both cases this came as a surprise to me. I had been in class with Dale at Walton for months where he was engaged and talkative but never expressed any views which seemed marked in any way. So I was surprised when he wrote confidently in the survey: "I think the Empire was great and I think every British Citizen should be proud of it." Kyle at Ferryhall was by contrast extremely quiet and barely spoke in class. He had not joined the focus groups and so the surveys were the first chance I had to hear his views. I will return to Dale and Kyle in the section on Identity.

Discourses of value were much more frequently expressed in balance sheet mode, accompanied by *discourses of critique* to form a *discourse of ambivalence*. Riley, an engaged student of Irish heritage at All Saints chose the survey option "The British Empire was a crime against humanity" but expressed 'both sides' in her reasoning:

> "Yes, the British empire brought many changes such as involved innovations in medical care and education. However at what cost? The British empire contributed to massacres, famines and the use of concentration camps and yes did fight to abolish slavery in the 1800s but also profited from slavery in the 1700s. So I would say it was a crime against humanity as the negative aspects greatly exceed the positive."

However, often *discourses of ambivalence* were expressed in vaguer terms than in Riley's answer, i.e. not necessarily in reference to specific ways of valuing or critiquing. For example, Simon at Walton described empire by way of: "There were good, and bad things that have happened." While Chapter 8 will speak to the frequencies of these discourses, this chapter is more concerned with a qualitative exploration of the role of 'balance' in students' discourses, investigating the power

and limits of the discursive formation of the balance sheet. In this chapter, I also address various contingencies in how this discursive formation becomes expressed/suppressed in students' discourses.

Students' Discourses and the Balance Sheet Discursive Formation

Students were often eager to reference 'both sides'. Although Dale's responses emphasised *discourses of value* he also acknowledges "the empire did some questionable things in the past" (see Table 11). He also chooses option (2) 'The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies') instead of option (1) ('The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies'). This suggests that even if one believes 'every British Citizen should be proud of the empire' that this should be expressed alongside acknowledgement of the 'bad', i.e. couched at least slightly in a *discourse of ambivalence*. The pull of this discursive formation was also in force for students who were more critical of empire. Above, Riley also acknowledges 'both sides' in her written answer despite the fact that, prior to writing this short paragraph, she had chosen an unambiguous survey response from the multiple-choice options (option (4) out of 4). That Dale and Riley, in their respective versions of the (im)balance sheet, seem at once to have clear points of view but are eager to show awareness of 'the other side' is evidence of the power of the balance sheet discursive formation.[87]

[87] A rebuttal against my argument that the balance sheet is an important force in students' discourses is that the structure of my question in Survey B (the four options presented to the question "How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?") artificially encouraged balance sheet-type answers in the open-text section. My response to this is twofold: firstly, students balance-sheet discourses extended beyond their answers to this survey question (for example, in their answers to the far less leading Survey A question "What did you think of the way the module (e.g. textbook, choice of topics) presented the British Empire?"). This suggests that these discourses are not just artificial products of one question. Secondly, even if balance sheet-type responses are 'induced' by this question, that would not undermine the broader argument given that, as described in Chapter 5 and 6, such 'inducing' is occurring through KS3 and GCSE activities on a scale far greater than my small research project. If the question is 'what does the balance

This phenomenon can be present in students' discourses even when it is largely absent in students' secondary history education. Riley acknowledges 'the other side' by speaking to medical care which is not mentioned in the Hodder textbook used in All Saints and was not mentioned in class either (the Hodder book does however mention education, see Chapter 6). In constructing her written response, she therefore draws on her own knowledges beyond the module and the classroom in order to demonstrate awareness of 'both sides' before focusing on her central argument. In regard to the same survey question, Maria, another student at All Saints, selected the multiple-choice option: 'The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies'. She elaborated by writing:

> "People of the British Empire were given the same rights of British citizens. They were allowed access into Britain. The British Empire also introduced work and support to people in the colonies. However there were still many cases of exploitation and abuse of power."

I will return below to Maria's constructions of imperial mobility, but here I want to draw attention to her construction of the empire as 'introducing work and support'. Neither the MEP classes nor the Hodder book used this trope of empire as provider of jobs. (All Saints also did not have a balance sheet activity at KS3.) These particular *discourses of value* – Riley's reference to imperial medical care and Maria's reference to work – appears not to stem from their KS3 or GCSE history classes. Rather Riley and Maria's answers are a bricolage of elements discussed in the module and elements from elsewhere. That these *discourses of ambivalence* were expressed at All Saints is

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sheet *do* to students' discourses' or 'what discourses does the balance sheet encourage students to access' then whether my survey 'induces' a balance sheet framing (that some students would not have used had the survey been formulated differently) is immaterial to those questions. Ultimately however, readers will notice that balance sheet framings appear in students' discourses throughout this chapter in response to multiple different kinds of questions in Survey A and Survey B and so I maintain the strong version of my argument, i.e. that their balance sheet-type responses are not just a reaction to the survey wording but that this way of organising discourses about empire is a wider phenomenon among students.

especially marked given the critical classroom environment and particular institutional culture of the history department. This suggests that schooling is not the only avenue through which students experience the shape and contents of the discursive formation, but that students may be socialised to value these forms of expression in more diffuse ways too.

As well as the discursive formation encouraging students to draw on discourses beyond the module to achieve a sense of balance/recognition of 'both sides', it also played a role in how students decoded the module itself. Maria's answer above shows how she had decoded MEP's discussion of post-war immigration and the 1948 Nationality Act as a 'benefit' of imperial membership. There are also more specific contingencies in this decoding, in that Maria's reading should also be seen in the context of her family moving to England from Puerto Rico (i.e. not as subjects of the former British Empire) and her own navigation of multicultural urban spaces that are targeted by anti-immigration rhetoric. For a young person living through the Brexit era in an immigrant community, it is understandable that anything that might be seen as providing entry to Britain can be constructed as something to be valued. While all this is 'in play', my main contention is that the balance sheet is also structuring how Maria and others make sense of the module even when the balance sheet is absent from teaching. What is discussed in class or in the textbooks – such as the 1948 Nationality Act and what Maria refers to as 'cases of exploitation and abuse of power' – is filtered through the lens of 'pros and cons'. To illustrate further with another example from Maria's writing, in response to questions about the module's presentation of imperialism in Survey A, she replied,

> "It surely made me kinda annoyed to the British empire about how they took an amazing history (like the Indian education) and made it look like they were wrong and that the

> 'British' education is better. However, I am also quite grateful to the good influence the British empire brought to the other countries."[88]

This demonstrates how students could decode critical messages through a balance sheet framework, where – here – a critique of Macaulayism in India is understood as 'one side' whilst the 'other side' must still exist in a different, undefined space. This also draws attention to one of the reasons the balance sheet is so resilient; it can withstand students learning critical histories of empire as these are 'placed' in a column ('bad'/'disadvantages'/'exploited colonies') without necessarily undermining faith in the alternate column ('good'/ 'advantages'/ 'benefitting colonies'). In this way, the discursive formation's articulation of contradictory elements allows it to be capacious and absorb *discourses of critique* while reproducing the same basic structure of ambivalence.

Students' Alternatives to the Balance Sheet

So far I have focused on the power of the balance sheet discursive formation, but here I want to bring into the frame the alternative ways that students described empire, particularly through unqualified *discourses of critique*. For instance, Hamza elaborated his choice of 'The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off' by writing that: "As seen in places such as India, the colonies led to mass famine in Bengal and also the stealing of products from locals." The discursive formation is in this sense not all-powerful and students did at times opt to formulate empire in ways that were neither concerned with neutrality nor with acknowledging 'both sides'.

[88] This means of organising ambivalence – balancing critiques with vague reference to an 'elsewhere' of positive legacies – is not unique to Maria. Responding to the same question, Ben from Walton said, "It had some positive impacts on certain colonies, however in the end it was an exploitative empire that used other land for the benefit of Britain." For Ben, using the OUP textbook, 'positive impacts on certain colonies' might be a reference to the Raj (also see Chapter 8), however, vagueness is a common trait in the discourse of 'other colonies where positive impact occurred.'

This space for alternative readings also characterised students' descriptions of the module. Mark's class at Walton diverged in their answers to the question "What did you think of the way the module (e.g. textbook, choice of topics) presented the British Empire?":

> "As a bad thing – truthful." (Chelsea)
> "Bad, because it was." (Harris)
> "Well balanced, some positives and negatives of the empire." (Stacey)
> "I think it doesn't give a fair representation from both sides as it favours the British due to it commonly being written by a British person/company." (Hamza)

While in the introduction to this chapter, the All Saints students spoke to the importance of school-level differences in how empire is framed, this divergence between students with the same books, materials and classes emphasises the importance of student-level differences.[89] The same message was decoded in contrasting ways. This troubles the airbrushed narrative in the popular discourses of Chapter 1 in which students will take a uniform normative lesson from learning the history of the British empire. This banking model of education can tell us nothing about students' divergent decodings and instead, here I will look to the concepts from Chapter 3 – identity and agency – to illuminate these decodings.

[89] As all three schools had students who (in the survey) wrote balance sheet responses sitting alongside students who wrote strong critiques of empire, it is interesting that these differences never surfaced in class, aside from Ferryhall's debate on Cecil's statue. (Many of the students wrote in the surveys that the only way they thought the module should be taught differently in the future was that they wanted more debate and discussion.) It is possible that in classes like Mark's they had effectively addressed these specific differences of opinion at KS3. More broadly there is a wide body of research across multiple contexts discussing why teachers might avoid surfacing these conflicts, which there is not the scope to explore in detail here. However, one aspect particularly relevant to GCSE studies in England is the role of high stakes examination and the need to prioritise curriculum coverage and practicing exam questions, squeezing out space and energy for handling sensitive discussions around differences in students' views on empire. Elsewhere, I have explored these re-focusing dynamics of neoliberalism in Northern Irish history education (Branford, 2021).

Socially patterned discourses

The ways in which different students described empire and the ways they decoded the module were socially patterned. One social patterning to emerge in this phase of the research was that the two students with the strongest *discourses of value*, Dale and Kyle, were both boys and racialised as white. However as discussed in Chapter 3 no identity obliterates its internal differences, as Dale and Kyle's discourses differed from each other as well as from other boys racialised as white. In other words, despite the social patternings described in these sections around gender and race/heritage, students' broad political orientations within these groups were also significant in their characterisations of empire. This is illustrated with the Survey B responses of three boys racialised as white in Table 11.[90]

[90] Although Table 11 focuses on interlinked themes of race, immigration and empire, the three boys differed in similar ways on a number of issues beyond this nexus too, such as on gender equality and on the welfare state.

Table 11: Ben, Kyle and Dale's Survey B Responses

	Ben (Walton)	Kyle (Ferryhall)	Dale (Walton)
BLM[91]	"We must draw a clear distinction between fascists rioting, and demonstration against systematic racism. Keep it up."	"I can see why the protests are happening and I agree with the reasonable cause for it. But I do not agree with the looting as that has nothing to do with Black Lives Matter."	"No comment."
Immigration	*There should be as few limits on immigration as possible*	*Immigration should be limited to those who do highly skilled work (e.g. engineers and doctors etc)*	*There should be no immigration (closed borders)*
	"Economic benefit to society"	"To stop the use of economic migrants. To help with the unemployment in this country."	"I think this because the immigrants increase the budget and the debt of the government and increase economic inequality. However, I do not think that they take our jobs and should never come to Britain. I just think it'll be easier for the country to focus on the other problems in the country like the Coronavirus, Poverty, Homelessness, Bullying etc. When immigration isn't the main focus for us when there are other countries that aren't having the same problems as Britain."
Empire	*The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.*	*The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.*	*The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.*
	"It had some positive impacts on certain colonies, however it was fundamentally an exploitative empire that used other land for the benefit solely to Britain. It also deprived some people of their humanity- kickstarting nationalistic ideas of race and difference"	"However at the time, the slave trade was common practice during this time period however wrong it may have been."	"I chose [this option] because if it wasn't for the Empire protecting our country we won't be like what we are today. I think the Empire was great and I think every British Citizen should be proud of it. Yes, the Empire did some questionable things in the past which is terrible in today's society but it was how people lived back in those days and we just wanted to be the best and the richest country in the world."

All three boys expressed some ambivalence towards empire, but the way in which they did so is bound up with their general political orientations. Ben, with his more progressive views, echoes

[91] This question asked – at the height of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (and counter protests) – for students' views on "the recent protests in the UK & USA". This question only consisted of an open text response, i.e. it did not include a multiple-choice component.

Riley in making a passing reference to 'positives' before focusing on *discourses of critique* and like Maria these are vague 'positives' in unspecified colonies. Kyle and Dale – with more conservative orientations, although even between them there are differences – both emphasise changing normative standards between the imperial past and contemporary society in their acknowledgment of 'negatives', while still emphasising 'improvements' in their multiple-choice response. However perhaps a shared positionality is still patterned in their responses in that their reactions to immigration all began with a contention about how this affected the economy, as opposed to for example Hamza and Hannah's narratives which focused on a normative duty to, as Hamza put it, "allow people to come to our beautiful country to improve their lives." Ben, Kyle and Dale couched immigration in de-personalised economic terms while Hamza and Hannah centred the motivations and possibilities of migrants 'improving their lives'. I hope that the comparisons made in this section hold the central tensions of this chapter: the widespread influence of balance sheet framings interacting with both the chosen and inherited identifications within which students formulate discourses about empire.

Another social patterning to students' discourses was that, generally, girls were more anti-imperial than boys; this is also illustrated quantitatively in a larger sample in Chapter 8. The question this raises can be formulated as such: Students at All Saints have multiple avenues to rejecting a narrative of a benevolent British establishment (through their classed and racialised experiences, their school, and their social groups). Similarly, the few students racialised as black and South Asian in the ethnographic sample at Walton and Ferryhall were all critical of imperialism (although there is more variation among students with global majority identities in the larger sample in Chapter 8). The conundrum then is why white girls at Ferryhall and Walton were generally more critical about empire than their white male classmates? What avenues to criticality were more open

to them than boys? This needs to be contextualised by looking further than the theme of empire. As described in Chapter 8, this gendered difference applies more widely because girls were more critical than boys on a raft of issues. This is affirmed by the N = 1,542 Policy Exchange research with 18–20-year-olds (Kaufmann, 2022).

The responses of Hannah from Ferryhall illustrate this phenomenon of girls taking more critical stances on a range of issues: pro-welfare state, anti-imperial, pro-immigration, anti-Brexit, pro-BLM. This is given more texture in Table 12. Hannah takes an activist stance towards racial injustice; supports higher taxation to pay for a more robust welfare state; and wants a welcoming immigration environment despite being racialised as white; going to an economically advantaged middle-class school; and living in a relatively monocultural county. In this way she's expressing solidarities that largely extend beyond her own personal experiences of the world. When asked "Can you think of anything in your life that has influenced your thinking on these or similar topics?" she replied "It might be shocking but social media is my access to the world and everything that goes on in it. It allows me to see so many different points of view hence creating my own opinion." This importance of social media also chimes with the findings from Policy Exchange:

> "students derive their views from the wider society more than from school. They are notably influenced by social media ...when asked where they first heard about one of four CSJ [Critical Social Justice] concepts, just 11 percent of young people mentioned school while 50 percent mentioned social media" (Kaufmann, 2022).

While perhaps girls are accessing and building different social media worlds than boys – or responding to the same social media worlds differently – this still begs the question 'why would girls be more open to particular kinds of cross-identity solidarities than boys in this political moment in England?' It could be that girls' gendered positionality provides an avenue to an activist

stance against patriarchy, as Hannah does in Table 12, and this 'branches out' to other themes like empire. Here I have focused on the contribution my ethnographic participants have made to this question and in the subsequent chapter I will revisit this theme from a different lens. However, this question of a gendered political split – not only on empire but as a more general quality in Generation Left – requires further research. While there is a deep and important body of literature about the failures of (white) feminism to address intersecting inequities or to build potent cross-identity solidarities (hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984), here I am posing the question of why young women in England like Hannah express these solidarities, even if Lorde's 1979 critique of the exclusions of mainstream feminism is still relevant in today's wider picture of feminist activism (Zakaria, 2021).

Table 12: Hannah Survey B Responses

Theme:	Survey B written answers:
Black Lives Matter	"These protests shouldn't have to happen it's appalling that Racism is still so present today, but I'm so glad that they are and will support the Black Lives Matter movement forever."
Gender	*Other*
	"[Housework] is still very woman heavy, but times are changing and more men are doing housework, the scales are balancing out but will only continue to do so if we shed light on the topic ... Because people want gender equality in so many areas not just this one, it's being spoken about and people are hearing it and the world is changing, but because it's working doesn't mean we stop talking about it otherwise it could fall back out of balance and all the work will be for nothing."
Immigration	*There should be as few limits on immigration as possible.*
	"Obviously we should check to see why any person from any country is coming into our country, but everyone should be welcome. It's unjust to force someone to assimilate into British society and completely disregard their own culture; them coming to England could mean a better quality of life for them so we should ensure that it happens."
Empire	*The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.*
	"No one who was invaded by Britain enjoyed it"

One way in which students' discourses were not as socially patterned as might be expected was in terms of their openness towards talking about past and present racism. Although this was spoken

about more often in All Saints, it was still more openly critiqued at Walton and Ferryhall than I had expected. This may be facilitated by how the module itself and all the teachers in the sample modelled for students the inescapability of discussing racism when it comes to empire. White students in Mark's class would draw parallels between slavery and Jim Crowe in the past and racialised inequality in the present. Many of Laura's students criticised Cecil Rhodes' racist views. References to racism were also a means through which students of all backgrounds seemed to deploy a *Horrible Histories* style humour in which racists were laughed at and ridiculed. When Mark read out the story of a ship surgeon who 'shocked many in colonial Bridgetown' but did not reveal the cause of this shock, he asked: "why was there 'a gasp of disbelief and they all pushed their seats back as far as the boundaries'?" Three students called back in unison, guessing correctly: "He was black." Mark read further and explained that "'the surgeon on the ship happened to be a man of colour.' So the ship surgeon was black but the people in Bridgetown couldn't comprehend this as a possibility." Before he could continue, another student called out from the back: "racist" to which the rest of the class laughed. Claire in explaining a cartoon to her class mentioned that "So people were very racist in the 1800s" to which one of the class provocateurs responded in mock horror: "during the 1800s? No!" While another Ferryhall student was explaining that Caribbean migrants were accused of taking jobs, another quipped sarcastically "how times have changed" to a round of sniggers. Anti-racism was a strong theme in All Saints' history department, so much so that after Erin explained the meaning of 'white man's burden', Deborah sighed: "Racism – when is it not?" However, an important distinction between the ways in which racism was discussed in All Saints compared to the other schools is that in the former racism was also discussed as more proximate, in terms of immediate relations within the school and the surrounding neighbourhood while students in Walton and Ferryhall tended not to discuss contemporary racism as a proximate force but rather a more distant force in the broader

national frame. Nonetheless, students across the contexts established types of anti-racist norms in their discourses.

Identity, Family & Empire

As described in the methodology chapter I did not initiate discussions with students in the ethnographic sample about the role of racial identity in their understandings of empire and the module. However, students with heritage in former British colonies did raise these connections in our discussions. As described in this chapter's introduction, students could draw on these connections in expressing their critical orientations to the British Empire. This was not only the case in All Saints where there was a more open culture in the history department and history classes about talking about positionality. At Ferryhall, Marcus, a student with African-Caribbean heritage spoke to me after the rest of the class filtered out to say that he felt that generally in British society the history of colonialism was whitewashed. He also wrote in the survey that "I'm quite opinionated on these topics [the British Empire] due to my family background." While for some students connected to postcolonies – like in Marcus's case – family background enabled access to critical narratives of empire, for others these conversations were closed off. In my conversations with All Saints students with African and African-Caribbean backgrounds some described MEP as an opportunity to learn more about the postcolonies they had connections with because they didn't have the opportunity to learn about this elsewhere. When I asked whether they spoke to their families about this history they conveyed some of the complexities which could produce historical silences at home. Chido explained that:

> "I personally don't really talk to my dad about Ghanaian history from where he's from, but when it comes to Zimbabwean history and talking to my mum it's like we don't really talk too much about it because like she – I don't think she likes hearing about it at all 'cause obviously it's contributed to different stereotypes and stigmas like you know: Africans are weak, Africans can't do their own civilisations – all that kind of stuff. When I remember this one time I was telling her about some stuff that we were learning in class and I

> mentioned Cecil Rhodes and my mom – she just does not like him at all –it's understandable – but she really didn't want to get into it because like I guess it was just so close to home."

While these intergenerational silences between an African parent who grew up in a settler colony and her child growing up in Britain are specific to those complexities, another aspect of Chido's narrative resonated in the narratives across schools and backgrounds. This is the idea of having a particular kind of affinity with one parent who is looked to as the key political interlocuter (even if they are also evasive at times). Marlene from All Saints whose mother is African-Caribbean said:

> "I don't talk to my mum about history because she's very closed minded but my dad – he is fully English, but he doesn't talk about British history. He refuses. He says, 'I don't want to talk about it.' He just - so my grandad - if he would say something like [puts on a voice] 'we fought for this country' and my Dad would counter it straight away and I think - because I spend a lot of time with my dad I feel like I think like my dad."

Similarly, students in all the schools would describe frustration with their 'close-minded' older family members and find it difficult to speak to them about charged topics.

The following vignette is my final illustration of student identification at the intersection of family, heritage and MEP. In this focus group at Ferryhall, I had brought printouts of a few news articles to act as springboards to conversation and spread them out along a large table in the requisitioned staffroom.

*

"'The British Empire is something to be proud of.'" Simon read out the title of the YouGov report which described their survey finding that most of those surveyed felt pride in the empire. "We did that topic in Year 8."
Holding up the page Simon added, "I mean I think the empire was good 'cause I wouldn't exist without it – since my grandad was born in India."
The group seemed confused as Simon had a similar pale complexion to me.
"So you're Indian?" Lucy asked.
I added another question, hoping to make it less awkward, "Was he from a British family that went to India?"

"No, ah, so – British people came over, intermingled with Indians, they made babies with each other – became the Anglo-Indians – and then so there was 'pure Indian' which was like the lowest –"
"And then the bloodline was tainted with Brits," Lucy interjected.
"Yeah, yeah," Simon waved away her remark before continuing, "You have pure Indian which was seen as like lower class, Anglo-Indian which was middle-class and the British were the higher class. And then the Anglo-Indians tend to stay within their bit, so did the Indians and so did the British."
In the interim Lucy had picked up an article about Brexit and immigration and said, "sounds like my dad" before pausing. "I don't agree with him" she added hastily.
"What does your dad say?" I asked.
"He's racist."
"Oh dear," responded Simon.
It was an entirely serious 'oh dear', the kind of 'oh dear' you say when you don't know what else to say.
"He's like" – Lucy put on a gruff voice – "'They're stealing our jobs! They don't deserve to be here.'"
"Oh my god," said Simon quietly.
"He's like they should go back to their country. That's my dad about anyone who's not British. But I don't think that because I understand the definition of racism."
"Was school a part of that at all?" I probed.
"No, because I grew up in a very multicultural area, so I grew up around more people who aren't British than actual British people, so they are just human so" – Lucy laughed – "just let 'em be."

*

The way these students constructed themselves and what was important to them is not 'naturally constituted'. Rather this vignette speaks to how 'identity is a source of agency in action' (see Chapter 3). The particular meanings Simon constructs from his connection to India and Lucy's decision to mock (and distance herself from) her father, are not 'given' by their situations. This illustrates Hall's point that

> "identity is always the product of identification. It is the product of taking a position of staking a place in a certain discourse or practice. Of saying, this is for the moment who I am and where I stand. And that positional notion of identity enables one then to speak from that place, to act from that place" (2019: 315).

They are however taking these stands in amongst many contingencies, choosing how to relate to accidents of birth they had no choice in.

Overdetermination

In these explorations of the contingencies of students' discourses of empire it is tempting to try to pinpoint exactly where particular discourses 'come from' in any individual case. However, this quickly runs into the problem that these discourses are overdetermined, making trying to argue that one source is *the* source somewhat unhelpful. This overdetermination is present in my analysis of Maria's construction of imperial mobility but it can also be illustrated with an analysis of James's construction of imperial control. James, an English boy racialised as white living in a village near Walton, chose 'Other' instead of one of the pre-written four responses to the question on empire's legacy. Choosing 'Other' invites students to write in an alternative response and James wrote: "I think that British colonialism had both ups and downs, in some cases it really didn't help any countries and exploited them for money but in others they improved health situations and gave them a control that they needed." The survey format then still asked for an elaboration of why James chose/wrote this 'Other' answer, to which he responded: "I think that the British had very controversial morals when taking countries." Focusing here on the *discourses of value*, how might the provenance of these particular discourses – 'improved health situations' and 'gave them a control that they needed' – be understood? In terms of health, James had the OUP textbook which mentions vaccinations (see Chapter 6), or this may have been mentioned at KS3 (see the discussion of Walton and KS3 in Chapter 5). As we know however from Riley, students do not necessarily need this discourse to be part of their secondary schooling in order to make use of it. Similarly, 'gave them a control that they needed' may or may not be derived from MEP, in that it could be a particular decoding of the OUP book's 'advantages' in the Raj such as British legal systems or that Britain 'helped settle ancient feuds between rival areas and regions' according to the OUP book.

It seems marked however for James to be referencing material from the textbook that was not discussed at all in his MEP classes. Despite Mark's not speaking to any *discourses of value* during the MEP module (in my own decoding anyway) James responded to the question of "What did you think of the way your teacher presented the British Empire? For example, do you feel anything was under or overemphasized?" by emphasising Mark's balance: "I think our teacher presented it [empire] brilliant as he showed no bias and told us that there were good, and bad things that have happened." To take the focus away from schooling and towards his home environment, James conveyed a sense of bristling against the views of conservative relatives, but being resigned to these intergenerational differences. This conservative environment coupled with a different generational identity (and a critical teacher with whom he had a good relationship) also provides a relational explanation for the ambivalence in James' responses: on the one hand, James affirms traditionally conservative values of order and control and on the other hand he pushes back on conservative narratives of empire when he said that the module "has helped me realise that we as a country certainly are not perfect, and were not in the past even though we did try and sugar coat it." The comment that empire 'gave them a control that they needed' also connects to older and more diffuse perceptions of hazardous Oriental anarchy without the British. For example, Satia describes how Seeley constructed colonial rule as "providing stability for India's own ethical failure in tending towards anarchy rather than nationhood" (2020: 122). To argue for the monocausality of any of these factors would be to miss their coalescence.

Free Agents

In terms of self-making, a prominent theme in speaking to students about how they developed their views on empire was their perception of their own autonomy. While the caricature of Britain's Gen Z (discussed briefly in Chapter 1) is of a herd-following ('snowflake') generation, this

is deeply at odds with students' self-presentation. Students saw themselves as curators of a diverse array of sources of information and were strongly invested in a sense of having their 'own opinion'. This was expressed by a Ferryhall student who described how "some Youtubers when they speak out also influence me with their views. My parents and relatives also influence my views – well some not all, but I never fully agree with family. So I do have a view of my own." This sense of students as curators, making considered judgements about what to pick out of a wide array of options has a link with the balance sheet and MEP which I explore below.

One question Hall provokes us to ask about identity is why would subjects take the positions which they do if multiple possible options exist: 'an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires, not only that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position'. Here I want to offer one possible reason students invest in the kinds of neutral or even-handed subject positions about empire: this demonstrates that they are aware of 'both sides' and that stating this range of awareness enables their self-presentation as both knowledgeable and autonomous. As well as helping to explain students' own *discourses of ambiguity* about empire it also helps to explain why students might decode largely critical messages about empire as 'balanced'. This is because perceiving their learning as 'balanced' (as giving them 'both sides') facilitates their self-understanding as navigators of a full range of views. For example, reflecting wider sentiments, one student at Walton wrote that "I like the way that it's taught – we are given the facts and sources but are able to make up our own opinion" while another echoed this by saying that the teaching was "very balanced and our teacher didn't tell us what to think." Students channelling their praise for Mark through the epithet of 'balanced' is therefore another means of validating their own intellectual autonomy.

The desires I am alluding to here are similar to what I had described in Chapter 5 about the affective and self-making attractions of bothsiderism. What might be particular to students however is that these desires may also be imbricated with a generational identity that contains an aversion to being seen as 'close-minded', which they perceive the older members of their families to be. Similarly, as the comments above about social media suggest, students wish to present themselves as competent managers of conflicting information while living through the possibilities and pressures of being a generation more saturated with 'information' than would have been imaginable a few short decades ago.

Another means for students to construct autonomy runs largely counter to the balance sheet: by pointing to the whitewashing of empire. Instead of a bothsiderist avenue to delineating the freethinking self from the dogmatic other, here freedom of thought is claimed through identifying the imperial apologist as the dogmatic other. (Perhaps by me pointing this out, I am – in a roundabout way – trying to claim the appearance of some kind of faux neutrality myself. This underscores the attraction of such claims to neutrality.) The autonomous self could be achieved through either positioning MEP as part of a broader societal apologia (as Hamza does) or as an unflinching account of empire which exposes this whitewashing (as Chelsea does). Students at All Saints were split in this way as some accused the module of glorifying the empire ("I think there are parts where they made it look like the best thing that happened in the whole world whilst it killed so many people in the process") and others praised it for being an exposé ("The module was presented in a way to expose the flaws and wrongdoings the British empire has done and therefore breaks the cycle of oppression of the mind in school systems"). While All Saints students with the former view were mistrustful of the exam board and the textbook (likely as these depersonalised actors were considered purveyors of 'official histories' and thus were inherently suspect for these

anti-establishment students), all the All Saints students I spoke to trusted their teachers' narratives. Nick at Ferryhall – who also distrusted the specification and textbook (as it presented imperialists as "better than what they possibly were") – applied the kinds of logics of source analysis to his teacher's narratives and said that "as the teacher was English, I feel that it was made in a certain way to make England look better." If the *bothsiderist* mode of claiming autonomy is potentially linked to the practices of assessment in history education (i.e. giving 'balanced' answers in tests), then this *critical* mode of claiming autonomy is also potentially linked to practices of assessment (source questions). These accounts of whitewashing mirror a common argument made in source analysis: that 'the source is produced by someone from [Country X] and so paints [Country X] in a flattering light'. However, my central point here is that regardless of whether 'bias' is located within or outside the module, or indeed whether 'bias' is a product of a lack of proper 'balance' or a lack of criticism of empire, students are eager to be seen as free thinkers about empire, much like the adults of previous chapters.

Students on the Impact of the Module – or – How Students Make Use of History

The reason for the dual title to this section is an attempt to show the development of my own thinking, from a concern with the 'impact' of the module (on passively constructed students) to a more agentive frame of students actively shaping what role this module plays in their lives. Another change in my thinking that was catalysed by my dialogue with students was that this 'impact' or role of the module can be something other than changing students' views from A to B. Most students reported that the module did not change their views on migration or empire but that rather through the module they learnt more historical detail which they did not know before. The module could still however play a role in that it was seen by many students as a form of reassurance of their worldview. It might be reassuring for Stacy because the module had 'positives

and negatives of the empire' while for Harris it was the critical elements of the module which stood out to him and which felt affirming. When asked in Survey A whether the module had changed his views he replied, "No I always knew it was pretty bad, it just reassured me our country is built on the backs of other people." However here I want to focus on the role of the module for All Saints students where this reassurance had a protective quality to it.

*

Abigail: "Did you feel the module was helpful?"

Chido: "I feel like it really comes in handy because in this age of like social media you have people saying things but they clearly don't have that contextual background knowledge of how things came to be ... I think I saw somewhere, I was watching a video, under the comments they were talking about how like um, the British people brought civilisation to different countries and I was like obviously that's not true. They were obviously civilized – there were examples that these African countries were already civilised before Britain went into those countries and countries like India ... they wanted things from those countries which is why they invaded them, but the countries were already civilised and they already had a set way of life. It just shows to me like how the West sets what is civilization."

Deborah: "Akuba showed me this video this morning about Piers Morgan and this woman was like 'what do you think about the British empire' and then he was like 'I don't think it's bad but you know there are some aspects of it that could've been negative but overall I think it's not too bad.' That's what he was saying and now thinking like wow how a lot of people they don't understand like – I don't know if he was taught about the British Empire. If he was taught then I don't see how he could see that"

Marlene: "Maybe he didn't experience the bad of the British Empire"

Akuba: "Yeah, 'cause he's on the other side."

Marlene: "It's just weird to think that even though time's moved on it's basically the same thing that's just repeating itself with different victims. I think it [MEP] kind of proves a point – an opinion that I did have. I could use the course like the Aliens Act and say immigrants aren't coming here and taking your jobs and that's basically what Brexit is about. You can see it a lot like replicating itself, like with the British Brothers' League and the English Defence League ...the brothers thing – it was so creepy – that guy I can't say his first name... he's basically the male version of Priti Patel but in the 1950s."

Abigail: "Does that make learning about this empowering or just sad?"

Marlene: "It's important to have the knowledge because for example you have a conversation with a Tory who talks about immigrants taking our jobs. It's nice to know I can have historical knowledge to back up what I've said, like … there's no evidence to support what you're [the Tory is] saying. So, it's empowering I guess."

Chido: "Imagine someone is being racist, I would know that they're being racist but how can I say something – how can I defend myself without knowledge? You need knowledge to be able to articulate yourself well and to make sure its impact and that person – to teach them right because you need to teach other people who don't know. And me who didn't know anything until I came to this school. I feel like it really helped me and now I link things together, link things that happened."

Deborah: "I feel like the fact that we're taught about the British Empire is so important because you know how there's some people that say oh there's all these immigrants taking our jobs and stuff and at the same time like we're learning about it, and why immigrants came here in the first place."

*

These students felt assured by their MEP knowledge and framed it as a resource which could help defend them from the unofficial aspects of the hostile environment, that is, the rhetoric from a broad range of actors including political elites in the media as well as interlocuters on and offline. As young women racialised as black in a marginalised part of the city, they moved through the world in positionalities under siege and this fundamentally shaped their relationship to the module. In this way, classroom knowledge is given purpose by 'the everyday' rather than the everyday merely being an obstacle to be overcome (as it is framed in powerful knowledge approaches). The distinction between powerful knowledge and critical socioculturalism which I am drawing out here is a difference in narratives of learning. The former sees student's prior conceptions as something to be overcome through learning (by replacing it with powerful knowledge), while the latter sees these prior conceptions as integral to the process of learning itself. These students are demonstrating that the meanings derived from classroom knowledge and the purposes to which that knowledge is put is itself dependent on students' everyday knowledge and how they are located in a particular sociocultural context.

This was also the case for students at Ferryhall, where sleek cars drove through leafy lanes to pick students up at the end of the school day. Many of these students, particularly the Year 12s looking back on MEP after two years, felt that they had previously been naïve about the British Empire. Kevin spoke up first and his narrative was greeted by nods and mmms by his classmates:

> "When we're younger, we're kind of taught about the British Empire, and how like cool it was and great it was but in kind of like, Empire and Migration we study you know how unethical it was and the bad practices they did and stuff like that – that changed my perspective a lot on that … so we look at advertising campaigns like the soap and stuff like that and how racist they used to be… Or we learnt about the Boer war which is not a great thing in British history and stuff like that – so they don't kind of skip out stuff."

It is striking that even though the module was not fresh for Kevin, he could still remember the textbooks' images of 19th century Pears soap adverts of back skin being 'washed' white.[92] After Kevin voiced this narrative in the focus group, others described the module as transformative in their written responses:

> "I thought the British Empire helped USA, it didn't. Didn't really help anyone."
> "It changed my perspective on it from when I was younger (used to think it was good) but I think we were quite unethical (e.g. slave trade)."

Marcus, having watched his white peers at Ferryhall experience a more critical history of empire for the first time, wrote that: "The thing is Britain and British history is known through the years as being very good at brushing things under the carpet that weren't too nice – fortunately it's [MEP's] throwing light on them because a lot of people grow up thinking that the British Empire is so perfect." The module thus seemed to have been most transformative for those students for whom

[92] Both textbooks used Pears adverts. As the OUP book explained: "Soap was first used widely in the Victorian period and became a symbol of how clean, civilised and racially superior the British were. This advert links the idea of 'cleanliness', 'whiteness' and 'superiority' together" (Bruce et al., 2016: 40).

MEP offered narratives of empire that are virtually absent from their own lifeworlds outside of class.

For this transformation to take place other contingencies (and the will to be transformed) need to be in place. In Survey A, Dale described what the module conveyed about empire as the idea that "there are positives and negatives about Britain" and when asked "In what ways, if any, has being taught this module shaped your own views on the British Empire?" he replied that: "I still think that Britain is the best country and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the British Empire." The trouble with pandemic-era surveys is that I couldn't ask a follow up question about what Dale meant by 'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the British Empire'. It might be related to his other comments about the British Empire 'protecting our country' (potentially in the World Wars) or perhaps his family biography tied to empire, potentially in similar ways to Simon. Although Dale gives the impression that MEP challenged him in some way ('I *still* think that Britain is the best country'), he manages to contain this threat to his worldview. He can explain the events he's learning about through different devices: a cutthroat realist international system with every state out for themselves and changes in these international normative standards over time (see Table 11). Therefore whether the module is transformative (and if so, how it is transformative) is shaped by students' agentive identifications.

My last point on the different roles the module plays for different students emphasises students' wider context and puts two fans of the MEP module in dialogue with each other in order to draw out the importance of these contexts. Marlene had said that for her the module emphasised that "it's basically the same thing that's just *repeating itself* with different victims" while for Kevin it underscored "how racist they *used to be*." Marlene and Kevin constructed contrasting

temporalities of British racism and had correspondingly different experiences of 'the same' histories. To put them in dialogue again:

> Kevin: "We can see how we've kind of developed as like a society and how something that was so socially acceptable back then would be completely out of order now. It's like, all the racism in the British Empire and the bad decisions we can kind of see how over time we developed and like improved in pretty much in everything."
>
> Marlene: "There was a racist thing that happened on the bus and it was so bad. People from our class were talking about the history and like migration and how they had to come back to this country – they were coming by the Windrush – and it's literally happened like in front of our faces so it's so relevant to now, to today."

Marlene's lived experiences meant she could not 'contain' racism in the past in the same way as Kevin. As another Ferryhall student said of empire, "I'm glad it's over." Whether students see the racism of the imperial past as temporally bounded or – as Marlene put it – 'replicating itself' is imbricated with their everyday knowledge.

The extent to which history classrooms can intervene in this foreshortening of racism is ambiguous. In terms of the specifications, MEP comes closer to the present than most history modules although there is no explicit instruction in the specifications to characterise imperial racism as extending into 21st century Britain. In light of Downing Street's Sewell report denying the existence of structural racism in contemporary Britain, any such attempt to formalise a narrative about contemporary racism in specifications seems likely to meet with pushback. While examination-driven content is unlikely to emphasise this theme, the fluidity of a friendly classroom space could open up opportunities to engage these questions. As I found in my fieldwork, students and history teachers often discuss the parallels of past and present, given the time and relationships to do so.

Conclusion

Students critiqued empire, saw value in empire and above all were ambivalent about empire, often opting to make use of balance sheet framings. They used both indeterminate even-handed balance sheet framings as well as imbalance sheet framings which 'picked a side'. However, this was not the major schism which emerged between students. The major schism was between those for whom empire is a legitimate controversy where opposing arguments should be carefully acknowledged (like the question of the most significant factor that led to the outbreak of WWI) and those students for whom empire is unambiguously an illegitimate project and that debate over this status belongs to a bygone era (like that on the existence of climate change). Either of these discursive strategies are amenable to self-making claims that this approach is the opposite of the dogma that students see in the adult world around them. As reiterated in Chapter 5, identities are, after all, constituted by the Others they exclude.

While the balance sheet played a larger role in some teaching/textbooks than in others, this did not itself determine which students used balance sheet framings themselves. I've argued that students' framings of empire are overdetermined, the coalescing of multiple factors such as students' agentive identifications, their wider context and their schooling. While it has been long acknowledged in history education that students do not come to class as 'blank slates', my contention here is that students are also not uniformly moved into the same understandings by history curricula as powerful knowledge's 'overcoming' narrative suggests. My analysis of students' meaning making demonstrates that what students bring to class is not overcome by classroom knowledge, but rather that the ways in which students integrate (or resist) classroom discourses are undergirded by their 'everyday' ideas about the world and their position within it. While MEP

embodies what many have hoped for in England (the opportunity to study the British empire in an extended way) this in itself cannot – to use Bernstein's phrase – compensate for society.

Chapter Eight: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Student Discourses

Introduction

This chapter turns to a different group of schools, students and methods than the previous findings chapters. Leaving Ferryhall, Walton and All Saints behind for the time being, this chapter is a deep dive on the quantitative and qualitative findings from one question of Survey B conducted with 7 different schools. In this introductory section I will set out a few important caveats before describing this new sample in more detail. The chapter is structured by means of three of the research questions:

- What discourses of empire do students express over the course of the module?
- How are students' discourses changing over the course of the module if at all?
- How do these discourses relate to identity?

Although Survey B contained more questions than I address here (see Appendix A for the full list of survey questions), as the doctoral project evolved and became more focused on balance sheet framings the survey question on empire's legacy became more central than the rest of the survey. Before this narrowing of focus, the survey findings comprised of several chapters and involved more sophisticated statistical analysis which would have required additional discussions in the methodology and conceptual framework chapters. Much of this content became extraneous to the key arguments of the dissertation and as a result I have pared it down to the most relevant elements and used a simpler numerical description. Nonetheless, even considering the previous longer quantitative analysis chapters, as small-scale survey research this component of the dissertation is more exploratory in nature than the other elements, often producing more questions than answers. Due to the gap between what was possible to do during covid and the demands of a quantitative paradigm, I have framed my results tentatively and signalled where further research is required. Lastly, I have not highlighted between-school differences in the chapter partly because

this requires more detailed statistical treatment than possible in my pared-down chapter and partly because this was addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 with richer school-level data than available for the survey-only schools.

Composition of the sample

The table below describes the composition of the sample of students in the survey-only schools. The two columns on the right include only students studying MEP, while the two columns to their left include students across all 7 of the survey-only schools (studying MEP, *Health and the People* [HATP] and *Power and the People* [PATP]). Within these groups, the table also distinguishes between the bigger group of students who completed the baseline survey and the smaller subset of students who completed *both* the baseline and endline survey.

Variable		All schools		MEP schools only	
		Students who did baseline survey	Students who did baseline & endline survey	Students who did baseline survey	Students who did baseline & endline survey
Module	MEP	91 (71%)	52 (70%)	91 (100%)	52 (57%)
	HATP	33 (25%)	19 (26%)		
	PATP	4 (3%)	3 (4%)		
	Total	128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (57%)
MEP/Non-MEP	MEP	91 (71%)	52 (70%)	91 (100%)	52 (57%)
	Non-MEP	37 (29%)	33 (30%)		
	Total	128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (100%)
Schools	MEP 1	24 (19%)	7 (10%)	24 (26%)	7 (14%)
	MEP 2	18 (14%)	11 (15%)	18 (20%)	11 (21%)
	MEP 3	26 (20%)	18 (24%)	26 (29%)	18 (35%)
	MEP 4	23 (18%)	16 (22%)	23 (25%)	16 (31%)
	HATP 1	11 (9%)	7 (10%)		
	HATP 2	22 (17%)	12 (16%)		
	PATP 1	4 (3%)	3 (4%)		
	Total	128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (100%)

Gender	Boys	46 (36%)	23 (31%)	31 (34%)	18 (35%)
	Girls	74 (59%)	49 (66%)	53 (58%)	33 (64%)
	Gender minority	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
	Left blank	7 (6%)	1 (1%)	6 (7%)	0 (0%)
	Total	128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (100%)
Ethnicity I (Office for National Statistics census terminology and structure) [1]					
White	English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	40 (31%)	28 (39%)	29 (32%)	19 (37%)
	Irish/Gypsy or Irish Traveller/ Other White	15 (12%)	8 (11%)	11 (12%)	8 (15%)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic group	White and Black Caribbean/ White and Black African/ White and Asian	3 (2%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	2 (4%)
	Other Mixed	3 (2%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	2 (4%)
Asian/Asian British	Indian	4 (3%)	3 (4%)	2 (2%)	2 (4%)
	Pakistani	4 (3%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	Bangladeshi	4 (3%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
	Chinese	3 (2%)	2 (3%)	3 (3%)	2 (4%)
	Other Asian	7 (5%)	5 (7%)	6 (7%)	4 (8%)
Black/African/ Caribbean/ Black British	African	8 (6%)	8 (11%)	5 (6%)	5 (10%)
	Caribbean	3 (2%)	2 (3%)	2 (2%)	1 (2%)
	Black British [2]	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	3 (3%)	0 (0%)
Other ethnic group	Arab/Any other ethnic group	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)
Left blank		29 (23%)	8 (11%)	22 (24%)	5 (10%)
Total		128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (100%)
Ethnicity II (Broad groupings for analysing baseline/endline differences)	White	55 (42%)	36 (49%)	40 (44%)	27 (21%)
	Black	14 (11%)	10 (14%)	10 (11%)	6 (16%)
	South Asian	14 (11%)	10 (14%)	5 (5%)	5 (13%)
	Other [3]	16 (13%)	10 (14%)	14 (15%)	9 (17%)
	Left blank	29 (23%)	8 (11%)	22 (24%)	5 (10%)
	Total	128 (100%)	74 (100%)	91 (100%)	52 (100%)

[1] To avoid statistical disclosure some groups are banded here which are not banded in the ONS census.

[2] Although 'Black British' appears in one of the headings ['Black, African, Caribbean or Black British'] of the 2011 census questionnaire on which I modelled this survey question, there is no ONS census option for 'Black British'. The options on the census are 'African'; 'Caribbean'; 'Any other Black, African or Caribbean background'. That my survey question had 'African'; 'Caribbean'; 'Black British' was therefore an error and a deviation from the census structure. However, three students did identify as 'Black British' over 'African' or 'Caribbean' and likely here 'Black British' played a similar role to that played by 'Any other Black, African or Caribbean background' in the census questionnaire.
[3] Here 'Other' includes: Mixed/Multiple ethnic group, Chinese, Other Asian, Other ethnic group.

What discourses of empire do students express over the course of the module?

As the group at the centre of the thesis is 'students who study MEP', the analyses in this section will look specifically at the students in the survey sample who studied MEP instead of at the entire sample of students. The overall sample (and differences between students studying different modules) will be addressed in a later section. Table 13 and Figure 3 describe MEP students' quantitative baseline responses to the question: 'How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?'

Table 13: MEP students' quantitative baseline responses: How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?

Responses	Number and percent of MEP students
(1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies.	2 (2%)
(2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.	27 (30%)
(3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful.	44 (48%)
(4) The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.	18 (20%)
Total	91 (100%)

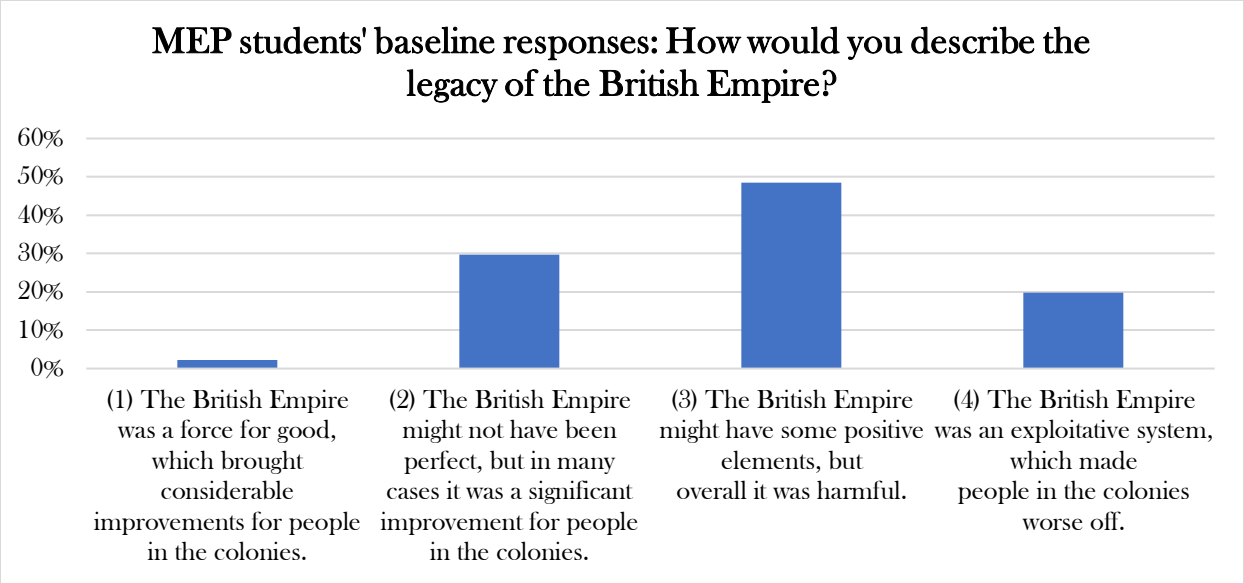


Figure 3: MEP students' baseline responses: How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?

Nearly half of MEP students chose (3) and nearly 80% chose either (3) or (4). While students choosing (3) in their qualitative open-text responses (see below) often affirmed the concept of 'imperial benefits' to colonised peoples, the quantitative data does suggest that overall this sample of students is critical of the impact of British imperialism even before studying the MEP module. However, 20% chose (2) and so favourable assessments of imperialism's impact are also present in these classrooms, although only in their qualified form of (2). Unalloyed assessments of the benefits of empire for colonised peoples were much rarer with only two students out of ninety-one choosing (1). This quantitative baseline picture provides an introduction to its qualitative counterpart below (in relation to the open-text component of the question which asked students to justify their answers of (1), (2), (3), (4) or Other).

Similarly to Chapter 7's ethnographic sample, *discourses of critique* were the strongest theme among the survey-only sample of MEP students. In descending order of prominence, sub-themes included: *economic exploitation*; *violent conquest and suppression*; and *racial and cultural*

hierarchies each of which I will discuss in more detail shortly. (Some students described one or multiple subthemes in their responses, while others with vaguer answers did not mention any of these subthemes.) The single most frequent critique was to characterise empire as embroiled in enslavement, e.g. "[empire] very much thrived of the slave trade" and "for their own well-being they exploited people, for example with the slave trade". I categorised references to slavery in critiques of empire under *economic exploitation* although enslavement demonstrates the interconnections between economic exploitation, violence and racism. Often students spoke to *economic exploitation* in vague terms – e.g. "Because now the former British colonies are seen to be less well off because of British exploitation." However other students also described more specific actions such as plundering resources or taking land and also made reference to lasting inequalities.

The subtheme *violent conquest and suppression* centres the political sphere instead of the economic sphere, describing invasion and conflict. Students described how imperialism was harmful because "England invaded other countries and claimed them as their own." As well as the more concrete references to "causing wars" and "taking lives", this sub-theme also encompassed more conceptual elements in that here students characterised imperialism as illegitimate on the grounds that it precluded sovereignty and lacked consent of the governed. As one student put it, "having an empire meant countries lost freedom and independence and were restrained to follow the orders of the country they had been taken over by." I have included 'suppression' in the sub-theme title to capture how students not only critiqued initial seizing of territory but also the recursive repression of resistance and independence movements in occupied territories.

Students brought attention to *racial and cultural hierarchies*, describing how colonialists "made their people subject to racism." At times, students pointed to how these are still influential, "The British Empire and the ideas of nationalism it brought helped to create the systems that enforce racism and classism that we still see today." These hierarchies could be expressed in terms of both culture and race: "[empire] led to erasing the identity and culture of some as well as treating others as if they were inferior purely due to their skin colour." Imperialism was seen as a process of imposing one culture while destroying others, that imperialists "attempted to stamp out many ancient cultures and traditions of the native people." Students differed as to whether this destruction of cultures was total or not.

Another supra-theme concerns *discourses of value*, what students saw as those things which made empire 'good'. In relation to this, I generated the sub-themes of *development*, *benefits to Britain* and *significance* in descending order of prominence. *Development* may be expressed in general terms, e.g. "If it weren't for the British empire, most of the colonies would be extremely underdeveloped." However, it could also include more specific formulations, e.g. 'positive things' empire was positioned as 'bequeathing' to colonised peoples: jobs, healthcare, education, infrastructure (especially railways), sanitation and English. I had considered making 'trade' a subtheme apart from *development*, but it most frequently appeared as another 'positive thing' specifically 'given' by empire and placed alongside these other 'positive things' within the same overarching umbrella. For example, "It developed trade and gave the colonies infrastructure" and "the empire made some improvements (technology and trade) to the countries within it."

Students described *benefits to Britain* such as how "the empire helped Britain expand" and "the British Empire had a positive impact on Brits and was a source of national pride."[93] Although the students often referenced *benefits to Britain*, the survey question only asked about how empire affected "people in the colonies."[94] This seems to be a product of the likeness of the survey question to balance sheet activities which, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, often include consideration of 'advantages to the British'. These remarks also suggest the ways in which imperial logics described by the module (the motivations of British empire building) can come to be seen as legitimate by students – that accomplishing these goals were 'positives'.

The sub-theme of *significance* shares some of the spirit of *benefits to Britain* in that it is more about 'Britain' than 'people in the colonies'. The *significance* sub-theme is potentially a product of history education's second order concept of 'significance', that is, whether and how events were particularly remarkable and/or later hold a place in collective memory and/or caused large changes for the future. Students seemed to conflate the significance of empire with it being a force for 'improvement', e.g. students explaining his choice of (2) by way of adding that it was "Because [empire] was significant". This was not unusual. Another student wrote, "The British Empire caused many significant events to happen, some good and some bad. The British Empire is an important factor in today's history and played a large part in many significant occurrences which impacted today's society." Using evocative imagery, another explained that, "Because it was the largest the world has ever seen, and its legacy can still be felt keenly today, for better or worse. The

[93] This sub-theme is perhaps more clearly expressed in an endline response to this question from an MEP student (excluded here because it was endline, not baseline). In explaining why he chose (2), he wrote: "because it did have its flaws but it's worked out decent for us today."

[94] It is also possible that in my attempt to avoid terms like 'natives' (by instead using the phrase 'people in the colonies') I created confusion about whether this referred to British settlers. However it seems clear from students' responses that they are here not only referring to settlers but to 'the mother country'.

territories it controlled ranged from tiny islands to vast segments of the world's major continents." These students in explaining their choice of (2) [mostly 'good'] made no reference to other *discourses of value* which implies that despite these framings (of 'some good and some bad', 'for better or worse'), significance in itself was seen by them as a 'good'. The discourse of *significance* resonates with the emphases of the Paxman clip, so much so that I had placed an endline response by an MEP student under *significance* before realising that he had copy-pasted the blurb from the BBC Teach clip as his survey answer.[95]

While students combined different sub-themes in their responses, what is of particular interest within this dissertation is the combination of *discourses of critique* and *discourses of value*, in other words, balance sheet formulations. In their open-text baseline responses relatively few students only deployed *discourses of value*. There was however an equal number of MEP students who combined *critique* and *value* and MEP students who only deployed *discourses of critique*. Looking only at those students who chose (2) or (3), most used a combination of *critique* and *value*. For example, "I agree that it did have some positive elements, helping the development of some of its colonies, however the overwhelming atrocities that arose as a result of the Empire heavily outweigh any good it may have done." The structure of the question and in particular the middle responses of (2) and (3) encourage such combinations, which I refer to as *discourses of ambivalence*. What is striking about some *discourses of ambivalence* are that these can be formulated even with references to enslavement or extreme violence (similarly to some KS3 activities, discussed in

[95] This was "The Empire brought blood and suffering to millions, but it also brought railways, roads and education. For good or ill, much of the world is the way it is today because of the Empire, from the way it looks, to the sports people play, from the religion we practise, to the language we speak" (BBC Teach, 2016). The added instructions for teachers attached to the clip are "Ask the students to consider if it is futile to try to make a simple good or bad judgement on something like the British Empire. Ask students to make a list of the effects revealed and hinted at in this clip. After further reflection, students should then put the list into an order of *significance*" [my emphasis].

Chapter 5). For instance, a student described how "Even though the British empire was involved with the slave trade, it brought Britain and its colonies technical and moral superiority." (The reference to 'moral superiority' also suggests a validity to the civilising project).

One specific *discourse of ambivalence* deserves further mention which is the sub-theme of *successful and failed colonies*. Here students achieve balance sheet-type responses without combining different 'positive' and 'negative' effects of empire (that may be simultaneously present in the same colony), but rather by creating a spatial distinction between colonies which flourished and those which did not. While specific cases are not often named – e.g. "[empire] has many cases where it has failed but more cases where the nation came together properly" – in those instances where cases are named, the successes cited are settler colonies which are now white majorities (USA, Australia, Canada).[96] For example, an MEP student contrasted, "Some countries like India were exploited under British reign and others like Canada have prospered." In formulations of *successful and failed colonies* the racialised distinction between these 'successful' and 'failed' colonies is not mentioned, nor is the decimation of indigenous peoples in 'successful' cases.

The qualitative data resonates with the quantitative data in that both show that students most frequently speak to critiques of imperialism. Their closed responses (through choosing (3) or (4)) and open responses (through *discourses of critique*) both emphasised harmfulness. However, what the qualitative data shows in addition to this is that most MEP students before the module also used *discourses of value* (just over half of MEP students included discourses of value in their open responses). The bulk of this revolved around imperialism as a form of development. Imperialism

[96] New Zealand would theoretically be part of this list, but it was not mentioned by students.

as an engine of development for the colonies was described by 42% of the MEP students in this baseline question. I will return to this sub-theme of development with a more substantive analysis in Chapter 9.

How are students' discourses changing over the course of the module if at all?

In this research project I was interested in how students' ideas were dynamically shifting while they were studying the MEP module. The following sections examine these changes between baseline and endline using a range of different methods which illuminate different aspects of these changes. Note that because not all students who did the baseline survey did the endline survey, the sample used here for looking at change is smaller than the one used for the previous section (52 MEP students compared to 91 MEP students). The baseline responses reported here in Table 14 are also therefore different from the baseline responses reported in Table 13 in the section above.

Table 14: Raw data changes from baseline to endline (MEP students only)

	Closed response choice	Baseline	Endline
Increasing criticality about empire's legacy ↓	(1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	(2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.	19 (36.5%)	14 (26.9%)
	(3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful.	24 (46.2%)	25 (48.1%)
	(4) The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.	9 (17%)	13 (25%)

MEP students' responses still centred on (3), but an increasing number of students chose (4) with the proportion of these responses growing from under a fifth to a quarter of MEP students in this sample. The number of MEP students describing empire as an imperfect improvement for people in the colonies with (2) reduced from a third to a quarter.

Another way of looking at change is to contrast how many students chose:

- the same response in baseline and endline;
- responses more critical of empire's legacy in endline than baseline;
- responses less critical of empire's legacy in endline than baseline.

As responses are given a particular 'status' this formulation is here referred to as 'change status'. Change status for the question on empire's legacy is represented in Table 15 and Figure 4. The largest group kept the same answer between baseline and endline (just over half of students in the sample). However, where students were changing their responses, twice as many students (16 students) increased the criticality of their responses than decreased (8 students). The overall direction of change was increasing criticality about empire's legacy over the course of the module. Moreover, most of those 16 students whose responses increased in criticality, changed from (2) to (3) or (4) meaning that this reflected a significant change in opinion [not only a change of degree such as changing from (1) to (2) or from (3) to (4).] Therefore, changes in these students' understanding of empire were substantial in this period, reassessing whether empire was a means of improving the quality of life for people in the colonies.

Table 15: Within-Student Change Status

	Responses less critical of empire's legacy in endline than baseline	Same response in baseline and endline	Responses more critical of empire's legacy in endline than baseline	Total

Empire's Legacy	8 (15.4%)	28 (53.8%)	16 (30.8%)	52 (100%)

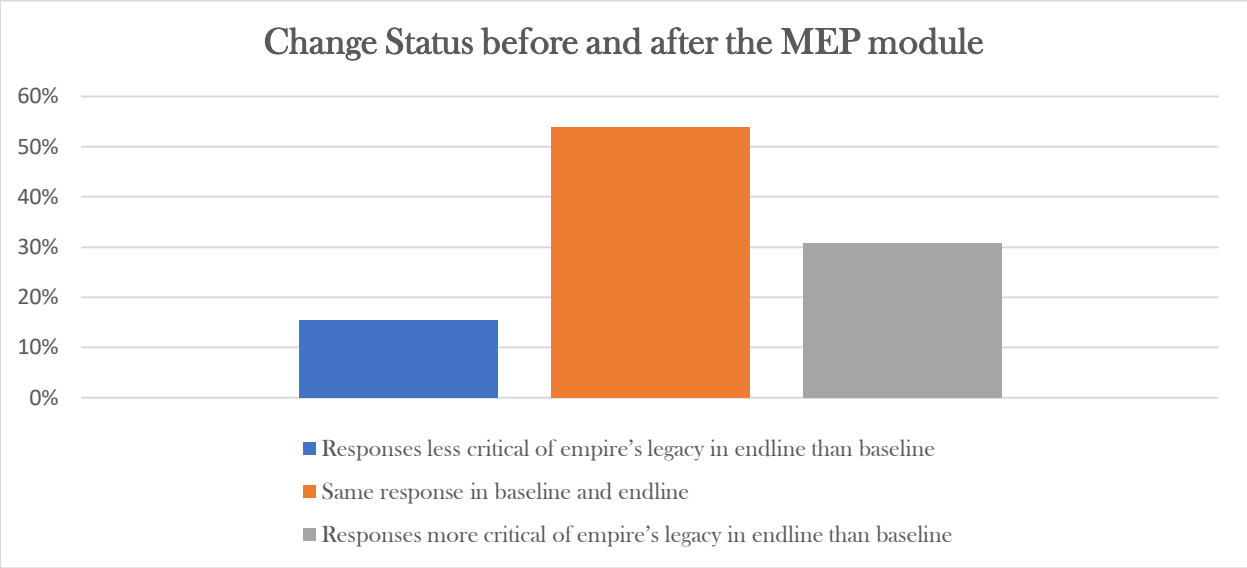


Figure 4: Change Status before and after the MEP module

Students' endline responses were more specific than their baseline responses. Baseline responses often included no references to specific places or events and comprised of vague formulations of 'exploitation' or 'advancements'. However, their endline responses demonstrated further details which are connected to the MEP module. This is most obvious in cases where the new information closely mirrors the textbook, e.g. a students' critique that in the empire included "using sepoys to do dangerous tasks" mirrors the OUP textbook's description that sepoys "were often the first to be sent to the most dangerous places" (Bruce et al. 2016: 222). Less directly, however, students often added new references to 'India' and 'Africa' which are the geographical configurations in the Part 3 specifications for MEP. They also referred to specific events mentioned in the module such as the Great Rebellion and the use of scorched earth tactics.

Comparing each MEP students' baseline and endline responses demonstrates that many students added not only new details but new ideas to their responses on empire's legacy which they did not express before the module. These new additions were both new *discourses of critique* and *discourses of value*, however there were more additions of the former than the latter, resonating with the quantitative changes. For example, some students who hadn't spoken to empire's relationship to slavery in their baseline answers did so in their endline responses. More students included references to the sub-themes of *economic exploitation, violent conquest and suppression*, and *racial and cultural hierarchies*, however there were no wholly new sub-themes of *discourses of critique* expressed by any MEP students at endline that were not present in another MEP student's response at baseline.

Discourses of value could also become more specific. For example:

Baseline: "the Empire set in place the foundations for western influence which has helped these countries in the modern world."
Endline: "here were also elements of European society that were introduced and remain today (e.g. the British-style justice system in India)."

Both textbooks made reference to this ["to give the Indians the benefit of British liberties and justice" (Mohamud and Whitburn 2016: 63) and "The British created a legal system based on the one in Britain" (Bruce et al., 2016: 227).] The new additions to some students' endline responses were chiefly about the subtheme of *development*: 'railways', 'education', 'healthcare', 'jobs'. Also, looking to *discourses of value*, there was one element present at endline which was not present at baseline, a subtheme of *togetherness*. This was expressed as empire having *value* in that it facilitated multiculturalism and integration, e.g. "The British empire helped create the current, diverse culture that we have in England that we have today" and "it created international links enabling future cultural integration." This could also be seen as a different dimension to the

benefits to Britain or *significance* subthemes. Students' additions of *discourses of value* (and more specific references within these discourses) suggest that students are not only paying attention to the aspects of the module which are critical of imperialism, but they are also decoding parts of the module as 'imperial benefits'. For some students, new *discourses of value* were accompanied by changes in their closed responses, e.g.

Baseline (3): "Damage was done."
Endline (2): "Improvement of railways and development of language."

Often it was students whose baseline answers were very vague who made their closed responses less critical at endline. While not many students in the sample changed their closed responses to being *less* critical of empire's legacy, it was common for students whose closed responses *remained the same/became more critical* to add new references to particular *discourses of value* to their open responses. This suggests that at times *discourses of value* discussed in the module are experienced by students as 'new' or 'newly relevant for thinking about empire' after doing the module.

Moreover, students were more likely to deploy *discourses of ambivalence* (balance sheet-type combinations of critique and value) at endline than baseline. Of MEP students who completed both baseline and endline surveys, the proportion of those who constructed *discourses of ambivalence* at endline grew by 20% from baseline while those who previously only raised *critiques* at baseline declined by 20%. (The same movement did not occur for those who only deployed *discourses of value* which remained the same size between baseline and endline). This suggests that part of what students may be decoding in the module are not only *discourses of value* themselves, but the idea that they should be expressing their characterisation of empire as 'mixed'.

For example, this student does not change the core of their open response but what changes is the addition of an acknowledgement of 'the opposing side' and *development* in particular:

Baseline: "It just doesn't sound right other countries being in charge of other countries."
Endline: "It did speed up the development of some countries, however I think it is wrong the whole idea of other countries having power over other countries."

Students thus could be said to be further socialised into balance sheet framings during the GCSE.

Of the students whose closed responses changed from (2) to (3) or (4), many changed from a focus on *development* in their baseline responses to a focus on *economic exploitation* in their endline responses (or a dual focus on *development* and *economic exploitation*). It is perhaps surprising that events of mass violence didn't play a larger role in these students' transformations, compared to the construction of imperialism as inhumane commerce. The following is an illustrative example of the movement from *development* to *development* and *economic exploitation*:

Baseline (2): "The British Empire effectively modernised its colonies and therefore improved the lives of ordinary citizens of the said colonies."
Endline: "Although British investment in certain colonies such as the British Raj benefitted certain groups of people (e.g. jobs in trade), the investment was ultimately to exploit the colonies and put profits ahead of people's lives. Although the Empire was harmful overall, the Empire has left its mark on certain colonies as it helped them to industrialise and modernise, e.g. India."

These specific references in the endline response were present in the OUP textbooks (jobs in trade, the industrialisation of India, self-interested investment).[97] Another student directly referenced their learning in their changed perceptions:

Baseline (2): "The British Empire benefited from exploiting many people through slavery etc. However, it also helped people in those colonies to have better access to healthcare and technology."

[97] OUP describes how "Trading in goods not only made money for the traders, but created jobs for both Indians and the British in shipping, transportation and sales.... It is important to consider that these innovations and developments were paid for by British investors, whose priority was to make a profit for themselves rather than improve the life of Indian people" (Bruce et al. 2016, 226). This description from the textbook resonates strongly with the student's endline response.

Endline (4): "At first I thought option 3 because the British empire built so many places,[98] but after learning about how they ruined the lives of a lot of natives living the colonies I do think Britain made people in the colonies worse off."

The implicit and explicit connections between the module and students endline responses suggest that the module played a role in students' increasingly critical attitude towards empire's legacy.

The influence of the module is further illustrated by contrasting the qualitative data between MEP and Non-MEP students. While Non-MEP students spoke to all the same sub-themes of *economic exploitation*, *violent conquest and suppression*, *racial and cultural hierarchies*, *development*, *significance*, *benefits to Britain*, and *togetherness* they tended not to reference particular places, events or specific actions. Compare the following two endline *discourses of ambivalence*:

Non-MEP student: "The British Empire helped to support people and help them, but sometimes enforced rules which negatively affected people's lives and prevented independence."

MEP student: "Some positive elements such as introducing improved infrastructure and better education to colonies can be argued as positive but forcing British culture onto colonies and eradicating original culture is just one example of how overwhelmingly harmful the British Empire was."

Not only were Non-MEP students' endline responses to the question on empire's legacy generally vaguer than MEP students' responses, but they particularly lacked the references to the module contents/constructs seen in MEP students' responses.[99] While MEP students often talked about 'India and Africa', at endline, Non-MEP students spoke about 'third world countries', 'poorer areas' etc. These differences imply that it was not simply that the broader media discussed empire between baseline and endline (see Chapter 1), but that at times students derived their examples from MEP.

[98] It is interesting that the student remembers answering (3) rather than (2), perhaps underestimating the extent to which their views had changed.

[99] An exception to this was *development* where Non-MEP students at baseline and endline would use similar touchstones to MEP students such as 'education', 'medicine', 'technology' etc.

Although it is impossible to rule out all the multiple factors beyond the module which might play a role in students' changing perspectives on empire's legacy, the new MEP references students used in their endline responses suggest the module is relevant to these multi-directional changes. In cases where only the texture of students' discourses change (adding new details), or where their attitudes might be shifting due to wider cultural movements (such as Black Lives Matter), the module may act as a *resource* for students to articulate their views rather than the module being the 'cause' of their views. In other cases, the module itself may be transformative. However, it is not pre-determined that such transformations are all in the direction of increasing criticality about empire's legacy (as some students became less critical of empire after the module). Students also elaborated further *discourses of value* after studying the module and tended more towards constructing *discourses of ambivalence*, both of which could be prompted or reinforced by different iterations of MEP. Therefore, while history education is a contingent aspect of students' discourses, the role the module plays in students' constructions is not determined. In the same vein as the findings of Chapter 7, students could use the module to articulate indictments of imperialism *or* 'balanced' characterisations of empire.

How do these discourses relate to identity?

Instead of focusing only on MEP students, in this discussion of identity I will be looking to the full baseline sample of both MEP and Non-MEP students as this will increase the sample size and help make certain patterns more visible. The first identity to be explored is generational, before discussing gender and, lastly, ethnicity.

Comparing across generations requires looking beyond my own dataset which comprised only of Gen Z respondents. The infamous 2014 YouGov poll (Dahlgreen, 2014) is helpful in this regard, although there are important differences: the YouGov question is posed slightly differently to mine; YouGov offered a 'don't know option'; and my sample was much smaller. However, it is useful that YouGov has disaggregated their data by age group, with their youngest respondents being the last of the millennials (born in 1996). Comparing the results of the YouGov poll in Table 16 with those of my sample in Table 17 suggests a shift is taking place. YouGov's poll found that younger groups were less likely than older groups to feel that countries that were colonised by Britain are better off for being colonised. This pattern could be said to continue in my research. 40% of the last millennials (18–24-year-olds in 2014) in YouGov's poll said these countries were better off, while only 35% of the Gen Z group in my sample chose similar 'better off' responses in the form of (1) or (2). The gap widens comparing this Gen Z sample to YouGov's over 60s as just over *one third* of the Gen Z sample chose 'better off'-type responses while this was closer to *two thirds* of over 60s. While this is a rough comparison, further research might explore the extent of this gap between Gen Z and older generations' attitudes to empire which I have posited here.

Table 16: YouGov 2014 Poll by Age Group

Responses to "Overall do you think the countries that were colonised by Britain are better off or worse off for being colonised?"	**Age Group**			
	18–24-year-olds	25-39-year-olds	40-59-year-olds	60+ year-olds
Better Off	40%	42%	46%	61%
Worse Off	23%	15%	16%	11%

Don't know	37%	42%	38%	28%

Table 17: All students' quantitative baseline responses: How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?

Responses	Number and percent of students
(1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies.	5 (4%)
(2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.	40 (31%)
(3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful.	61 (48%)
(4) The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.	22 (17%)
Total	128 (100%)

In order to discuss gender and ethnicity it is helpful to group (1) and (2) together and (3) and (4) together by labelling the former Low Criticality Responses (LCR) and the latter High Criticality Responses (HCR). This is set out in Table 18.

Table 18: Definition of low and high criticality responses

Low criticality responses (LCR)	High criticality responses (HCR)
(1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies. (2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.	(3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful. (4) The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.

Table 19 uses these LCR/HCR groups to contrast the proportions of girls' and boys' responses. Here I removed those who left the optional gender field on the questionnaire blank from the sample as well as removing gender minorities due to low counts. Girls were more critical of empire's legacy than boys in the quantitative data, which resonates with my findings in the ethnographic sample discussed in Chapter 7. The distribution of sub-themes in the qualitative

survey data was also gendered. Boys spoke more frequently about *development* than girls and in particular 'trade', 'education', 'technology', 'modernisation' and 'jobs' (with the latter two not mentioned by any girls in the sample despite girls being the majority of respondents). Two other *discourses of value* were more likely to be mentioned by girls than boys: *togetherness* and *significance*. Girls described *economic exploitation* and spoke about imperialism's entanglement with slavery more frequently than boys. Changes between baseline and endline reflected similar differences. Boys were more likely to add new references – or more specific references – about *development* to their endline responses. By contrast girls were more likely to add references to *economic exploitation* and *racial and cultural hierarchies* at endline. These differences in the survey data allowed me to notice the more subtle gendered aspects of my ethnographic notes. For example, during a discussion about the aftermath of US independence Mark asked his students:

"If Britain is no longer ruling people who are mainly British, but ruling over other cultures and religions how might that affect Britain itself?"

Alya: "It would bring different food and religion and stuff to Britain."
Dale: "The British didn't like different beliefs – also it'd bring tensions."

This moment of multiculturalism versus a clash of civilisations here symbolises the different gendered lenses applied to MEP and to empire. Moreover, the consistency of gendered differences across the 10 Survey B questions creates a case for further research into whether a generalised political rift is developing between teenage boys and girls in England and if so why.

Table 19: Responses Disaggregated by Gender

	LCRs/HCRs	Boys	Girls
Empire's legacy	Low criticality responses	20 (43.5%)	22 (29.7%)
	High criticality responses	26 (56.5%)	52 (70.3%)
	Total	46 (100%)	74 (100%)

Ethnicity was more challenging to explore. Firstly, many students chose to leave the optional ethnicity field in the questionnaire blank (23% left this blank compared to only 6% leaving it blank for gender). This was ameliorated somewhat by using a drop-down menu and the familiar ONS structure in the endline questionnaire which students seemed more comfortable using than an open-text box. However, the ONS structure collapses identities which may relate differently to imperialism. For example, both Welsh and English students are grouped together. Other groups are also too broad to interpret meaningfully such as 'Any other ethnic group'. The bigger problem was that of low counts across most of the ONS groups. This meant that I had to use an alternative structure, banding white students [N=55], black students [N=14] and South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) [N=12] students and excluding all other groups, including those identifying with the 'Mixed/Multiple ethnic group' categories. Figure 5 compares the proportions of LCRs and HCRs across these three constructed groups.

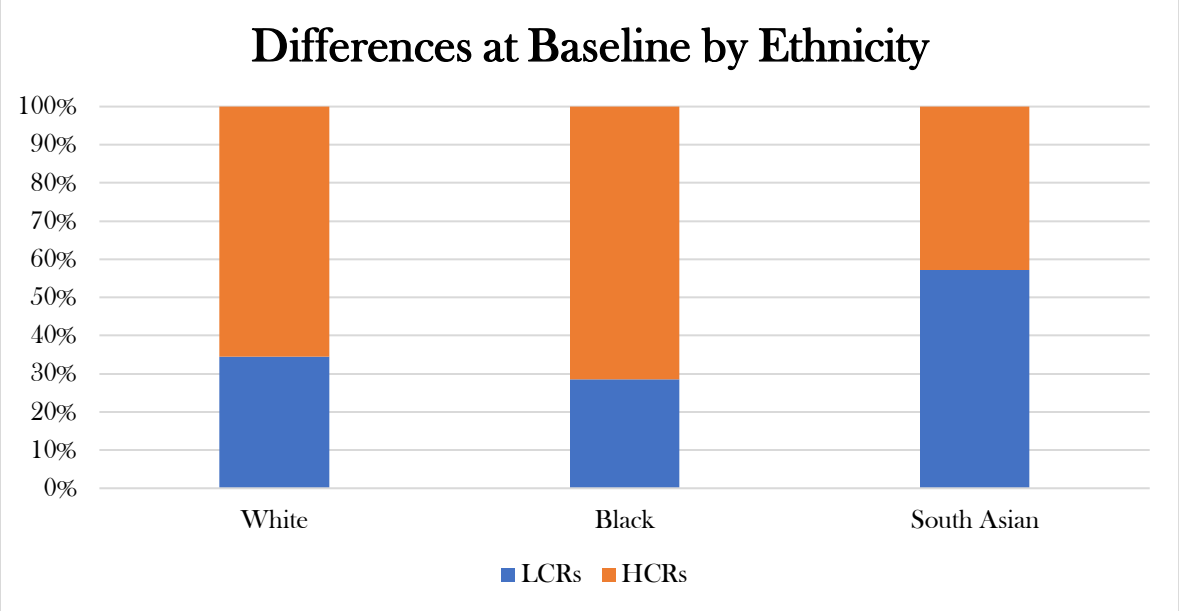


Figure 5: Differences at Baseline by Ethnicity

While the small sample size and the banding of the groups reduce the usefulness of Figure 5, it is nonetheless interesting that in this sample South Asian students had the highest proportion of LCRs. Internally disaggregating the groups again, showed that while other ONS groups mostly chose (3)[100], Indian students were split between (2) and (3) and Pakistani students mostly chose (2). Further research would be required to determine whether this was the product of sampling error/a small and unrepresentative data set or whether it speaks to a systemic pattern in imperial memory among young people of South Asian descent in Britain.

While the proportion of LCRs were higher among these students, every ONS group with more than 3 students – including Black Caribbean, Black African and Black British students – had one or more students with favourable views of empire's legacy. Positive assessments of empire are therefore not exclusive to white students. The philosopher Charles W. Mills reminds readers that ideologies may be imbued with the perspectives of powerful groups, but this does not mean that such ideologies are only held by those powerful groups. In his description of 'white ignorance', Mills writes "the 'white' in 'white ignorance' does not mean that it has to be confined to white people. Indeed ... it will often be shared by nonwhites to a greater or lesser extent because of the power relations and patterns of ideological hegemony involved" (2017: 57).

In 2020, Ipsos Mori conducted a poll using YouGov's formulation of pride/shame with a few differences. Of significance here is that Ipsos Mori disaggregated the results between mixed race (28% empire something to be proud of), black (16% empire something to be proud of), All BAME (22% empire something to be proud of), and white (36% empire something to be proud of) (2020).

[100] Except 'Arab/Any other ethnic group' who were also split between (2) and (3).

It does not specify results for British South Asians, however this poll finds a larger gap between black and white respondents' favourable views of empire than in my small sample (20% vs 6%). Further quantitative research might investigate inter-ethnic differences in views on empire among Gen Z in comparison to these differences among older groups.

In the qualitative data, black students were the least likely to discuss *development* while white and South Asian students were equally likely to use *development* as a *discourse of value*. South Asian students were the only group to characterise imperialism as causing division – "separating many people, countries" – which may have been in reference to the Partition of India. Black students were more likely to reference imperialism's relationship with slavery in this question than the other groups. White students were more likely to co-identify with imperialism in that they might use 'we' and 'us' language to identify with the Britain of the imperial past (some students in all three groups used this language to identify with contemporary Britain, but projecting a longer identification was particular to white students). This is illustrated in comments such as "it made *us* one of the most powerful empires in the world" and "*we* effectively stole resources that weren't *our* own" [my emphasis]. Black and South Asian students occasionally but very rarely referenced their own backgrounds in the empire's legacy question, e.g. "if my country Ghana wasn't colonised it could be one of the most resourceful and richest countries in the world." Conversely, another student wrote that "due to the colonies being unmodernised and bare boned the introduction of English allowed modernisation which made the countries stronger today such as my nation, India." These qualitative connections between students' discourses and their identities complements the quantitative findings that all ethnic groups had an internal diversity of opinions about empire. Together the qualitative and quantitative findings of the survey suggest that while students' ethnic

identity mattered to their discourses of empire, *how* they connected their ethnic identity to empire depended on their other political orientations towards empire.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how MEP students in the survey-only sample were already more orientated towards *discourses of critique* than *discourses of value* before the module. Over the course of the module these students became even more critical of empire's legacy, although most students gave the same closed response before and after the module and some students also saw empire's legacy more favourably after the module. However, a distinctive change was that more students articulated *discourses of ambivalence* after the module which happened in concert with more prominent and detailed descriptions of imperialism as a form of *development* for the colonies. These findings suggests that the module may encourage students to understand empire through a balance sheet framing, even if these balance sheets were unbalanced and 'leaning' towards *discourses of critique*. This resonates both with the classroom observation data from Ferryhall of unbalanced balance sheets as well as the discourses from students discussed in Chapter 7. Other commonalities with Chapter 7 were that girls were more critical of empire's legacy than boys; the suggestion that there is a generational gap between how Gen Z and older generations see empire; and intra-ethnic differences in how students characterised empire's legacy including how some students with heritage in former colonies may characterise empire as 'a good thing' to happen to these places. However, while the ideas with the sub-theme of *development* were occasionally mentioned by students in the ethnographic sample, these ideas were articulated much more frequently in the survey-only data. Students may have found these ideas easier to articulate in private surveys than in focus groups and/or potentially the discrepancy between the

ethnographic and survey findings was a result of volunteer bias: that teachers whose classroom environments had more critical orientations towards empire were more likely to participate in the research. The penultimate chapter reflects in more depth on these discourses of *development* which I have emphasised here as well as offering further analysis on the balance sheet discursive formation in light of the findings of the last four chapters.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I draw together the empirical findings and further develop my analysis of the role that 'balance' plays in structuring students' discourses of empire. While the balance sheet has been subject to principled critiques within history education (Benger, 2022b) and beyond history education (Satia, 2020), the empirical findings of this dissertation can provide a clearer picture of certain *qualities* of balance sheet discourses which have not been made visible in these other critiques. In other words, the use of student-level data is a novel approach to discussions of the balance sheet. This data enables me to ask more granular questions about what work the balance sheet does in student discourses about empire, what assumptions these discourses rely on and reinforce.

While I have discussed the variety of discourses of empire at GCSE (including resistance to balance sheet framings), in order to focus on this 'work' of the balance sheet I will only be addressing participants' use of balance sheet discourses in this chapter. Therefore, this analysis does not pertain to the full datasets of the previous chapters, nor does it imply that there is no resistance in the GCSE to the types of discourses discussed in this chapter. For example, I argue below that the balance sheet discursive formation constructs a homogenised 'the British' as the imperial agent, giving no scope for discussing the relationships between oppression in the metropole and imperial oppression. However, in the specifications and textbooks there is a suggestion of such a relationship in the act of weaving the Highland Clearances and convict transportation into a wider imperial narrative. My point is that such innovations struggle to have wider purchase in the face of the persistence of balance sheet discourses which do not

accommodate them. Additionally, while not all students used balance sheet discourses, I refer in this chapter to 'students' rather than 'some students' for readability although this is somewhat flattening.

The chapter is split into two halves, the first describes the process whereby colonial transformations are rendered as 'assets' and the second describes the 'high modernist' ideology underpinning this. My analysis here has been deeply influenced by my experiences teaching history and political science within an African Studies MSc course. Being immersed in the possibilities of how narratives of coloniality can be taught and discussed has acted as a comparative to balanced sheet discourses, illuminating differences which cannot be reduced to a matter of secondary versus tertiary education. My major contention is that it is not only that balance sheets 'simplify' or 'oversimplify' but rather that there is an important set of qualities and narrative moves to balance sheet discourse to be explicated beyond the question of whether they are overly simplistic. Making simplifications is an inescapable part of education and even of communication, but *which* parts of narratives (whether they are told in simpler or more complex ways) to make visible is nonetheless an important pedagogic choice.

Assets

An image I found helpful in presenting my survey findings visually as a work-in-progress at academic conferences was that of 'red boxes' and 'green boxes'.

Each sub-theme comprised of 'red box' (if it formed part of students' *discourses of critique*, like 'stole resources', 'took land') or a 'green box' (if it formed part of students' *discourses of value*, like 'education' or 'medicine'). This was originally inspired by the Ferryhall KS3 worksheet discussed

in Chapter 5 in which the teacher referred to the blocks on the page as 'boxes'. On my conference slides I depicted these as little drawings of three-dimensional green and red packing boxes, arranged like building blocks in different configurations. Students' survey answers comprised either of single boxes, combinations of green boxes, combinations of red boxes, but combinations of green and red boxes were the most common and even more prevalent after the MEP module. For example, "people in African countries would have experienced racism in their own country from the colonisers. This would have been a negative even if their economy was improved due to the colonisation." As in the student's response above, these arrangements of green and red boxes can take the form of 'moral evil, economic good' as Ndlovu-Gatsheni memorably put it in a critique of balance sheet frameworks for Al Jazeera (2021).[101] While as Ndlovu-Gatsheni's formulation of 'moral evil, economic good' captures this archetypical dynamic in the balance sheet discursive formation more widely, students' discourses are more sporadic, using a greater variety of combinations of red and green boxes. I find the image of boxes productive because firstly these are 'things' which can be given from one person to another and, secondly, they are 'things' which close and contain. Below I describe how these boxes (e.g. 'education', 'healthcare', 'railways') are treated as 'assets', things that are bequeathed and passed on from the agentive owner to the passive recipient.

I have borrowed the term 'assets' from the financial domain (from which the term 'balance sheet' is also drawn). In balance sheet discourse there is already a latent sense of 'assets' juxtaposed with

[101] In his piece for Al Jazeera, Ndlovu-Gatsheni was opposing attempts at Oxford University to use balance sheet framings in a project entitled Ethics and Empire which was launched in 2017. He wrote that "without a real comprehension of the true meaning of colonialism, there are all sorts of dangers of developing a complacent if not ahistorical and apologetic view of it, including the one that argues it was a moral evil with economic benefits to its victims. This view of colonialism is re-emerging within a context where some conservative metropolitan-based scholars of the empire are calling for a 'balance sheet of the empire', which weighs up the costs and benefits of colonialism."

'liabilities'. These types of 'thing' are contained in different columns and kept separate in order to come to a final tally. As I describe in Chapter 5, Sanghera and others take issue with coming to this final tally. However here I want to dwell on the separate columns as themselves doing work in balance sheet discourses. These separate columns enable students' statements such as "There was repressed cultures and the big problem of the slave trade but countries also gained access to technology and education. It allowed for better trading, but it was still harmful as a whole." Here the student separates cultural repression (a red box) and British-style education (a green box) although these are mutually constitutive processes. She also separates enslavement (a red box) and imperial trade (a green box), although the latter was constituted by various forms of unfree labour, including slavery. This segregation inherent in the balance sheet prohibits students from seeing these as interconnected. However, as I argue below, without acknowledging the interconnections students cannot understand the phenomena signified by either the red or green boxes.

Colonial Contexts

In this segregation of mutually constitutive processes, with assets on one side and liabilities on another, this also effectively segregates these assets from their colonial context. What 'trade' means in imperial circuits of commerce is lost when simply understood as a green box, 'a good thing', effectively shorn of the colonial context in which trade takes place. There is a strong presentist element to how assets are understood: what is considered 'good' and 'bad' in a 21st century capitalist democracy is also considered 'good' and 'bad' across the colonial settings of the 17th to 20th centuries. Access to particular types of education is 'good'; increased trade is 'good'; employment in waged labour is 'good', while being 'un-educated' is 'bad', sluggish trade is 'bad', lacking waged employment is 'bad'. The relevance of the colonial context to the form, function or utility of these assets is not apparent when they are only presented as decontextualised references

to 'imperial benefits'. While history education could provide further context to these phenomena this is not well served when the narrative is most concerned with elaborating imperial logics from above rather than the experiences and perspectives of imperial subjects from below. In the absence of more granular depictions of what these institutions looked like *in* their colonial contexts, students draw on their own presentist[102] or Eurocentric assumptions – their frameworks of knowledge – to construct narratives around these themes. This can be further illustrated with reference to perhaps the most iconic 'asset' in this discourse: railways. It is compelling as a 'benefit' because it allows for the assumption that trains were used in the way that contemporary Britons interact with passenger trains in the metropole. If a students' major interactions with trains are that they are enabling of their and their families' affective projects (such as visiting loved ones or tourism) it is not obvious that in many colonial contexts railways were primarily mechanisms of extraction and military control. As Satia explains: "British-built railroads in India, for instance, served British economic and political needs rather than the needs of Indians" (Satia, 2020). Thus the colonial setting is not incidental but shapes the forms 'development' takes, but in balance sheet discourses the colonial setting and its extractive nature is separated from the 'asset' which leaves room for a more presentist lens.

In this discussion of erasure of context, it is helpful here to return to an activity in the OUP textbook mentioned in Chapter 6: "Create a poster called 'The British in India'. Using no more than ten words show both the positives and the negatives of British rule there." Students made use of this telegraphic style in their survey answers, e.g. "In most cases [empire] brought health and

[102] By 'presentist', here I do not mean simply the bearing down of interpreters' contexts on their interpretations (discussed in the Chapter 3), but a more extreme sense in which there is *little to no* consideration of differences between past contexts and present contexts. See Miles and Gibson (Miles & Gibson, 2022) for further discussion on questions of presentism in history education.

education but also exploited resources and the people." In their survey answers, students encoded these words or phrases – 'health', 'education' – as colonial gifts in the expectation that the reader (me) decodes them as such. As students perceive this as common knowledge (that these phenomena are 'imperial gifts'), students don't typically substantiate *why* these assets are 'good', superior, distinctly British, novel, or only made possible through colonisation; they are seen as self-evidently all of these things. These messages from students are encoded with particular meanings which can only be understood within a Eurocentric discursive framework. The dominant code, to use Stuart Hall's language, allows me to decode these messages in particular ways. I decode 'education' in the dominant code as 'superior, western/British education, bequeathed to passive recipients who could not possibly have alternatives of value.' That all these subclauses are submerged, that their truth is seen as self-evident, entails that this is not 'where the debate lies'. The overt debate, both in the public sphere and in classroom balance sheet activities, operates at the level of selecting and weighing the boxes; what is *in* the boxes remains obscured, part of the encoding and decoding. The frameworks of knowledge (see Figure 1) which make this encoding and decoding possible are reinforced by classrooms and textbooks.

More speculatively, it is possible that this decoding and encoding of 'imperial benefits' have particular purchase for adolescents. The logic of 'imperial benefits' requires the belief that being part of coercive institutions can be beneficial even without consenting to be a part of them. This mirrors conditions of adolescence. As Cohen writes "The European colonial powers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries viewed the African and Asian subjects as children, as men [*sic*] not fully grown, whose destiny had to be guided by the presumably more advanced states of Europe" (Cohen, 1970: 427). However, what is less well understood is how this might interplay with metropolitan adolescents' own beliefs around the legitimacy of coercion, the many institutions

which coerce them 'for their own good'. If students potentially experience education as a 'necessary coercion' for their own 'development', in preparation for another 'necessary coercion' of employment, while being sustained by adult supervision over their healthcare, they may perhaps be even more liable to seeing it as 'common sense' that 'education', 'jobs' and 'medicine' can and should be imposed in other settings. The assets bequeathed to colonial subjects and to contemporary metropolitan adolescents are not things for which their consent is sought or needed partly because they are considered things these groups are not capable of accomplishing without adult/imperial intervention. The paternalism of colonialism, and of 'colonial benefits' discourse in particular, dovetails with the paternalistic world experienced by students.

Limited Subject Positions

As discussed in Chapter 5, balance sheet discourses fundamentally ask 'what did empire *do*'. Where balance sheet discourses enter MEP it is often through the specifications which relate to 'impact' – in particular the impact of empire on Native Americans, on India and on Africa. This creates a structure of fixed positions of who is the agent and who is the patient.[103] British imperialists play the role of agents while Africans, Asians, Irish, and indigenous peoples of Oceania and the Americas can only be the recipients, whether as beneficiaries receiving gifts, or as victims receiving violence. The full spectrum of human complexity seems reduced for these

[103] This question of agency opens up the opportunity to offer a brief clarification on 'balance'. While I have argued against the appropriateness of the balance sheet as a pedagogical tool in the context of histories of empire, this is not to imply that 'balance' is an inherently problematic heuristic. It can be a useful tool for looking at phenomena from different angles (Aikin & Casey, 2022). Agency might be one area in which 'balance' might be a useful heuristic in imperial history, i.e. it can be helpful to ask if a proposed historical narrative has paid due attention to agency of different actors – but this can be held together with wider critique. This is described by Helen Tilly in a specific subfield: "Historians who have explored the relationship between science and empire in colonial Africa have recently gone to some lengths to demonstrate the importance of Africans as active agents in the production, application, and appropriation of scientific knowledge. Without losing sight of differences and inequalities, these studies have revealed intricate patterns of negotiation and exchange alongside those of domination and intervention" (2011: 14). This is, in its own way, an attempt at 'balance' which can enrich the historical narrative and one which mirrors the tensions between agency and context which I outlined in Chapter 3.

subjects, at the same time erasing narratives of resistance, collaboration or opportunism in colonial encounters.

Not only is the agency of these groups in shaping the colonial encounter marginalised but so too are relations between groups of colonised people. The only politics that are relevant are those between colonised and coloniser and the only relations are bi-lateral ones with the British. This is made more problematic by the relative lack of popular knowledge or teaching about 'precolonial' societies beyond Europe and their politics (Hazell, 2020). A revealing Bechdel-type test might be to review modules/textbooks for whether at any point one group of people of colour engage with another group of people of colour about something that is not white people. This erasure of 'precolonial' people across much of the world as political actors contributes to the suggestion that they were politically immature (and thus they required the developmental process of colonisation for achieving maturity). This manifests in discourses of how colonisation was associated with peace and stability by students, implicitly contrasted with an assumption of precolonial chaos. In addition to James from Walton's formulation that empire gave the colonised 'a control that they needed, students in the survey-only sample asserted that empire "maintained peace" and led to "a more stable lifestyle for people who lived in these colonies." This demonstrates how the balance sheet does not simply illuminate specific colonial histories but relies on historical erasures – or to return to Charles W. Mills' term, white ignorance – to be effective.

These fixed subject positions are also homogenising, homogenising 'the British' as powerful imperialists, and erasing relationships between oppression in the metropole and in the colonies.[104]

[104] Other narratives squeezed out by the balance sheet also include imperial conquest as unsuccessful or impotent. The balance sheet, the metric of 'impact' and the question of 'what did imperialism *do*' coheres with an assumption of

As Scott quotes from Weber: "imperialist sentiment, a white man's burden of Francophony, whose first conquests were to be right at home" (1998: 73). Scott also describes how "modern statecraft is largely a project of internal colonization, often glossed, as it is in imperial rhetoric, as a 'civilizing mission'" (82). Using references to popular culture, Mitchell describes the imperial gaze as applied to British working classes into the present (2021). These analyses of 'imperialism-at-home' disaggregate the aggregated subject of 'the British' found in balance sheet discourses. That white students so often used the language of 'we' to describe their relationship to 'empire' might imply some acknowledgement of being 'implicated subjects'. However, it also flattens these internal distinctions into one continuous, powerful national identity and identifies (in a non-necessary articulation) with empire builders abroad rather than subjects of empires-at-home.

The agent/patient structure also positions British imperialists as the sole agents of modernity. This unidirectional agency is evident in students' statements such as "the British empire built so many places." Even the proverbial 'the British built the railways' erases all colonial labour in these projects. In the context of students' discourses of development and modernisation, this also positions British imperialists as the sole creators of modernity. This reinforces a narrative that modernity arises in the West (in England in particular) and 'diffuses' outwards, emanating from a centre. However, Bhambra argues powerfully that modernity "has to be understood as formed in and through the colonial relationship ... colonization was not simply an outcome of modernity, or shaped by modernity, but rather, modernity itself developed out of colonial encounters, encounters which are hardly captured by the idea of 'diffusion'" (Bhambra, 2007: 77). Despite modernity's and industrialisation's dependence on colonised labour, the groups providing this

power and success of imperialist projects. The image of empire constructed in the balance sheet is one of omnipotence. I discuss this further later in the chapter.

labour are imagined by students to be antithetical to modernisation. An alternative but related point is made by Satia – as well as Amartya Sen (2021) – that balance sheet frameworks assume places like India 'needed' to become a colony to industrialise. "The very act of totting up pros and cons rests on the fallacy of counterfactual history, the idea that, absent the British presence, there would be no railroads or dams or any sort of 'progress' in India ... Those still sceptical of the possibility of Indian industrial take-off might at least be persuaded that there is no evidence that Indians would not have been as good at imitating British industry as the Japanese and Germans proved to be" (Satia, 2020). In both South Asian and African contexts, the shape of colonial trade (extraction of raw materials in the colonies to be processed in metropolitan manufacturing industries) suppressed domestic industrialisation and this has proved to be an enduring legacy of imperialism (Mkandawire, 1988; Satia, 2020) Whether one emphasises the interconnectedness of modernity and colonisation or empire's foreclosing of certain kinds of industrialisation within colonies, the balance sheet's projection of British imperialists as historical actors 'bringing' modernity to passive places is more than misleading.

Development and High Modernism

Imperialism, development and progress merged in students' discourses.[105] Students saw empire as a phenomenon that "improved development of third world countries", administered by imperialist agents of development who "built many things in poorer areas, and innovated in many ways, spreading more developed ideas and practices." The frequent use of terms such as 'advancements' – and as one student put it "[empire] did *speed up* the development of some countries" [my

[105] While as I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter that I would not be focusing here on resistance to balance sheet discourses, it is worth acknowledging that some students explicitly pushed back on imperialism-as-development discourses, e.g. "Even though it brought 'advancements' these were only what the capitalist western world saw as the future and didn't take other cultures or communities into thought."

emphasis] – constructs a linear trajectory of development which imperialism was claimed to "help" or "support" colonies move along. This discourse of development itself played a role in justifying colonialism: "the construction of a linear, universal history and the authoritative assertion of where India's place within this schema was to be, enabled the British to assert control over India's past, claim authority over her future, and validate their own presence within the country" (Bhambra, 2007: 24).

As *development* was such a prominent sub-theme in the discourses of students in the survey-only sample, this section of the chapter explores this topic in more depth. This is aided by a concept from James Scott's *Seeing like a State* (1998): high modernism. I argue here that many of my student participants drew on high modernist ideology and that this ideology is imbued in balance sheet discourses. High modernism is "a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress" (4). The irony is that while high modernism emphasises 'science', it is an ideology that is "uncritical, unsceptical, and thus unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production" (*ibid.*) This chimes with students' confidence in the presence of technology and more generally colonial social engineering to improve colonial lives. As Scott explains:

> "a range of historical soils have seemed particularly favourable for the flourishing of high-modernist ideology. Those soils include ... circumstances in which a state's capacity for relatively unimpeded planning is greatly enhanced, such as ... colonial rule ... "the authoritarian power inherent in colonial rule has encouraged ambitious schemes to remake native societies... [Coloniality provides] the combination of the universalist pretensions of epistemic knowledge and authoritarian social engineering" (97–340).

As I argued earlier in this chapter, colonial context is largely erased from 'imperial benefits'. To appropriate Xiaoping's famous quip: "Sovereign cat or colonial cat, if it can catch mice, it's a good

cat." By contrast Scott explains why high modernist ideology plays out differently in different kinds of regimes:

> "Where [high modernism] animated plans in liberal parliamentary societies and where the planners therefore had to negotiate with organized citizens, it could spur reform ... [but this is not the case in] an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being ... [This is particularly the case in] late colonial rule, with its social engineering aspirations and ability to run roughshod over popular opposition ... Many of the same state objectives animate both the European and the colonial exercises, but in the colonial case, the state is at once more bureaucratized and less tolerant of popular resistance" (5, 69).

In this sense high modernism takes on different dimensions in colonial contexts than in the parliamentary context in which the students who participated in my research live.

High modernism also connects with the structure of subject positions described in the previous section on (imperialist) agents/ (colonised) patients. Imperialists could be seen by students as effective agents of development because they had expertise developed in the centre of modernity which is assumed to be generically applicable elsewhere. The assumption of the soundness and success of colonial development is enabled by high modernist ideology which elevates generic expertise and deprioritises contextual knowledge and cooperation. This is an "imperial or hegemonic planning mentality that excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how" (6). The telegraphic discourse of "brought advancements" gives no scope to considering how development projects could be ineffective or damaging in contexts of coercion or where 'experts' lacked relevant knowledge. That systems suited to the locality were often replaced with those that did not is discussed at length by Scott. On this theme, Satia also notes that: "The question is not when and where did the imperial state err or fail or prove incompetent, but why we presume an illegitimate form of government could but err and fail and prove incompetent" (2020: 132). While imperial agents of development are assumed to have sufficient expertise, colonial subjects are

assumed to be incompetent in development. They are also largely identity-less, with "no gender, no tastes, no history, no values, no opinions or original ideas, no traditions, and no distinctive personalities to contribute to the enterprise" (346).[106] The only characteristic of colonised subjects which the balance sheet requires 'knowledge' of is their supposed incompetence in pursuing the development of their societies.

High modernism also offers an explanation for why 'western' assets were assumed by students to be superior. If colonised subjects are seen as living in a state of chaos without the guidance of imperialists and imperialists impose order on this chaos, what is particular to high modernism is that the absence of chaos and the presence of order is determined at a superficial level. Scott argues that "The carriers of high modernism tended to see rational order in remarkably visual aesthetic terms" (4). He refers to grid patterns and straight lines as this superficial dimension, but for students this dimension, also partly visual but less obviously so, is that buildings, infrastructure and institutions which appear 'more western' are given the benefit of the doubt that they must function 'better' than any alternatives. Students described empire as bringing "better health and education", "better developments", "better railroads and new culture", "developed language", "improved infrastructure", "urban improvements", "building houses and schools." Rather than answering the question as to whether these claims are 'true' or not, here I want to interrogate *why they seem true* to students. I argue that they seem true because these assets 'look right' to students. Referring to grid patterns of roads and fields Scott explains that "The fact that they look right becomes more important than whether they work; or, better put, the assumption is that if the

[106] Where students' balance sheet discourses conflict with this characterisation is on the question of 'no traditions'; within *discourses of ambivalence* students often counterposed green boxes of 'development' with the red boxes of 'repressed indigenous cultures and traditions'.

arrangement looks right, it will also, ipso facto, function well." The aesthetic qualities of imperial development reinforce the non-necessity to substantiate why 'assets' are beneficial and rather they only need to 'look right'.

In both the ethnographic and the survey-only sample, balance sheet discourses were deployed not only by conservative-leaning students but students who were otherwise aligned to discourses of racial justice or were very critical of the Conservative government. High modernism also offers a potential insight into why this might be the case as Scott explains that high modernist ideology exists across the political spectrum. High modernism with its emphasis on 'expertise' makes the political context seem irrelevant. "High-modernist ideology thus tends to devalue or banish politics. Political interests can only frustrate the social solutions devised by specialists" (94). High modernism therefore renders a profoundly political project as an apolitical and technical one.

One area in which high modernism is less helpful to 'think with' in understanding students' discourses is that Scott does not attend adequately to the role of racialisation in colonial high modernism, partly because his framing is wider than colonial settings. However, racialisation is crucial to the ways in which certain groups are portrayed variously as poor, violent, vulnerable, backwards, and prone to chaos and incompetence and thus in need of imperial development. For example, "Many of the provinces empire took over were poor rural areas with a less than thriving populous. In the case of India, the British Empire built schools, roads and other improvements that drastically improved life." Racialisation also manifests in students' distinctions between 'unsuccessful' (black and brown majority) colonies and 'successful' (white majority) colonies. On this theme, Hall is more useful. He describes the role of racialisation in these historical conceptualisations: "Whiteness remains a signifier of a particular unique and uninterrupted

progressive history ... We are this because they are not. 'They', the blacks in our history, become the constitutive outside of this national story" (Hall & Schwarz, 2017: 197–211). In order to make sense of (or decode) the claims of the balance sheet about development, white agents of development must be complemented with an Other which is abject and in need, the constitutive outside of progress.

Lastly, students can share high modernism's ethic of the ends justify the means. Scott describes how authoritarian high modernist projects "entailed a great deal of violence against its erstwhile beneficiaries" (159). The legitimacy of 'ends justify the means' is often implicit in students' responses but it can also be explicit e.g. "The British may have killed many people as they travelled the world to colonise different places but in the end it was all for good reasons and the people living in the British Empire today may not be as advanced if they weren't." Ends-means can be connected with the previous paragraph in that within these discourses certain lives – racialised in particular ways – are cast as expendable. Lives without modernity, lives lived in 'the constitutive outside', are cast as lives without dignity. This lack of dignity justifies a cruel but necessary deliverance of modernity.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the ways in which balance sheet discourses create certain narratives and erase others. I have argued that structurally it bifurcates and limits the subject positions of historical actors and also removes historical phenomena from the colonial contexts in which they took place, especially 'development'. Scott describes high modernism in a particular 20th century historical context and so my use of it here to describe 21st century discourses of development seems anachronistic. Why talk about high modernism in the *post*-modern age? In terms of the

periodisation set out in Chapter 1, it would be expected that high modernism has been supplanted first by neoliberal de-regulation and then by the current conjuncture that has 'had enough of experts' in Gove's famous phrase. Despite this seeming anachronism, I have found the concept generative because of its synergies with my data which I have outlined here. This worldview appears alive and well. Writing in 1998, Scott admitted that high modernism "sounds rather naïve today, when we are far more sober about the limits and costs of technological progress and have acquired a postmodern scepticism about any totalizing discourse. Still, this new sensibility ignores ... the degree to which modernist assumptions prevail in our lives" (90). In the 2020s, that such ideologies of the 20th century have such a resonance with students' discourses seems to indicate something profound about England's general stagnancy around discourse of the colonial past. Despite the high-profile critiques of imperialism discussed in the Introduction, this chapter has highlighted that many of these critiques have not supplanted and – as students' ambivalences suggests – *are rendered compatible with* characterisations of imperialism-as-development. I explore this further in the final chapter.

Conclusion: The Present Conjuncture

Introduction

This thesis on the balance sheet as discursive formation shares some concerns with a body of literature within the discipline of history. As Satia explains, "a great deal of scholarship aimed at understanding how Britons reconciled their claims of good intentions with the violence they continually unleashed. Indeed, the contradictions between the liberatory claims and repressive tendencies of 'liberal empire' are a staple of this scholarship" (2020: 280). My thesis demonstrates how this work of reconciliation is done in 21st century England. Satia is perhaps too optimistic in writing that "Mantena answers those who protest the wholly negative characterization of empire well, explaining that *once we realize that violence and racism were constitutive of empire*, we can no longer judge empire on the basis of the purity of moral intentions or the universalism of liberal ideals" (2020: 279) [my emphasis]. My findings demonstrate that 'recognising violence and racism were constitutive of empire' – as many students in the sample do recognise – is not incompatible with a belief in empire as deliverer of universal liberal ideals (which are here embodied by discourses of development). In fact, my findings suggest that this combination, this particular *discourse of ambivalence*, is the archetypical response of students before – and even more so after – the MEP module. In this concluding chapter I want to reflect on what this may mean for the current political moment both within and beyond history education.

The Balance Sheet: Change and Continuity

I want to return here to the question raised in Chapter 3 in relation to the research by Barton and McCully: are students changing their perspectives or embellishing preconceived ideas through history education? My findings in this research project suggest that large changes in students' views

on the fundamental nature of a controversial historical phenomenon (such as empire) *can* happen over the course of a history module where some students will explicitly attribute this to their learning. However, these dramatic changes occurred only for a small minority of students (and occurred in multiple directions) whilst most students retained their core views. Changes were often more subtle. Similarly to Barton and McCully's findings (2007), one noticeable difference was simply that students' studies allowed them to deploy more specificities and details in the responses to the research prompts. Moreover, instead of large changes of opinion, a more common experience of the module was students' discourses shifted towards being slightly more critical of empire overall while also expressing this in a balance-sheet style, i.e. accompanying this critique with an acknowledgement of 'the good parts' of empire. Students are potentially therefore viewing the module through the lens of their prior understandings of empire ('mostly bad with some good bits') and decoding the module as what I described in Chapter 5 as 'an imbalanced balance sheet'. In this way MEP answers the call from Fill in the Blanks to have a new curriculum which 'looks at the good, the bad and the ugly of Britain's colonial past'.

It is understandable that '*more* teaching about empire' has become an increasing demand from various 'pugilists' – in Whitburn and Mohamud's terminology – directed at teachers, exam boards, the DfE and Westminster. While a great deal of hope has been invested in the ability of teaching about empire to transform society, my exploration of the prevalence and problems of balance sheet framings demands a greater emphasis on *how* empire is framed by these actors at different nodes of the history education system. 'More teaching' is likely to reproduce the existing problems which I have outlined here. Additionally, this dissertation has highlighted how factors beyond 'the curriculum' can heighten or lower the prominence of balance sheet framings, such as the politics and circumstance of students as well as the agency of teachers in their lesson design and textbook

authors in their elaboration of module specifications. My findings draw attention to the ways changes at one node (such as the introduction of a new module by an exam board) interacts with pre-existing circumstances at the other nodes (such as the tradition of balance sheet teaching). Activism in this area faces the challenge of considering these multiple nodes and their interactions.

Returning to the space of professional conversations in history education discussed in Chapter 5 and in particular professional development forums such as the History Association – an important node in this wider configuration – a new norm is emerging in which the balance sheet is discouraged. This provides scope for cautious optimism. However, the alternatives to the balance sheet in circulation seem insufficient. As discussed in Chapter 5, the balanced anti-balance sheet shares many problems with the balance sheet. Additionally, it positions anti-imperial scholarship as *a priori* 'unsophisticated', because it takes a clear position on empire when the only legitimate position (in this discourse) is to not have one. This erases a host of important intellectual work out of hand. Implicitly this discourse also positions detachment as superior to anti-colonial resistance, because the latter comes to a 'biased' conclusion. By substituting 'legitimate' for 'indeterminate', Satia's critique of the 'original' balance sheet still rings true for the balanced anti-balance sheet: it "depends on the premise that empire was a legitimate political and economic form. This premise subverts the laborious and sacrificial work of generations who fought to end empire on the grounds that it was illegitimate – the imposition of an autocratic, racist, violent, and extractive form of rule" (2020: 277). Another alternative is to teach implicitly critical narratives of empire which do not substantively engage with development discourse. In this iteration, teaching imperial history focuses on critical narratives of empire, on 'red boxes' and on resistance. Discourses of development are either absent or referred to only briefly and unenthusiastically. This is how I would characterise much of the teaching of MEP in my ethnographic sample. This mode of MEP is compatible with

an explicit balance sheet pedagogy – or an imbalanced balance sheet (as in the case of Ferryhall) – as well as with the absence of an explicit balance sheet pedagogy (as in the case of Walton and All Saints) where students may still draw on the 'raw materials' provided by/beyond the MEP module to construct balance sheet understandings of empire. This strategy of focusing on 'red boxes' still leaves students without opportunities to explore alternative narratives of development/modernity in a context where students continue to reproduce the hegemonic narrative of imperialism as 'helping colonies to develop'. A third but not mutually exclusive avenue away from the balance sheet is to use the frame of 'the impact' or 'consequences' of empire, but this too replays some of the problems identified in the dissertation. The History Association's blog – One Big History Department – makes a case for focusing on consequences as a way to redirect from imperial logics towards the perspectives of colonised peoples:

> "A question that I see a lot of colleagues ask is why did Britain have such a large empire. There is nothing wrong with this question per se, but looking at the causes of the Empire forces us to look at this through the perspective of the colonisers. There is no doubt there is interesting history here – the mechanics of the East India Company, the ship technology, the involvement of the government. But the problem with this is that it entirely leaves out the experience of the colonised. Doing a causation question means you won't look at what happened in these countries and in particular what happened to their indigenous people – this are obviously problems in neglecting this. Therefore we need more consequence questions. Looking at why the Empire grew is great but it is far more interesting and far more important to look at what happened next. What was Empire like in India? What changed as a result of Empire in New Zealand?" (Kennett, 2021).

Questions of 'impact' seem to have a gravitational pull towards balance sheet discourses from teachers and students in the case of MEP. Questions of empire's 'impact' also – as I argued in Chapter 9 – only offer a limited set of roles. It assumes that imperialists are the central actors while colonised peoples are recipients of consequences. It also does not itself do the important work of adequate worldbuilding of precolonial societies that are needed to have more meaningful conversations about 'impact' as in the absence of such worldbuilding a tabula rasa assumption distorts understandings of the societies 'impacted' by empire.

Alternative Alternatives

Thematic modules (i.e. chronologically lengthy modules, like MEP) freed from the criterion of being 'British history' could open up new possibilities in English history education. MEP being cast as 'British history' at GCSE means that the most texture in the narrative is given to imperialists and that places become relevant/irrelevant when the British arrive/leave. This global-but-British-centric lens inherently limits the perspectives with which this history is approached. By contrast, it would be preferable to address empire through a thematic module on a particular region e.g. East Africa, South Asia. The desire to 'cover' the full geographical extent of empire results in moving between spaces in a way that is not amenable to a deeper exploration of political agency. More attention to political structures, asymmetries, allegiances, and rivalries prior to, during and after colonisation provides the ground on which to have a more meaningful discussion about how agency was exercised and thwarted by different political actors. This would give space to dispel both the tabula rasa and the balance sheet-style projection of British omnipotence.

A regional *thematic* module – including pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras – would be ideal, in that a *depth* module with a sole focus on the colonial period in these spaces does not make clear the nature or extent of colonial transformation because it does not provide sufficient detail as to what came before or after. Histories of the colonial period itself are necessary but not sufficient for understanding contemporary global inequality. Bringing postcolonial states into the frame can foster a more complex understanding of colonial legacies than students' freezeframing of a moment of colonial extraction (which dominated much of students' *discourses of critique*). In other words, students focused on 'taking resources' during the colonial period but did not have temporally broader narratives to think about more systemic legacies of the colonial period. Space

for postcolonial histories can better allow students to examine (at a more granular level) how colonialism shaped the state and the economy after decolonisation; how neo-colonial practices continue; and the importance of other pressures which do not result from (neo)-imperial agencies. A thematic module in this vein could ask a similar – but potentially more productive – question to 'impact: "how far did colonialism shape the politics/society/economy of the region?" This invites a consideration of multiple actors' agency as well as giving scope for critically addressing development discourse.

Narratives which re-member development in colonial contexts could speak for example to the roles of railways, monocropping, residential schools, dams or conscription in colonial development. Instead of imperial logics, a more productive lens for the imperial past could be economic history from below, that is, ordinary people's experiences of these colonial institutions of development as well as more broadly the changes and continuities in their economic lives. These histories can form a basis to weave wider interconnections between spaces. Bhambra (2022) has advocated for school history to demonstrate the interconnections between British modernity and colonial extraction through histories of taxation. Koram (2022) also provides an example of interconnected modernity by describing how imperialism has structured finance capitalism in ways that generate inequality within Britain and globally. Bhambra and Koram both begin these texts with ethnographic portraits of their grandfathers – in the Punjab and Accra respectively – describing their various jobs, their migrations and their hybrid identities. These micro-histories form a basis to then discuss much broader and more abstract narratives of economic inequality. A similar structure might be productive for a history education which addresses empire through economic history from below.

Despite pointing to such alternatives, I do not want to overshadow my other findings by implying that strategic changes at the level of history education will straightforwardly lead to students changing the shape of their discourses about empire. Balance sheet discourse and its high modernism persist because they connect with other aspects of the discursive environment. As this persistence itself suggests, even when exam boards and teachers innovate, frameworks of knowledge are difficult to shift and students' decodings will vary from the encoded message.

However, something which should also be emphasised is that this decoder agency *also* means that for some students attempts to instil in them *discourses of value* or the virtue of balanced assessments of empire are ineffective. While I invisibilised this group in Chapter 9, here I want to highlight that while some of their classmates became 'more balanced' over the course of the module, other students retained or intensified their critical views of empire. As Harvey Milk quipped, if students really did only imitate their teachers "there'd be a lot of nuns running around the streets today" (Epstein, 1984: 36:10–36:22).

Changing History as Unwaged Labour

In this dissertation I have emphasised the discursive aspects of teaching imperial history, while the economics of schooling have largely been confined to a backdrop contextualising the ethnographic sections.[107] Here I want to bring the economics of schooling from the backdrop to the foreground and highlight the material relations which make it extremely difficult to bring about the kinds of changes suggested above. While teaching is waged/salaried, the time required to undertake these tasks (and more so

[107] This relative backgrounding is a product of the dissertation's focus on discourse and the intellectual period in which 'discourse' takes off. Google Books Ngram Viewer shows that across most of the 20th century, its database had all but lost term 'discourse' but the term skyrockets from 1980 onwards. In detailing different phases of Hall's thought, Karayiannides remarks that "The vogue of post-structuralism and postmodernism in the 1980s has something to do with the relative neglect of political-economic analysis in the thinking of sections of the New Left at the close of the twentieth century" (2022: 24).

to do them well) exceeds the time for which teachers are compensated. As Matt puts it "judging by the occasional horror story you hear about, [the Slave Trade and the British Empire] still aren't always taught well. *Teachers and schools need time, resources and training* to make sure our teaching of the Empire is nuanced, that we are investigating and searching for truth and not repeating myths and that we approach the topic with sensitivity" (Matt, 2021a) [my emphasis]. MEP was the least popular option of the three AQA thematic modules potentially because it required unwaged labour in order for school history departments to choose it: its geographic breadth and its inclusion of topics beyond the canon which teachers and students would be more familiar with require more time and effort on the part of teachers than other options.[108] Given the broader context of austerity, making time-consuming changes requires not only unwaged labour but – in many squeezed schools – even a decision between different unwaged tasks. As an indication of the seemingly endless demands on teachers, Erin remarked that she wished lunch periods would be longer so that she would have more time to address student pastoral issues as this was currently much of what she did over the lunch break. Exhaustion and frustration was a common theme of discussion at all three schools. That the demands on teachers are unsustainable is further reinforced by the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.[109] This broader crisis affects history teachers. Often there is little time and energy for negotiating, designing and implementing curriculum changes beyond traditional narratives. There is a clash, under-acknowledged in much public discussion, between the post-BLM political momentum to do this work and the context of austerity which continuously thwarts that work.

Another dimension to these material relations is that of the centrality of students' achievement in assessment, the need for students to fulfil the expectations of teachers, administrators, families and students

[108] This is compounded by MEP being a thematic module, which is especially challenging and content-heavy (as Deborah remarked with exasperation in Erin's class: "it's like we do a different century every lesson!").
[109] A 2022 House of Commons Library Research Briefing noted that postgraduate teacher recruitment was 41% below target academic year 2022/23 and that according to the 2018 TALIS survey, 57% of lower-secondary school teachers in England felt that their workload was unmanageable (Long & Danechi, 2022). In 2022, Schools Week reported on census data collected on the school workforce in November 2021: "the number of teachers leaving last year jumped by 12.4 per cent, with 4,000 more departures in 2020-21 than the previous year ... vacancies are now at the highest level since recent records began in 2010-11" (Belger, 2022).

themselves. This metric can be at odds with the question of whether what students are learning is *meaningful* which can become deprioritised and crowded out by other concerns. During my ethnographic fieldwork I was struck by the amount of time dedicated to practising exam questions, conscious that it was not only about having answers which were correct, but which were written *in the correct way*. Such activities are a necessity as the material chances of students, particularly the most marginalised, depend on reaching assessment thresholds. This shapes priorities in the classroom and further tilts the scale away from choosing new modules with new content in which student achievement is initially less predictable than teaching modules well-known to teachers and topics most students in England are culturally more familiar with, i.e. "Hitler and the Henrys" as Simon Schama memorably referred to this canon (in Cassidy, 2003). This context and dilemmas it produces for history teachers in England is discussed in more depth by Harris and Graham (2019). They open their article with an arresting quote from a lead history teacher:

> "Still struggling to decide whether to use Key Stage 3 as a training ground for GCSE or whether to have it sit apart and use it to offer some breadth and wider historical teaching. Heart wants the second. Head is leaning towards the first" (Harris & Graham, 2019).

If exam boards did bring out the kind of thematic module which I argue for above, in the current context to choose to do such a module would in most settings be – to borrow this teacher's formulation – a 'heart choice rather than a 'head' one. Whether from the lens of teachers' unwaged labour or teachers as presiding over 'exam factories', schools may need to be different kinds of places on a day-to-day level to make this work of reckoning with the imperial past truly possible. That is, institutions with more space for teachers' intellectual labour and a material base for flourishing and not just surviving.

Education As Panacea

As I mentioned above, given these problems in the broader education sector it is paradoxical that there is so much hope invested in teaching these histories to transform society. This rests on a broader discourse encapsulated by Mandela's phrase that 'education is the most powerful weapon to change the world' (visible on the walls of many universities' Education Departments). This discourse manifests in relation to the themes explored here when teaching about imperialism or teaching 'diverse' histories is framed as a means

of combatting or even eliminating racism. In a similar vein of holding high hopes for what this teaching might mean is Shashi Tharoor who has positioned teaching colonial history in British schools as a form of "atonement" (Kosher, 2017). Hope is also a necessary condition for political action and so these pugilist narratives play an important role.

However, here I want to draw attention to ways in which a faith in curricula to change society can become problematic when it assumes a banking model of education that makes students and their contexts irrelevant while only the 'input' of curricula comes into view. This is a high modernist view of education: a faith in technical expertise to 'improve' identity-less subjects irrespective of their context. Such discourses of top-down change construct students as what Scott calls 'standardised citizens' who are assumed to be "uniform in their needs and even interchangeable" (1998: 346). By contrast, my findings point to how central students' contexts and identities are to how they decode the module. Not only does the module 'land' differently in different schools and with different students, but students' interpretative frames are sticky and not overhauled by a 'diverse' module or one which discusses colonialism.

Even if there was a compulsory curriculum for KS3 and GCSE which uses the frames I suggest above, students would interact with this curriculum in complex ways (as Dale at Walton Academy demonstrates, 'might is right' is a perpetually available frame through which to decode histories of oppression). The inequalities of schooling and the world outside the history classroom would still exist – as injustices in themselves, but also as influences shaping students' understandings of past, present and future. In other words, the socio-economic inequalities which marginalise people of colour in England and which stratify global life chances will themselves continue to incentivise the *interpretation* of these very inequalities as the product of the inherent failings of their victims. As important as curricular/pedagogic discursive struggles are, they should be recognised as a component of broader struggles, not positioned as a panacea. As Wineburg et al put it "School history is one among a team of players in the formation of contemporary

historical consciousness, but too often acts as if it is the *only* player" (2007: 44) [emphasise in original]. Matt makes this point powerfully in terms of teaching empire in England:

> "Ultimately, one or two units on Britain's colonial past in a subject that is studied for 1 or 2 hours a week between the ages of 11 and 13 for some kids is, at most, sticking your fingers in the dam as the cracks continue to spread. History teaching is not a panacea. Sanghera says that *"only the balanced and compulsory study of British Empire in British schools would solve our many dysfunctions when it comes to imperialism."* I think the British Empire should be taught to all (and basically is), but I'm not convinced by the hoped-for impact. The collective 'amnesia' that he describes in the book is perpetuated by all sorts of institutions, not least the media and government, who use it for their own ends. A 10 lesson unit on the reality of the British Empire is swimming upstream against national myths, tabloid front pages and TV shows about Indian railways. Education is one front in the fight for truth, perhaps the most important front, but not the only one. National problems aren't solved if we just *teach them the stuff*. Every year I teach about the Empire, and every year kids forget things, or get told different stories by their parents or the press or films they watch and the memes they share. If education is the front line, then it is education by all – an honest search for truth by multiple institutions. As long as some are protective of their role or defensive of their history, schools can only go so far."

It is possible that I am mistaking the ways in which pugilist discourse must simplify and over-emphasise the efficacy of its proposed solutions in order to gain traction for their theory of change. However, as education is often posited as 'the' solution to a number of societal problems, I wanted to highlight the asymmetry between the expectations on the education system and its capacities to enact broader changes in society.

A further consideration on the theme of 'schools can only go so far' is that the party-political environment is not conducive to supporting schools to move further away from balance sheet framings. As discussed in Chapter 5, there are pressures to maintain the balance sheet, such as the non-statutory political impartiality guidance noting the need for a balanced view of empire. Moreover, since the Brexit campaign began gaining momentum, various Conservative politicians have taken culture warrior stances as an attempt to win support in a changing political environment. This creates a danger that imperialism will come under greater, more explicit scrutiny from the executive in ways that are counterproductive. This would however be unlikely to be as extreme a raft of policies restricting classroom discussion of so-called 'divisive concepts' as found in the US, referred to as 'education gag-orders' by detractors such as the freedom of speech non-profit PEN America. This is because discourses of 'balance' demand that *discourses of critique* are given some validity. After all, the non-statutory guidance of 'balance' does not require silencing the teaching of empire altogether

nor teaching a totally unqualified endorsement of the record of British imperialism. Instead, it mirrors the executive's policy on statues, by implying that when it comes to the balance sheet, teachers should 'retain and explain'. That it is the executive which creates the high-level stipulations of the formal curriculum – and that this is an executive shaped by the Brexit campaign and its aftermath – further reinforces my contention that the formal curriculum should not be treated as the only lever for change.

The Conjuncture

While I have been looking at this topic through the lens of history education, thinking with Hall leads to the question of what my findings might suggest about the current conjuncture. To reiterate from the Introduction, 'a conjuncture is a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape'. My findings suggest that one facet of the current conjuncture confronting (and constructed by) young people in England is what I call *anti-racist high modernism*. Like Hall's formulation of Thatcherism, it is the articulation of seemingly contradictory elements (between which there is no necessary relation) that nevertheless came together in this particular moment in time. While in Chapter 9, I discussed the racialising elements of high modernism, this is in tension with the anti-racist discourses of MEP and of students. Schools are potentially particular sites of anti-racist high modernism as they are both suffused with official multicultural discourses and seen as institutions of benevolent social control of a group of people (here, adolescents). More broadly the conviviality and official multiculturalism under New Labour may have been challenged by the extended political moment of Brexit, but this new political moment of Brexit has also seen a counter-challenge of anti-racism. This 'counter-challenge' potentially emerges from a coalition of the old official multiculturalism and a new initially unofficial activist anti-racism typified by Black Lives Matter. This anti-racism is, in Hall's sense, articulated by students with the unquestioned assumptions of high modernism.

There is a sense in which, in this political moment, there is more confidence about speaking of the racism of empire than the economics of empire. *Empireland* is also instructive here, as arguments against the

characterisation of empire as racist are each firmly rebutted – "none of these reservations amount to much" (2021: 149) – whilst the economics of empire is open-ended – "opinion is divided" (140). My drawing of this distinction here risks reproducing unhelpful dichotomies around race and class, but what I am arguing for is the opposite of this dichotomy. My intention is to reinforce the case I made in the Discussion chapter: that the racism of empire (as part of the colonial context) needs to be re-membered with the economics of empire (as part of understanding 'development'). The importance of reintegrating the economics of empire into the narrative of imperialism is described by Koram:

> "Empire carries an economic legacy, not just a cultural or racial one. As important as ideological justifications for racial hierarchies became to the project of colonisation, the British Empire was not just a five-hundred-year world tour of being mean to brown people. It was a global system of cultivated and coordinated armed robbery. And while Britain no longer exercises sovereign control over large parts of the planet, many of the legal and economic structures put in place to facilitate the imperial system of wealth transfer still drive our world" (2022).

Anti-racist high modernism is therefore an inadequate response to imperial history.

My concerns here are also of a similar kind to those expressed by Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò (2022). He has written provocatively about our collective failure to articulate attention to particular identity characteristics such as race and gender to material analyses. He takes elite discourses, especially those of academics and middle-class activists, as his object of critique, warning against "a strategy reliant on fantasies about the exchange rate between the attention economy and the material economy" (2022). In this fantasy, "after we in the chattering class get the clout we deserve and secure the bag, its contents will eventually trickle down to the workers who clean up after our conferences, to slums of the Global South's megacities, to its countryside" (*ibid.*) While my argument and that of Táíwò are not synonymous, they are both pointing to the ways in which the conjuncture illuminates particular injustices while casting insufficient light on the scale of (not only, but particularly) global geospatial inequalities. Both Táíwò and critiques of high modernism are concerned with how (colonial and postcolonial) 'experts' can reproduce these inequalities even in political projects glossed as progressive.

David Scott in his dialogue with Hall argues that conjunctural analysis cannot be passive but pushes us to be reflexive about what the conjuncture means for action:

> "Thatcherism had effectively posed a fundamentally new question to the Left for which it had, as yet, no adequate answer. Read this way, a conjuncture is not merely a cognitive category in a social-historical reconstruction but a moral-political category in a strategic framework of intervention.... One way of thinking about what you're saying about the conventional questions the Left was continuing to ask of the Thatcherite moment and the rise of the new Right is that they were, in effect, questions that could no longer yield politically useful answers" (Scott, 2017: 69-70).

I propose that in this space many are asking 'questions that might no longer yield politically useful answers'. These are questions that are raised by the balanced anti-balance sheet ('how can the Right celebrate the empire when it was both good and bad?') and the imbalanced balance sheet ('If empire was an 'economic good but moral evil' then how can the Right justify elevating economic good over the moral evils of violence and racism?') These assume that the Right are simply celebrating empire, when rather than an unalloyed celebration the Right have co-opted the balance sheet. The balance sheet makes these ineffective questions as they are so easily neutralised with the answer that 'there was both good and bad'. The result is that: the balance sheet is adequate, the status of empire is indeterminate and no action is required. It is on this theme of what questions we might ask that I will conclude.

Over the course of the doctorate my thinking on 'what is the strategic question' has changed. When I began my research, I would have responded to the classic balance sheet question – 'was the empire good or bad' – by thinking that although it is deeply disappointing that this question even needs to be asked, that any attempt to answer it aside from the entirely disingenuous would come to the conclusion 'bad' through a utilitarian process of adding up the 'red boxes'. However, over the course of the research project I became more and more uncomfortable with the question itself, often experienced literally as a physical sensation in the body while engaging with some of the discourses that the question produced. This thesis is in some ways an attempt to think with and through that discomfort and to name it. Now (almost) at the end of this doctoral journey, I can better see the necessity to retire the question all together. This is not for the reasons of objectivity, detachment or other concerns about what are *a prioi* (in)appropriate questions for disciplines to pose. The latter – the critique that 'this is not a question fit for historians' – has been a common

discourse among historians and as I allude to Chapter 3 and 5, stems from the intersection of professional identity, disciplinary codes and the need to protect the discipline from attack. However, the best explanation of why this is an impoverished question is perhaps that by Herbert in Satia, who characterises imperialism as "violent usurpation and enslavement… *by definition* devoid of redeeming features" (2020: 278) [emphasis in original]. A principled stance – or perhaps put more strongly, a definitional stance – is a better alternative than being drawn into the game of boxes set up by the balance sheet question (or being drawn into unsustainable claims of detached neutrality by the balanced anti-balance sheet). Below I want to add a further reflection on the balance sheet question which I developed through the process of the doctorate.

It is ironic that despite the discomfort I have just described, my final objection is that the question 'was the empire good or bad' is ultimately neither a particularly interesting nor a provocative question. Even if the answer to the question 'was the empire good or bad' *does* come back 'bad', this in itself tells us nothing about empire's durabilities or vulnerabilities and thus tells us very little about what is actually important: how to navigate and resist the old-new empires in which we live. Similarly, if one does respond decisively to the utilitarian balance sheet question then – no matter how one comes down on it – the format enables the uncritical reproduction of discourses of 'imperial benefits' because the question itself does not require us to confront the premises of these discourses. The red and green boxes remain closed and mysterious. Asking this question thus fails to do the kind of work that we need our questions to do. That is, the work of enabling us to rethink the kinds of high modernist 'development' which have contributed to multiple present crises and enabling us to foster agentive, coalitional responses.

While this thesis cannot answer David Scott's call for a conjunctural analysis that is also a 'strategic framework of intervention', I will end with a hesitant proposition for what kind of question might yield more politically useful answers. While it lacks some of the simplicity of 'good or bad', it does have the

benefit of being a question that has been and continues to be addressed by many thinkers in generative ways:

'What can the multiple experiences and workings of empire, past and present, tell us about inequality?'

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Survey A

Q1 Which history courses do you remember taking in your GCSE (if you're finishing Year 10 then, which of these have you taken so far):

- ☐ Britain: Power and the people (1)
- ☐ Britain: Migration, empires and the people (2)
- ☐ Britain: Health and the people (3)
- ☐ Norman England (4)
- ☐ Medieval England - the reign of Edward I, 1272–1307 (5)
- ☐ Elizabethan England, c1568–1603 (6)
- ☐ Restoration England, 1660–1685 (7)
- ☐ America, 1840–1895: Expansion and consolidation (8)
- ☐ Germany, 1890–1945: Democracy and dictatorship (9)
- ☐ Russia, 1894–1945: Tsardom and communism (10)
- ☐ America, 1920–1973: Opportunity and inequality (11)
- ☐ Conflict and tension: the First World War, 1894–1918 (12)
- ☐ Conflict and tension: the inter-war years, 1918–1939 (13)
- ☐ Conflict and tension between East and West, 1945–1972 (14)
- ☐ Conflict and tension in Asia, 1950–1975 (15)
- ☐ Conflict and tension in the Gulf and Afghanistan, 1990–2009 (16)

Q2 Which part, if any, of the history you've been taught at school do you find the most relevant to your everyday life and why?

(This can include things you were taught before GCSE)

_____

Q3 Rank the sections of the Migration, Empires and the People module with '1', '2', '3' and '4', from the **most** useful to you ('1') to the **least** useful to you ('4').
I'm interested in how you use this history personally, for example:
-seeing the world in a new way,
-learning things you might bring up to defend your point of view,
-learning things which help you understand why the world is the way it is today
-helping you reflect on your own personal identity

	1	2	3	4
Conquered and conquerors Context: Conquered and conquerors Vikings and Anglo-Saxons, 790–1066 England and France, 1066–1560	○	○	○	○
Looking west: Britain and the Atlantic world Context: Looking west – Britain and the Atlantic world England in the Age of Discovery, 1558–1707 Britain and the Americas, 1707–1865	○	○	○	○
Expansion and empire Context: Expansion and empire Britain as the workshop of the world, 1750–1939 Britain expansion in India, 1750–1914 Expansion in Africa, 1800–1914	○	○	○	○
Britain in the twentieth century Context: Britain in the twentieth century The impact of the world wars on Britain, 1914–65 Britain and the legacy of empire, 1960 to the present	○	○	○	○

Q4 Why did you rank them this way?

- 1. Most useful section ranking (1) _____
- 2. (2) _____
- 3. (3) _____
- 4. Least useful section ranking (4) _____

Q5

- What did you think of the way the module (e.g. textbook, choice of topics) presented the British Empire?

  _____

- What did you think of the way your teacher presented the British Empire? For example, do you feel anything was under or over emphasized?

  _____

- In what ways, if any, has being taught this module helped you in your understanding of debates about the legacy of the British Empire in your community?

  _____

- In what ways, if any, has being taught this module shaped your own views on the British Empire?

  _____

Q6

- What did you think of the way the module (e.g. textbook, choice of topics) presented migration?

  _____

- What did you think of the way your teacher characterised migration? For example, do you feel anything was under or over emphasized?

  _____

- In what ways, if any, has being taught this module helped you in your understanding of debates about migration in your community?
  _____

- In what ways, if any, has being taught this module shaped your own views on migration?
  _____

Q7 These are the last two questions

- In an ideal world, what if anything could be changed about the Migration, Empires and the People module or its teaching to make it more useful to young people in Britain today?
  _____

- Do you have any further comments to share on this module or on history curriculum/teaching?
  _____

Survey B

Q1 Your thematic 'and the people' history GCSE module:

- ○ Health and the People
- ○ Power and the People
- ○ Migration, Empires and the People

Q2 Gender
This question is optional

_____

Q3 Ethnicity
This question is optional

- White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- White - Irish
- White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- White - Any other White background
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background
- Asian/Asian British - Indian
- Asian/Asian British - Pakistani
- Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Asian/Asian British - Chinese
- Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background
- Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British - African
- Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean
- Black/ African/Caribbean/Black British - Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
- Other ethnic group - Arab
- Other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group

Q4 If you'd like to say more about your ethnicity, please do so in the box below:
This question is optional

_____

This is a follow up to the survey you filled out a few months ago and will ask you some of the same questions again.

Don't worry about remembering your previous answers, just answer with what you think today.

There is no right or wrong answer- it's just asking for your opinion.

Please answer all the questions e.g. also answer the health-related questions even if you did Power and the People instead of Health and the People.

Your answers will be kept anonymous at all stages of the research.

Q5 People with bad health as a result of poor diet, lack of exercise or smoking should contribute more to the NHS than those who lead healthy lifestyles.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Q6 Britain should bring back the death penalty.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Q7 How would you describe the legacy of the British Empire?

- ○ (1) The British Empire was a force for good, which brought considerable improvements for people in the colonies.
- ○ (2) The British Empire might not have been perfect, but in many cases it was a significant improvement for people in the colonies.
- ○ (3) The British Empire might have some positive elements, but overall it was harmful.
- ○ (4) The British Empire was an exploitative system, which made people in the colonies worse off.
- ○ Other _____

Q8 Why this one? Or in other words, why do you feel this is the case?

{Quotes chosen Q7 Answer}

_____

Q9 It is good that Britain has left the EU.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Q10 How would you describe gender equality in Britain today?

- ○ (1) Women in Britain have achieved equality - women are not discriminated against in society today.
- ○ (2) Women in Britain have nearly achieved equality - women may face some disadvantages today but not many.
- ○ (3) Women in Britain still face significant barriers to full equality - women are discriminated against in society today.
- ○ Other _____

Q11 It is more important to celebrate that Britain abolished slavery than to emphasise that Britain once bought and sold slaves.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Q12 Why do you {Quotes chosen Q11 Answer}? Or in other words, why do you feel this is the case?

It is more important to celebrate that Britain abolished slavery than to emphasise that Britain once bought and sold slaves.

{Quotes chosen Q11 Answer}

_____

Q13
What should be a modern government's response to a pandemic?

○ (1) No action - keep the economy going full steam.

○ (2) Minimal action - business as normal with certain exceptions.

○ (3) Some action - keep the majority of businesses open but ban big gatherings

○ (4) A lot of action - try to stop the spread even where it harms many businesses, e.g. a lockdown

○ (5) A lot of extensive action - e.g. not only have a lockdown but also force some businesses to convert their factories to making particular supplies for the pandemic response

○ Other: _____

Q14 It is good that people are protesting against statues of British colonisers.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disgaree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Q15
What should be Britain's immigration policy?

- ○ (1) There should be no restrictions on immigration (open borders)
- ○ (2) There should be as few limits on immigration as possible
- ○ (3) Immigration should be limited to those who do highly skilled work (e.g. engineers and doctors etc)
- ○ (4) Immigration should be limited to those who do high skilled work and prove they've adapted to the English language and English culture
- ○ (5) There should be no immigration (closed borders)
- ○ Other _____

Q16 It's better to have a welfare system which encourages people to look after themselves rather than rely on state help.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Slightly Agree
- ○ Slightly Disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Q17
Why do you {Quotes chosen Q16 Answer}?

It is good that people are protesting against statues of British colonisers.

{Quotes chosen Q16 Answer}

_____

Q18 Your younger sibling (or your friend's younger sibling) asks you why some parts of the world are wealthier than others. How would you answer their question?

_____

Q19
These last few questions are just about your module {Quotes chosen Q1 Answer}

What year were you in when you did this module?

- ○ Year 9
- ○ Year 10
- ○ Year 11
- ○ Other _____

Q20 How were you taught this module?

- ○ All online
- ○ Mostly online
- ○ About half online and half in-person
- ○ Mostly in-person
- ○ All in-person

Q21
If you were in charge of England's history curriculum, would you keep {Quotes chosen Q1 Answer} in the GCSE curriculum next year or would you scrap it?

- ○ Keep it
- ○ Scrap it

Q22
LAST QUESTION

Why would you {Quotes chosen Q21 Answer}?

_____

Appendix B: Key Stage 3 Balance Sheet Teaching Materials

For this collection I have only signalled source and the year.

Here "TES" refers to the online lesson resources available either for free or for sale on *The Times Educational Supplement* website in a similar model to the 'Teachers Pay Teachers' site popular in the USA.

Example A

Source: TES (2020)

Was the Empire Good or Bad?

1. Colour code each point as either Good ☐ Bad ☐ Both ☐
2. Decide which was the worst thing and mark it with a minus -
3. Decide which was the best thing and mark it with a plus +

Agriculture: Britain introduced new farming techniques using different crops and foods which allowed native people to grow more food.	**Religion**: The spread of Christian religion across the British Empire stopped native people from following their own religion.
Britain divided native communities in order to rule them. For example in India, the British decided to separate the Hindus and Muslims. When the British Empire ended and they left, the two sides of the communities started destroying each other again.	**Disease and Medicine**: British people brought diseases with them to the Empire which natives had no resistance to so many of them died. Britain may have transferred the new germs but they did not bring medicine that could help them with their own native diseases.
Natives such as the Aborigines of Australia had their land taken by British colonists - 80% of the Aboriginal population was wiped out in just 150 years.	**Clean water and sanitation**: Britain built lots of new wells and sewers to try and stop the spread of disease.
English Language: The English language was the most universal spoken language throughout the world which opened up good communication between countries..	**Theft**: Land and items belonging to natives were stolen and transported back to Britain. A lot of aborigine art work was stolen as well as diamonds taken from India.
Crime: British criminals committing serious crimes were transported from Britain and sent to countries in the British empire as punishment, e.g. convicts colonised Australia. Many had to leave their families behind and some never saw them again.	**Friendship**: Many former colonies chose to belong to the British Commonwealth and have the Queen even after they were liberated.

Culture: British colonists forced their own customs and traditions on native people whilst forcing them to ignore their own.	**Soldiers**: The colonies were forced to provide soldiers to fight for Britain in both WWI and WWII.
Law: One aspect of life that many colonies retained after the British Empire ended was that of its system of law and order in the countries it colonised.	**Government**: Many former Colonies used the democratic system of Parliament introduced by Britain after the Empire ended which allowed all people to vote for who they wanted to lead them.
Education: The colonies benefitted from the introduction of a schooling and educational system which allowed natives to educate their children for a new future.	**Rebellion**: A lot of people in the colonies were killed if they fought back against British rule - for example the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya in 1956 and the Amritsar Massacre in India in 1919.

Example B

Source: TES (2014)

The British Empire; Good or Bad?

Look at the statements:

- Some support the argument that the British Empire was **GOOD**.
- Some support the argument that the British Empire was **BAD**.
- Draw a table in your books and put the statements in the right columns.

The British Empire; Good or Bad?

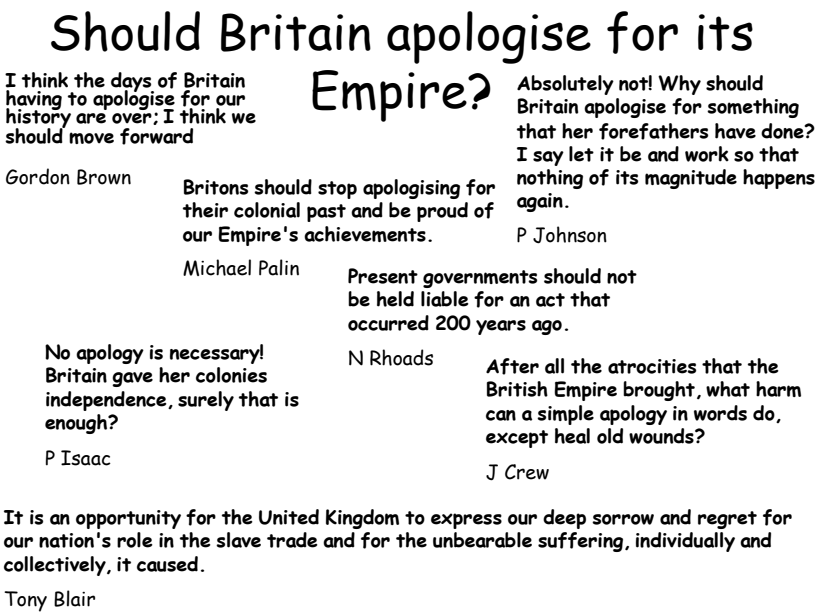
- Britain grew rich from slavery, from trading with the empire and gaining cheap raw materials.
- The empire gave opportunities for the British to seek their fortune.
- Britain exported (gave to other countries) its culture e.g. sport, arts, science and education.
- Britain brought Christianity to large parts of the world.
- Britain tried to stop many other local religions that had existed before they were there.
- Britain's building projects cost huge amounts of money and lives to the local people .
- Britain helped to build roads, railways, bridges and schools in the empire.
- Many British thought their way of life was best, they ignored local customs and sometimes tried to destroy them.
- Many British emigrants simply stole land from the natives and killed those that resisted.

The British Empire; Good or Bad?

Bad	Good
Britain grew rich from slavery, from trading with the empire and gaining cheap raw materials.	The empire gave opportunities for the British to seek their fortune.
Many British thought their way of life was best, they ignored local customs and sometimes tried to destroy them.	Britain exported (gave to other countries) its culture e.g. sport, arts, science and education.
Britain tried to stop many other local religions that had existed before they were there.	Britain brought Christianity to large parts of the world.
Britain's building projects cost huge amounts of money and lives to the local people .	Britain helped to build roads, railways, bridges and schools in the empire.
Many British emigrants simply stole land from the natives and killed those that resisted.	

Should Britain apologise for her Empire?

- Using what we have looked at this lesson, and the quotes on the next slide to help you to decide whether Britain should apologise for her empire.
- Write at least 2 PEEL paragraphs about why you think this.



Example C

Source: School Website (nd)

Benefits of the British Empire	Drawbacks of the British Empire
By expanding colonies (where people live) overseas made England one of the most important countries in the world. Britain made a lot of money due to creating restrictions on goods made and sold.	The British colonies were not allowed to make goods. They had to buy the goods from Britain costing the colonies much more money. Lots of violence around the Empire

Example D

Source: TES (2018)

What the historians say:

The Chinese behaved in a big-headed, ignorant and careless way. The Chinese started the problems by calling the British 'barbarians'. The Chinese were asking for trouble when they refused to treat foreigners as equals and when they believed that the British would not be able to beat them.
L.C.B. Seaman circa 1968.

The war about opium was an example of how the British were very happy to attack other nations just to get what they wanted. Britain simply forced the Chinese to trade with them using guns and battleships.
Denis Judd circa 1996.

WAS THE BRITISH EMPIRE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

One example of British rule which might be seen as a success was the modernisation of Hong Kong and its position as a wealthy trading city. However, the present day success masks a darker origin.



TASK 1:

Watch the video clip carefully.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/13354

1. **What would a British person in say about British rule in Hong Kong?**
2. **How would the Chinese remember British rule in Hong Kong?**
3. **How similar do you think the two accounts would be and why?**
4. **Use Minds & Machines pp104-109 to help you complete your tick box worksheet.**

WAS THE BRITISH EMPIRE A FORCE FOR GOOD?



David Livingstone was a Scot who trained as a medical missionary. He travelled throughout Africa crossing the Kalahari desert to reach the Zambezi river and the waterfall he named Victoria Falls after the queen. He became a symbol of the best aspects of the British Empire.

TASK 2:

Watch the video clip carefully.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/13355

1. **Livingstone is buried in Westminster Abbey which is usually reserved for monarchs, saints or military heroes. Do you think he deserved this honour?**

2. **Do you think he would have wanted this honour?**

3. **Does the good work of people like Livingstone make up for events like the Opium Wars? Or is this just too simplistic a view?**

WAS THE BRITISH EMPIRE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

TASK 3:

Use the writing frame below to help you write a balanced answer to the question above.

By 1900 the British Empire covered 1/5 of the globe and contained $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world population. The Empire helped to modernise many countries by…

However, there was a darker side to the empire. For example…

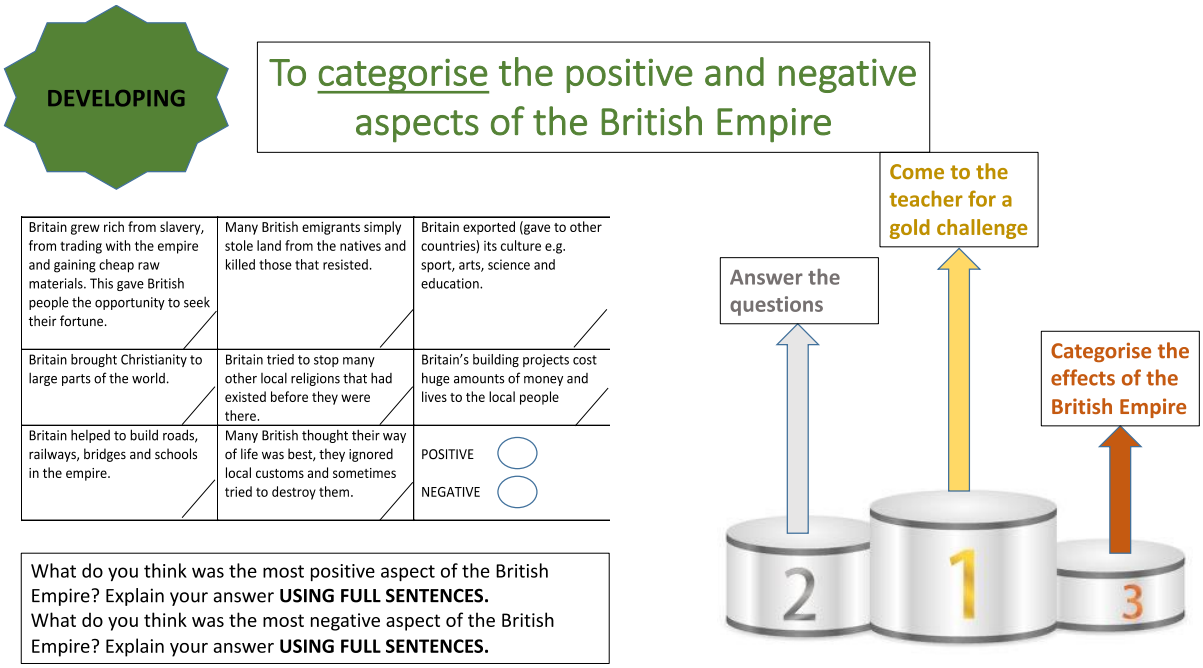
Overall I think the British Empire was/wasn't a force for good because…

EXT: collect a cartoon analysis sheet to try.

Notably, the writing frame here states "The Empire helped to *modernise* many countries" (my emphasis).

Example E

Source: TES (2017)



The first box is troubling as it implies the 'positivity' of wealth from slavery. This is discussed in relation to a similar example in the chapter.

Source A



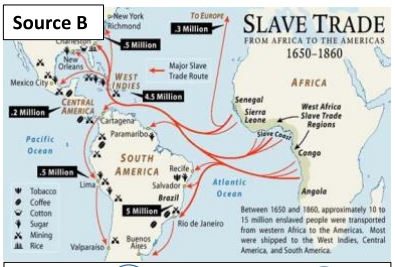
Positive ◯ **Negative** ◯

Evidence to support this

SECURING

Finished? Ask for a challenge!

Source B



Positive ◯ **Negative** ◯

Evidence to support this _____

_____

_____

INTERPRETATION 1: The British empire has had a huge impact on the world. The majority of former colonies still keep their ties with Britain through the Commonwealth. Today, North America and Australia are very similar to Europe in a lot of ways. Many countries around the world now have multi-cultural populations. Parliamentary democracy, the English language and the Christian religion can be found in many countries. These are just a few of the ways in which the British empire has had a lasting effect on world history.

- **From the National Archives**

Positive ◯ **Negative** ◯

Evidence to support this

INTERPRETATION 2: It is my firm opinion that the Empire helped bring out the best in the people we colonised. We have left a legacy that allows these countries to succeed in the modern world. With this has come new self-confidence. These things have made for quite extraordinary progress in most of our former colonies in a very short time. We have taught the colonies to learn fast and how to build roads and buildings. We helped them to recognise this.

- From the British governor in Kenya

Positive ◯ Negative ◯

Evidence to support this:

INTERPRETATION 3: In the 1950s, the people of Kenya decided they wanted their nation back. Fearing a countrywide rebellion, the British rounded up 1.5 million people and placed them in concentration camps. Inmates were worked to death as slave labour filling in mass graves. Random executions were not-uncommon and the use of torture was widespread.

- **From *'A History of the British Empire'***

Positive ◯ **Negative** ◯

Evidence to support this:

Students are asked to question the governor's viewpoint: "Look at Interpretation 2. To what extent is this interpretation reliable? Explain your answer."

Example F

Source: School Website (2021)

Interpretation 1:
Niall Ferguson, Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World (2002)

'… there is reason to doubt that the world would have been the same or even similar in the absence of the Empire. Even if we allow for the possibility that trade … could have been 'naturally occurring' in the past three hundred years, there remain the flows of culture and institutions … When the British governed a country … there were distinctive features of their own society that they tended to disseminate (spread). A list of the more important of these would run as follows:

1. The English language
2. English forms of land tenure (ownership)
3. Scottish and English banking
4. The Common Law
5. Protestantism
6. Team sports
7. The limited or 'night watchman' state
8. Representative assemblies
9. The idea of liberty (freedom)

The last of these is perhaps the most important because it remains the most distinctive feature of the Empire – the thing that sets it apart from its continental European rivals.'

Interpretation 2:
Richard Gott, Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt (2011)

'The British understandably try to forget that their Empire was the fruit of military conquest and of brutal wars involving physical and cultural extermination. Although the Empire itself, at the start of the twenty-first century, has almost ceased to exist, there remains a … tendency to view the imperial experience through … rose-tinted spectacles.

… the colonial experience – for those who actually 'experienced' it – was just as horrific as the opponents of Empire had always maintained that it was, perhaps more so. New generations have been recovering tales of rebellion, repression and resistance that make nonsense of the accepted imperial version of what went on.'

Part 1: Understanding interpretations of the British Empire from recent historians

Tasks:

1. Carefully read through each of the interpretations from start to finish.
2. Highlight five words from each interpretation which tell you whether it gives a positive or negative view of the British Empire.
3. Complete each of the following sentences:

'Ferguson argues that we should feel proud/ashamed of the Empire because …'
'Gott argues that we should feel proud/ashamed of the Empire because …'.

1. Decide if each of the boxes below is a reason to feel proud of the British Empire, ashamed or it or both. Colour code them to show your choices.

2. Now number all the cards within each colour group to show which you feel are the most important reasons to feel proud or ashamed.

Many sports were spread through the British Empire, for example cricket, football, rugby and tennis.	Money poured into Britain from trade with countries like India and from the slave trade: banks, and cities like Liverpool and Bristol, became very wealthy.	The systems of law and government today in many former colonies were modeled on Britain. The British system of democracy is generally said to be fair and just.
Britons developed theories of racial supremacy to justify their role in other countries. These have created a legacy of racism.	Over 900 million people speak English in the world today, partly because it was spread through the Empire. Before the Empire it was common for there to be many regional dialects within one country.	Britain exported a lot of industrial goods to the Empire, e.g. cotton cloth to India. These countries were discouraged from developing their own secondary industry to process their own raw materials.
About 11 million Africans were sold as slaves by British merchants to plantation owners in the Americas. Some African slave traders became very wealthy through selling people they had captured to the British.	Britain today is a multi-cultural society. Having an Empire has influenced our language, food, culture and religions.	In the colonies the top jobs were often taken by the British. Local people were not allowed to have important jobs and were sometimes viewed as incapable.
India's first prime minister after independence in 1947 was called Pandit Nehru. He claimed 'The British have kept us poor. Our people toil for slave wages in British owned cotton mills'.	A massive Indian diamond, called the Koh-i-noor was taken and added to the British Royal Crown. It has never been given back to India.	Today, the Commonwealth is an organisation of former British colonies which promotes business, human rights and democracy.
Disease was spread by white settlers. The aboriginal population of Australia was reduced by around 90% because of disease brought to the country by Europeans and because of forced settlement.	Britain tried to spread Christianity in its colonies. Missionaries travelled across the Empire to assist colonial people and to preach their faith.	When Britain granted independence it often left behind divided communities who have since fought wars. For example, there was a civil war between Muslims and Hindus in India in 1947 which resulted in a million deaths.
Many poor people living in Britain were able to emigrate to the colonies. For example, many Scottish highlanders suffered from economic decline in the 19th century and were able to travel to Canada to start new lives on the land.	Britain helped development in some areas of the Empire by building railways, schools and colleges. For example, they attempted to connect Cape Town (South Africa) to Cairo (Egypt) by rail. Although the project wasn't completed, large sections are still used today.	The British were responsible for many acts of violence in the Empire. In 1857, for example, some Indian sepoys (soldiers in the British Army) were blown from cannons to punish them for refusing to fight with guns that were said to be greased with pig fat.

Example G

Source: School Website (2020)

What historians think?

The 'Whig' historians regarded the Empire as the deserved result of Britain's technological and moral, superiority. They were proud that 'a small kingdom' had amassed such a huge empire. By contrast, some modern historians such as Edward Said (1978) have criticised Britain's 'cultural imperialism. Some historians point to the positive legacy of British rule, with formal systems of government, law and education as well as the development of infrastructure, like railways. However, others argue that this view can overlook the more shameful aspects of Britain's past. These include the extensive use of slavery (in 17th and 18th centuries), the loss of land and culture of the native people (Aborigines in Australia) as well as deaths caused by famine (in India 1943) and violence (in Kenya in the 1950s).

1. 1) What do Whig historians think of the Empire?
2. 2) What does Edward Said say about the Empire?
3. 3) What are the shameful aspects of Britain's past?

Example H

Source: TES (2017)

Decision Time!

Did British rule in India have a positive or negative impact on the country?

You must make a decision based on the evidence you have studied today.

If you think it had a **POSITIVE** impact, go to the left side of the classroom. **Be ready to justify your opinion.**

Historians and researchers suggest that from 1870 to 1930 Britain took about 1% of India's wealth per year. This was much less than the French, Dutch and Germans took from their lands.

Historians estimate that the British invested about £400 million in India between 1870 and 1930. They developed a coal industry, which had not existed before. Public health and life expectancy increased under British rule – due to improved water supplies and treatment for malaria.

Recent research suggests that India gained little economically from British rule. Britain gained hugely from ruling India, but most of the wealth created was not invested back into the country.

The British abolished the sati (a Hindu custom where the widow was burned to death on the funeral pyre of her dead husband) and of infanticide (the mass killing of unwanted children).

40% of India's wealth was spent on the army to be used by Britain all over the world, while the great mass of Indians were incredibly poor.

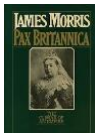
There were terrible famines that devastated India. When famine struck in 1876-1877 and 1899-1900 the British system of government could not organise a big enough relief effort. Too many Indians were growing 'cash crops' for the British, such as tea or cotton and not enough staple foods. It has been estimated that 19 million Indians had died from starvation and disease in these famines. Source: *The Lancet 1901.*

Florence Nightingale, the famous British nurse, said *'we do not care enough to stop them dying slow and terrible deaths from things we could easily stop. We have taken their land, and we rule it, for our good, not theirs'*.



'India has become impoverished [poor] by their [Britain's] government. They take away our money from year to year. The most important jobs are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently [insultingly] towards us and disregard our feelings…'
Written by Gandhi in 'Indian Home Rule', 1938.Ghandhi wanted India to govern itself.

'From 1815 to 1900 the British had built 2,300 miles of road and 2,900 miles of railway in India. The land used for farming increased from 400,000 acres to 3.2 million acres, the schools from 170 to 2900, the hospitals from 0 to 65…'
Written by James Morris in Pax Britannica, 1968.



Example I

Source: TES (2022)

This is a more visual version of the same historians mentioned in Example F.

Historian's views



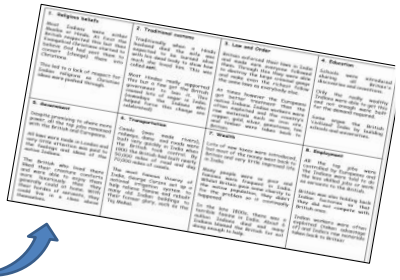
Look at the titles of these books. Which historian thinks the Empire was a **positive** experience? Which one thinks the Empire was a **negative** experience. Why?

Challenge: Why might these authors hold these views?

Who benefits from Empire?

Task 2: What impression do you get?

- Create two column headings:
- Read the following information about the British in India. Decide if it is beneficial and for whom.



Benefits	Drawbacks



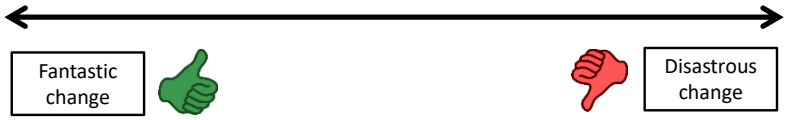
Who benefits from Empire?

1. Religious beliefs Most Indians were either Muslim or Hindu. At first the British respected this but then Evangelical Christians started to believe God had sent them to convert (change) them into Christians. This led to a lack of respect for Indian religions as Christian ideas were pushed through.	**2. Traditional customs** Traditionally when a Hindu husband died the wife was expected to be burned alive with his dead body to show how much she loved him. This was called **sati**. Most Hindus really supported this but a few got the British government to ban it. This caused lots of anger in India. (nowadays the Indians who helped force this change are celebrated)	**3. Law and Order** Britain enforced their laws in India and made sure everyone followed them. Through this they were able to destroy the large criminal gangs and make even the richest follow the same laws as everybody else. At times however the Europeans got better treatment than the native Indians. Indian workers were often exploited and the country's raw materials such as iron ore, copper, gold, silver, gemstones, tea and timber were taken back to Britain.	**4. Education** Schools were introduced sharing all Britain's discoveries and inventions. They increased from 170 to 2900. Only the really wealthy Indians were able to get this and not enough were built for the demand required. Some argue the British 'civilized' India by building schools and universities.
5. Government Despite promising to share more power, all the top jobs remained with the British and Europeans. All laws were made in London and very little attention was paid to the feelings and ideas of the native Indians. The British who lived there liked their creature comforts and were able to enjoy them more luxuriously than they generally could at home. With their hordes of servants, they could live in a class above themselves.	**6. Transportation** Canals (man made rivers), railways, dams and roads were built very quickly in India when the British took control. By 1900 the British had built nearly 50,000 miles of road and dug 70,000 miles of canals. The most famous Viceroy of India, George Curzon set up a national irrigation system to help relieve famine and rebuilt many old Indian buildings to their former glory, such as the Taj Mahal.	**7. Wealth** Lots of new taxes were introduced, but most of the money went back to Britain and very little improved life in India. Many people were so poor and famines were frequent in India. Whilst Britain gave some charity to the native population, they didn't fix the problem so it continually happened. In the late 1800s, there was a terrible famine in India. About 6 million Indians died and many Indians blamed the British for not doing enough to help.	**8. Employment** All the top jobs were controlled by Europeans and the Indians were told to do the less skilled jobs or work as servants to the British. Britain was also holding back Indian factories so that they did not compete with British ones. Indian workers were often exploited (taken advantage of) and India's raw materials taken back to Britain'

Who benefits from Empire?

Task 3: Did the British Raj rock?

1. Create a judgment line in your book



2. Now decide how Britain changed India and put an **X** where you think it belongs on the line.

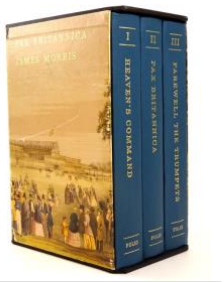
3. Under the line justify your choices in your books.

For example: I have put the x in the middle because ……

Who benefits from Empire?

The centrality of the question 'who benefits' influences the tenor of this example. The above slides are prefaced with stimuli which can invoke reflections on how 'benefits' and 'drawbacks' are distributed, but the ultimate utility of the balance sheet and discourses of imperial benefits/philanthropy are affirmed.

Historian's views

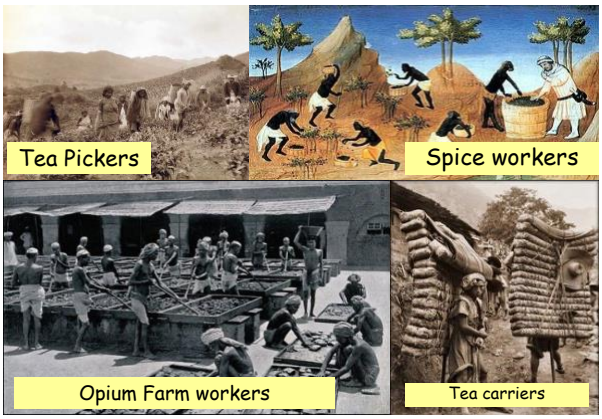


From a modern history book: James Morris, 'Pax Britannica.'

'The British who lived in the colonies liked their creature comforts and were able to enjoy them more luxuriously than they generally could at home. With their hordes of servants they could live in a class above themselves.'

Who benefits from Empire?

Beneficial for whom?



Example J

Source: School Website (nd)

What do Ferguson and Tharoor actually say about empire?

Read the key bits from Ferguson and Tharoor's interpretations about the British Empire. Then answer the questions to check your understanding.

Key terms	Extract: From *Empire: How Britain Made The Modern World*, by Niall Ferguson. Published in 2003 in Britain.
Enhanced global welfare: improving the world **British Imperial Rule:** being ruled by the British Empire **Democracy:** when the people have the power to decide who and how a country is run	"The empire **enhanced global welfare** – in other words, it was a Good Thing... Without **British Imperial rule**, it is hard to believe that **democracy** would have happened to the colonies. India, the world's largest democracy, owes a lot to British rule. Its elite schools, its universities, its government, its army. Finally, there is the English language itself. Today 350 million people speak English as their first language and around 450 million people have it as a second language. That is roughly one in every seven people on the planet"

Key terms	Extract: From *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire In India,* by Sashi Tharoor, published in 2016 in India
literacy rate: the percentage of people who can read and write **Life expectancy:** how many years people usually live for **Colonialism:** taking control of over countries **Massacres:** the brutal killing/murder of many people **forced resettlement:** Making people move to a new location. **Flaunting:** showing off **Kohinoor:** At the time it was the largest diamond in the World. Found in India but taken by the British.	"The British left [India] with 16% **literacy rate**, a **life expectancy** of 27... and over 90 percent living in poverty. **Colonialism** [was] a tale of slavery, theft, war, corruption, land-grabbing, hunger, poverty, **massacres** and **forced resettlement**... **Flaunting** the **Kohinoor** in the Tower of London is a reminder of the former imperial power {Britain]. Until it is returned... it will remain evidence of the loot, plunder, and theft that colonialism was really all about"

What made Tharoor and Ferguson write books about Empire?

Write 'Ferguson' or 'Tharoor' next to the statements about their background.

How have Tharoor and Ferguson's backgrounds influenced their views of the British Empire?



Shashi Tharoor

Grew up...

Niall Ferguson

Grew up..



in India

_____

in Scotland

_____

Had family who had travelled and lived all over the World because of Empire

_____

In a country that had become wealthier because of the Empire

_____

Around people who had been ruled by the British

_____

In a country that celebrated the work of the British Empire

_____

Reading books about the damage caused by the British Empire

_____

In a country that had just become free from the British Empire

_____

In a country that had become poorer because of the Empire

_____

What is the big difference between Shashi Tharoor and Niall Ferguson's backgrounds?

Ferguson grew up in _____, whereas Tharoor grew up in _____.
Tharoor grew up in a country that had become _____ because of the empire, whereas
Ferguson grew up in a country that had become _____ because of the empire.
Ferguson grew up in a country that _____ the work of the empire, whereas
Tharoor grew up in a country that had recently become _____ from it
Ferguson's family would have _____ all over the world because of the empire,
whereas Tharoor was focused on reading about the _____ caused by the empire.

richer / India / damage / poorer / travelled / Scotland / celebrated / free

Key terms	Extract: From *Empire: How Britain Made The Modern World*, by Niall Ferguson. Published in 2003 in Britain.
Conventional: the normal or most common way of thinking.	"Once there was an Empire that governed roughly a quarter of the world's population, covered about the same proportion of the earth's land surface and dominated nearly all its oceans. The British Empire was the biggest empire ever, bar none... [This book attempts to answer] whether the Empire was a good or bad thing. It is nowadays quite conventional to think that, on balance, it was bad.

Ferguson liked the British empire because it was the _____ empire ever
His book is about answering if the empire was
_____ Ferguson says most people see the empire as good / bad (pick one)

Key terms	Extract: From *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire In India,* by Shashi Tharoor, published in 2016 in India
Opened their eyes: helped them to understand **Reiterating:** telling someone something again	"What I considered basic was unfamiliar to many, perhaps most, educated Indians. They reacted as if I had opened their eyes, instead of merely reiterating what they had already known... This book is also not about British colonialism as a whole, but simply about India's experience of it... As we have seen, [Niall Ferguson] sees in Empire cause for much that is good in the world... a Good thing... Ferguson merely continues a long-established colonial tradition of the writing of world history with his own people [British] and their interests as the fixed, first and final point of reference.

Tharoor says most _____ hadn't thought about the empire's effect on India
He uses the phrase "opened _____", which means
_____
_____
_____ He says that Ferguson is writing as though the British point of view is correct right away. He calls this way of thinking "a long _____ _____ tradition".



Knowledge Organiser Focus:

"Good thing" vs "Era of Darkness", why has the British Empire been seen so differently?

Was the British Empire good or bad for India?

Key words:

What aspects of a person's life do you think could affect their interpretations about the past?
