

'Man's inhumanity to man' and other platitudes of avoidance and misrecognition: an analysis of visitor responses to exhibitions marking the 1807 bicentenary

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Abstract

2007 marked the bicentenary of Britain's abolition of its slave trade. This paper outlines the findings of interviews undertaken with 1498 visitors to eight museum exhibitions marking the bicentenary. One of the major findings of the research was the degree to which visitors from different self-identified ethnic groups responded to the both the exhibitions and the bicentenary itself. This paper focuses on the white British response, a response dominated by emotional avoidance and disengagement with exhibition content. The role of the authorised heritage discourse (AHD) in this response is discussed, and a number of self-sufficient arguments utilised in emotionally insulating visitors from exhibition content are identified.

Key words: 1807 bicentenary, slavery, museum visitors, apology, dissonant heritage, Britain, AHD, empathy.

Introduction

The marking of the bicentenary of the abolition of Britain's transatlantic slave trade in 1807 represented a significant opportunity for public debate about national memory. The history of Britain's involvement in this trade, and its ongoing legacies, although well documented in academic scholarship had, prior to 2007, received little active national public debate or acknowledgement (Kowaleski Wallace 2006; Oldfield 2007; Dresser 2009). It is a history often characterised as 'hidden'; indeed, it was only after the bicentenary that it was included as a compulsory element within the national school curriculum (Paton and Webster 2009:166). This paper documents how audiences at museums within England responded to attempts by the exhibitions they were visiting to shift the public gaze from an unproblematised celebration of abolition towards the facilitation of debate about the meaning and consequences of this history.

During 2007, the *1807 Commemorated Project*¹ team interviewed 1498 people at eight different exhibitions that either marked the bicentenary of the 1807 Act or dealt with the history of African enslavement (see Table 1). The aim of the interviews was to explore the memory and identity work undertaken at these exhibitions and thus gauge the impact the exhibitions, and the bicentenary celebrations more generally, were having on public debates over the legacies of this history. The overall aim was to explore the ways visitors engaged with traumatic history, and thus help improve exhibition policies and practices for interpreting and exhibiting controversial histories.

The findings of the audience interviews were predictably complex, given that over 175 hours of audio were recorded. Overall, however, clear differences emerged between African British/African-Caribbean British responses and those of European British (hereafter white British, to use the standard ethnic descriptors favoured in the UK). Clear strategies of engagement were identified in both African-Caribbean British and white British responses. These, however, were often overshadowed by a range of strategies of disengagement used by a majority of white British respondents. Many of those interviewed engaged in an array of discursive and emotional strategies to avoid the issues raised by the bicentenary and the exhibitions they were visiting. The strategies of disengagement centred primarily on the avoidance of feelings of responsibility, guilt and discomfort. So focused were many on trying to

avoid discomfort or guilt, that little conceptual room or emotional energy was left to engage with the deeper issues of continuing social injustice and other legacies of the history of Britain's exploitation of Africa and its peoples. The significance of this is that for many (but not all) visitors, the continual misrecognition of the history of enslavement reinforced a lack of recognition of the role played by racism in contemporary society, and a misrecognition of the identity claims of those who assert themselves as African or African-Caribbean British in the face of the dominant and state sanctioned descriptor 'black British'.

Context of the bicentenary – politics of recognition

As Connerton (1991) notes, commemorative events can be key to collective social memory, and provide opportunities to re-legitimise or renegotiate not only recollected knowledge about the past, but also what that knowledge may mean for contemporary society. The marking of the bicentenary was a commemorative event that pivoted on tensions between recollections of Britain's moral international leadership in ending its trade in the enslaved and the positive affirmation this has for national identity, and the much more difficult recollection of Britain's history of enslavement and the consequences this has for national identity, understanding and acknowledging racism and asserting the legitimacy of multicultural Britain. As various commentators have documented, both the official government position and the visible public debate on the bicentenary was one in which Britain's pride in their 'moral leadership' was celebrated (Agbetu 2007, forthcoming; Paton 2009; Waterton this issue; Waterton et al. 2010; Naidoo forthcoming; amongst others). However, the abolitionist celebration was challenged by a range of counter narratives, not least by a number of African and African-Caribbean British groups and organisations, such as Ligali (2005, 2007) and the Consortium of Black Groups (2007). These organisations not only challenged the primacy and legitimacy of the moral narrative of abolition, but in doing so demanded recognition for African/African-Caribbean/Caribbean communities in Britain. This discourse of *acknowledgement* became central to debates that attempted to counter the abolitionist narrative and significant 'blank spots' (Wertsch 2008), or 'memory voids' (Oldfield 2007:7), in Britain's collective memory were identified. In effect, how the history marked by the bicentenary was remembered was thus imbricated with the 'politics of recognition'.

The politics of recognition, as defined by Nancy Fraser, has as its goal 'a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect' (2003:7). The politics of recognition acknowledges that struggles for recognition of identity will have consequences for both respect and self-worth, which in turn will have implications for legal standing, access to and redistribution of resources and, ultimately, social justice (Fraser 2000, 2001). As such, culture, history and memory become important arenas of struggle for equity, and just as recognition can underpin claims to equity and justice, so too can misrecognition result in loss of equity and the continuation of injustice. This sense of recognition is illustrated in the Ligali (2006) criticism of what they identify as the Eurocentric 'black' British descriptor used in the British census and in other state measurements of ethnic and cultural identity. The culturally indistinct and racialized term 'black British' inevitably denies the cultural and historical legacies of African and African-Caribbean British identities and any social justice claims based on those legacies and experiences. Understanding the tensions between abolitionist narratives and their challengers within the framework of the politics of recognition allows some insight into what was at stake in the bicentenary. On one hand, there is a comforting reassertion of British moral identity, while on the other, demands for a more inclusive narrative that acknowledges dissonance and continuing injustices requires not only a recognition of difference, but most importantly, a re-recognition of 'self'. In effect, before any recognition could be made of the identity claims of African-Caribbean British, a process of remembering the 'blank spots' in collective memory had to occur, and a recognition or re-recognition of British identity had to be undertaken.

It is in this context that the response by the museums sector to the bicentenary is important. Within the museological literature, there has been sustained debate about the role that museums can play in facilitating public debate and providing forums for community expression and social action (see for instance Vergo 1989; Witcomb 2003; Sandell 2007;

Macdonald 2007, 2009; Message 2009). Indeed Clifford's (1997) concept of museums as 'contact zones', in which contemporary and historical meanings are negotiated and mediated, has become philosophically important within the sector. Some commentators suggest that museums may be defined as 'safe' places in which to explore risky subjects (Gurian 1995; Janes 2007), although, as Cameron (2007) argues, this sense of 'safeness' also tends to assume that museums are apolitical, and that by definition, contentious topics make museums 'unsafe'. Overall, as Cubitt documents (2009, this issue; see also Paton 2009), the museum sector in general, including those involved in this study, attempted to challenge the celebratory narrative, and aimed to shift public gaze away from abolition and consider the trade itself, resistance by the enslaved and the legacies of racism and multiculturalism. However, as Oldfield (2007:7) documents, there had been little precedent in marking the dissonant history of enslavement in Britain, and thus there was no 'tradition' of recollection for people to draw on in navigating the complexities of the 2007 bicentenary. This lack of tradition is significant, as it begs the question of what cultural tools were available for remembering and commemorating the history of the slave trade and its abolition.

Comfort and pride – the English authorized heritage discourse

Before outlining the audience interview findings associated with the 1807 exhibitions, it is useful to identify the available and dominant cultural tools used in Britain for remembering and commemorating the past. Heritage in its various material or intangible forms, as stand-alone sites or as museum exhibitions, are part of the cultural tools drawn both upon to remember the past and define the meanings that the past has for the present (Samuel 1994; Bennett 1995, 2005; Dicks 2000; Smith 2006). However, while it is recognised that there are many different forms and understandings of 'heritage', there is nonetheless a dominant or authorized understanding that frames the way it may be used. The Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) in Britain is the dominant public and policy discourse that frames not only professional practice, but also the ways in which some audiences may respond to or engage with heritage sites. It defines heritage as materialistic, monumental, grand, as representing 'nation', and, above all, 'good' (see Smith 2006, Smith and Waterton 2009, 2010 for further discussion of the AHD). This dominant discourse, and the way it conceptualises British history and heritage, is significant in understanding why and how sections of the 1807 audience disengaged themselves from the history and legacies of enslavement. To illustrate this, it is useful to consider the example of country houses. Although places often valued for their aesthetic, architectural and national historical associations, a number of such sites also have clear associations with the slave trade (Walvin 2000; Tyrrell and Walvin 2004).

In 2004, using a similar methodology to that used with the 1807 audiences (see below), 454 people were interviewed at six English Country Houses – or the house museums of the English aristocracy – to identify the memory and identity work they were undertaking (see Smith 2006 for details). A significant theme that emerged from the country house study was the degree of deep emotional engagement people had with the houses and their exhibitions. Visitors were actively constructing national identity and the pride that was expressed by visitors at these sites was palpable (Smith 2006: 138-161). Catherine Palmer similarly emphasised the importance emotions played in cementing a sense of national identity in a study of visitors to heritage sites defined as nationally significant (an Abbey, Castle and stately home). She observed that such sites 'enable people to feel the kinship ties linking them to the wider nation' (2005:17) and thus an attachment to the nation, facilitated through the creation of a sense of familiarity with the history being depicted, which helped to make people feel 'cosy', 'warm' and accepting of that history as their own (2005:18, 24).

The AHD, then, sets up an expectation that heritage is something that engenders pride and comfort – yes there can be discomfoting attributes, but these are inevitably subsumed by the creation of a consensus history that emphasises a sense of the continuity of national identity – an identity that has also naturalised its 'whiteness' (Gilroy 1987; Hall 1999). Heritage, within the context of the AHD, speaks to a comforting and familiar sense of history, a process further reinforced by the traditional roles of museums as institutions of nationalizing and triumphal historical narratives that aimed to regulate and define 'good citizens' (Bennett 1995).

1807 audience interviews

Methodology

A structured interview schedule was used during 2007 to record visitor responses to exhibitions, and the bicentenary more generally, at each of the institutions listed in Table 1. A sequence of standard demographic questions and 18 open-ended questions were asked². The primary aim of the interview was to identify the affective memory and identity work undertaken by visitors during their visit and determine their degree of engagement with the exhibitions and legacy issues (in particular, racism and multiculturalism).

The schedule was administered at the exits to exhibitions/museums with the intention of undertaking one-to-one interviews, although group interviews were taken where couples, family groups or visitor groups desired to be interviewed collectively. In these cases, each individual was counted as a separate interview and when discussions occurred during group interviews, they were recorded. Generally, such group interviews occurred between couples, although the largest group interview consisted of four people. All interviews were recorded, unless the participant requested otherwise, in which case the interviewer took detailed notes.

MUSEUM	NUMBER OF VISITORS
British Museum	206
National Maritime Museum	205
British Empire and Commonwealth Museum	162
International Slavery Museum, Liverpool	339
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery	165
Museum of London Docklands	182
Wilberforce House Museum, Hull	148
Harewood House	91
Total	1498

Table 1: Visitor interviews per Museum

All recordings were transcribed and coded thematically. Each *individual interview* was also coded in its entirety on three registers: a) emotional engagement with exhibition content; b) how active/passive engagement with the exhibition was; and c) awareness and engagement with racial and multicultural issues.

To create descriptive statistics the demographic data and the coded open-ended questions were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 15. Cross-tabulations were made with demographic variables and chi-square significance tests undertaken to measure statistical significance. The variables used for cross-tabulation included: gender, age, socio-economic category;³ ethnicity; educational attainment; intention of visit (ie if the visit was planned or unplanned); and the museum at which the interview was undertaken.

It is important to note that the interview question requesting information on ethnic background/identity required self-identification. That is, standard British ethnic descriptors were *not* used, and respondents were simply asked to define their ethnic identity as they saw it. However, the majority of British respondents tended to use generic standard definitions such as 'White British', 'White English' or 'Asian British'. 'Black British' was less frequently used in preference to African British, African-Caribbean or Caribbean British, amongst others. For the purposes of this paper, 'African-Caribbean British' is used. Tourists, ex-pats etc from overseas were, for the purposes of cross tabulation, grouped as 'non-British'.

The Exhibitions

Table 1 lists the museums where audience interviews were undertaken. These all come from different regions around England; some are large institutions such as the British Museum, and others relatively small and regionally focused, such as Wilberforce House in Hull. Although a diverse array of activities were undertaken to mark the bicentenary, as Cubitt (2009, this issue) documents, certain common chronological themes and narratives ran across all the exhibitions at which audience interviews were undertaken (see also Patton 2009). Visitors were presented with the history and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade through a series of stages that included African art and culture, the triangular trade, the middle passage, plantation life, abolition and resistance and modern day slavery. Visitors were thus taken from the origins of this history to the legacy and the present day. The similarities across exhibitions in the themes and narratives they developed are not surprising given the lack of a popular meta-narrative about this history (but see Cubitt and Wilson, this issue, for a more detailed discussion of the exhibition content).

Findings

The interviewees, in keeping with traditional museum audiences, were predominantly white and middle class, with 74% coming from socio-economic categories (1-3) traditionally associated with the middle classes and 51% having a university education. The sample was evenly divided between men and women (50% each), with 51% aged 45 and over. Table 2 gives a breakdown of ethnicity using descriptors nominated by respondents.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
'White' British/English	867	58.4
Non-British	348	23.4
'Black' /African-Caribbean/African British	182	12.3
'Mixed Race' British	40	2.7
'Asian' British	34	2.3
Other	14	.9
Total	1485	100.0

Table 2: Ethnicity

Slightly less than half (47%) of those interviewed reported that they had come specifically to see the exhibition they were visiting, while 52% noted that their visit had been unplanned.

Clear and statistically significant correlations to most responses to the open-ended questions occurred against ethnicity. The overall pattern that emerges from the interview data is that most white British respondents tended to emotionally insulate or disengage themselves from the exhibitions, and more particularly from feelings of 'guilt' and 'shame', using a range of discursive strategies. It is important to note that none of the exhibitions were concerned with generating such feelings, nor were specific questions asked about these emotions; rather, these feelings were frequently raised, unprompted, by respondents. Non-British respondents were quite mixed in their responses, with some utilising similar strategies of disengagement and avoidance of the histories and the emotions this generated. These latter responses tended to come from tourists whose countries were also involved in the slave trade; however, this tendency was not statistically significant and it should be noted that visitor numbers from such countries were relatively low.

African-Caribbean British responses to the exhibitions were, overall, far more engaged with the exhibition content than white British respondents, as they were generally engaging in active politicised assessments of the extent to which the exhibitions were perceived as

acknowledging hidden histories, and/or were engaged in active expressions of remembering, commemoration and social commentary. Asian British responses also stood out as relatively emotionally neutral, but nonetheless also tended to assess the political meaning and consequence of the exhibitions for contemporary Britain.

Across the overall sample, and *within* the sample of white British respondents, educational attainment and socio-economic status produced no statistically significant patterning. Age also had no influence, with one exception identified below. Gender, however, was statistically significant, with women, and in particular African-Caribbean women, often more likely to be emotionally and empathetically engaged than men. Some small variations were observed across museums, but overall, strategies of avoidance were not significantly influenced by the interpretive strategies employed at museums. Some tendencies were identified in relation to strategies of *engagement*, and these are discussed below. Visitor intention was a difficult variable to assess, as this most strongly correlated against ethnicity; that is, African-Caribbean visitors overwhelmingly intended to visit, and the variable intentionality often correlated with ethnicity. Within the white British sample, there was some correlation with intentionality and levels of engagement, but this correlation was not strong.

As noted above, each interview was coded in their entirety in order to get a sense of the emotional engagement or response of visitors, relative engagement with the exhibition, and awareness of legacy issues. The first of these measures considered the emotional engagement of visitors, with 49.1% recorded as neutral in their emotional response, 10.8% showed empathy, 7.1% were angry and confronted by the exhibition; 7.9% mentioned feelings of shame/guilt, 5.8% exhibited pride (the remaining 19% showing a range of 'other' emotions)². The second measure revealed that passive engagement (42.4%), followed by neutral or uncommitted engagement (31.9%), was the most frequent response, with 23% being quite or fully engaged with the exhibition content. White British were most likely to be neutral or passive, and were only more likely to be active if engaged negatively. This negativity often displayed itself in strategies that distanced individuals from the exhibition and its content (discussed below). Asian British were almost universally neutral, while African-Caribbean British were most likely to be quite or fully engaged, in both positive and negative ways. In the case of African-Caribbean British respondents, negative engagement tended to manifest itself in criticisms of the exhibitions/museums they were visiting rather than in negativity to the overall topic.

The house museum, Harewood House, recorded slightly higher levels of disengagement and confrontation than the other museums. Two museums recorded slightly higher levels of active engagement from both the overall sample and the sample of white British respondents. This engagement often exhibited itself in high levels of empathy, coupled with statements that indicated people were using empathy to assess the significance of the history portrayed for their sense of national/regional or individual identity, and/or were making some form of critical commentary about contemporary Britain. This engagement tended to occur around aspects of the exhibitions that dealt with personal stories of the enslaved. For instance, an audio reading of a segment from Mary Prince's diary describing how, at the age of twelve, she was sold away from her mother was an aspect of one exhibition that initiated the following:

Well its obviously quite disturbing to see what people went through as slaves that way and the horrors of that, erm, so that was, that was quite challenging, and also there was some comments in there of er the girl Mary I think, who was sold, that was quite disturbing, it was just a case that she made a comment during her discussions that where there were lots of people who didn't seem to care about her and bidding for her she assumed that not all of them could have been bad, the way everybody gets sucked up to the attitudes of the time even though they were not bad people , they would do things without thinking it was bad, that was quite disturbing, so all the things we do today in different subjects.

(BB15(79): male, 35-44, sales technology, white British).

At one of the museums measuring slightly higher levels of engagement, the exhibition centred on the life history of Olaudah Equiano and emphasised the message of personal growth and triumph. This narrative found some synergy with traditional abolition stories that centred on William Wilberforce's moral struggles for abolition against the tide of resistance:

...when you think about, I'm in my 60s...but for me I was in Wales whatever you got you had to work for, to go to a grammar school you had to work, that I can associate with him, he only got what he had through hard work and I think that's what you're getting at, that's what it means to me [the exhibition on Equiano]. It's just emphasising the lesson. You can say to the youth of today and say look he started with nothing.

(BHA85: male, 55-64, teacher, white British)

...John Wesley, Wilberforce, Granville Sharp, Equiano, they are men of character and they have strength of character and I think the character of this nation, especially English is very weak, that's the message, wake up and stop watching TV, stop getting drunk every night, just get up and do something, make a difference.

(BHE9: male, white British).

Personal stories of the enslaved were used as tools by those white British respondents, assessed as quite or very engaged, to connect with and negotiate the meaning of the history they were encountering. In addition, or when such personal stories were not present at exhibitions, some respondents drew on their own experiences, or those of friends or family, to make empathetic links to the exhibition content. For instance:

Well I've got a new daughter-in-law from, erm, Trinidad, she's working over here, her dad is Trinidad her mum is white, and all the time learning a lot about the Caribbean, as I was walking around I was just wondering how she would feel, and I thought it would be fantastic to talk to her about this exhibition because now that we've been to Trinidad and learnt a bit about the West Indies, I thought that was a very interesting part for me.

(BE9(138): male, over 65, bank director, white British)

Well coming as I do from Cardiff, and the history of the development of the coal mines in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the behaviour of the rich against the poor of course is manifest in all the time isn't it? Those people who are desperately poor and desperate to advance themselves work in appalling conditions, so basically that's the message.

(BA1(1): male, over 65, retired accountant, white British)

Women, and in particular African-Caribbean women, were more likely to be quite or fully engaged, and more likely to be constructively engaged than were men. Feelings of empathy were also more likely to be felt by women and more likely to be used as triggers for critical identity work that reconsidered the nature of British history or identity:

Erm, how does it make me feel? I think maybe, maybe, a bit more understanding exactly what it was like for the slaves and everything I think it's sort of maybe helping me to emphasise with them a bit, I'm not sure that says how I feel, yeah maybe [I] feel also a little bit guilty I suppose, that's part of my heritage

(BA47(48): Female, 25-34, administrator, white British living in New Zealand)

Sad, I think the history of humanity seems to let us down, whatever we learn about history people did such cruel things to one another, in the end people did try to abolish slavery but that took so long, the abolition of actual trading before slavery was abolished, as I was saying emancipation came so long after that, so sadness really.

(BB23b(94): female, 45-54, civil engineer, white British)

The acknowledgement of legacy issues was significant both in public and professional debate around the bicentenary and in the exhibitions used in this study. The third relative coding of interviews was undertaken to determine the degree to which issues about racism and/or multiculturalism were considered by the interviewee: 50.4% of those interviewed were unaware or uninterested in these issues, 19.9% were aware but not engaged and 15.4% were active in considering them. A very strong correlation occurred with ethnic identity, with white British more likely to be unaware, while Asians, those who identified as mixed race and African-Caribbean British were more likely to be positively engaged and assessing social consequences. Non-British were, unsurprisingly, likely to be unaware. In addition, those over 55 years of age and under 24 tended to be unaware of these issues, while women were likely to be more aware and engaged than men.

Engagement with the content of exhibitions tended to manifest itself in two ways. Firstly, it was done through active political assessment of either the exhibition or what the exhibition and the bicentenary may mean for contemporary public debates and British identity. This form of engagement was predominantly undertaken by African-Caribbean British respondents:

it [the exhibition] is not really what I would call compensation for what happened... but at least it means that people do acknowledge that it was wrong, and that it shows we have come a long way since those days, because my family... and I am sure my great great grandparents who were part of the slave trade... it is nice to know that we have come a long way since then.

(BHA30: female, 25-34, engineer, African British)

Erm, slightly emotional. Erm, a little bit upset but relieved that it's actually out in the open that it's no longer a secret (laughs). That's how you feel, that's how you were brought up to feel, that it was a secret. Especially in secondary school it comes across as a secret. I remember telling my friends that at school we were studying World War Two and we were told that the following week we were discussing slavery, and slavery consisted of an afternoon. And that did concern me. But so much so, that most of us photocopied bits of the book that we were learning from and took it away just to get a better understanding, even then you didn't get a full understanding, your parents don't want to talk about it because its such a difficult subject...other than that! (laughs) Its history you have to accept it.

(DB17(63): female, 35-44, fashion design, black British)

I think its it gives the message to remind people to treat people to be aware of where we buy our things or how we live our lives and I think its also a message that this country did get there on the back of others it didn't just [happen]. I think too many people are very nationalistic at times they forget that this country was built on the sweat of others ... it didn't just happen in sort of like glamorous Jane Austen type way.

(BE17(144): female, 35-44, Caribbean British)

The second form of engagement, most often undertaken by white British or overseas visitors, tended to use feelings of empathy to imagine not only what it was like then, but also what that history of experience may mean for contemporary Britain. These forms of engagement, as already noted, tended to draw on personal stories and accounts by enslaved people, and/or used personal experience to make empathetic linkages. Others where frank about their assessment of British identity:

...I think that... it is really easy to be quite sentimental about Britain and the colonial past, and you know all about rule Britannia and it's great its quite easy to be quite blind about the cost of that.

(BHA16: female, 16-24, trainee solicitor, white British)

However, disengagement, either passive or active, was the most frequent response by white British respondents, and the rest of this paper will consider this in more detail. This disengagement centres on attempts by individuals to distance themselves from negative feelings, and thus insulate the personal impact acknowledgement of this history may have on their sense of identity or sense of self-recognition. On one level, this distancing is revealed in the extent to which people did not personally engage with the exhibitions. Although 76% of those surveyed considered that the bicentenary was of national significance and should be marked, many gave quite bland answers: 'Absolutely, absolutely....I think every anniversary should be marked' (LD26(64): male, 45-54, concierge, white British). Only 20% of those surveyed felt that it should be marked for reasons of *active remembering*. That is, for acknowledging a hidden history and/or because it had resonance for contemporary issues. On the other hand, when asked if the bicentenary had any personal significance, 71% declared that it did not: 'Well nothing that motivates me to ... behave differently' (HHD20(84): female, 45-54, HR director, white British). Those for whom the bicentenary had personal significance tended to be African-Caribbean British: 'Yes it has, because my great grandmother her parents were slaves so it's as close as that, she died a year before I was born in 1942 so it's important' (DB15(61): Male, 55-64, retail, Caribbean British).

Visitors were also asked if the exhibition they were visiting spoke to any aspects of their personal identity, with 58% noting that there were no aspects of their personal identities to which the exhibition spoke (38% nominating that it did and 4% undecided). White British were most likely to say no:

Only as much as that I'm interested in the subject, I don't feel that it's part of my heritage, if I was black, maybe I'd feel differently, in that way, I don't personally feel...

(ML10(73): female, 35-44, HR director, white British)

No, not at all, I can look at it from a point of view of a historian say and find it interesting in that way, but nothing directly personal.

(LD8(45): male, over 65, accountant, white British)

No, because times have changed, it's not me personally, it's how things were years ago.

(LD7(44): male, 35-44, prison officer, white British).

In these responses, history and the past are noted but are defined as not my heritage, it is not part of their personal identity – it does not, in actuality, affect their feelings. These were typical insulating responses. The feelings they were insulating themselves against become apparent in these responses:

As an English person, this [exhibition content] is part of English history it speaks to me in that way...no closer than that. I don't feel guilty about the slave trade although I believe the slave trade was horrible and it was awful and it was morally reprehensible and it was inexcusable etcetera. I don't feel, even though I'm English and I benefited from that, I don't feel guilty.

(BHA64: male, 55-64, teacher, white British)

Er, actually, I er, I was coming a bit pessimistic as we always concentrate on the negative side, putting the blame on Britain. I think this is for me I feel quite encouraged because it seems quite balanced [the exhibition] because it wasn't just Britain involved in slavery there was other countries as well as African countries I quite like that balance.

(BA122(122): male, 25-34, HR manager, white British)

... they showed all sides of arguments, initially I thought it was anti-British but as you go through they do clearly, we did get rid of slavery in the end and there was a lot of British people helping to do that.

(BE24(153): female, 45-54, lecturer, white British)

In the above responses, issues of guilt or shame are denied or raised as a fear or a concern – an issue underlying many white British responses to the bicentenary or the exhibition they were visiting. As noted above, these were not issues raised in any of the exhibitions or by the interviewers, but were concerns respondents brought with them to the exhibitions. A different response to the issue of guilt is given here by those who nominated that the exhibition *did* speak to their personal identities:

It speaks to my whiteness. I don't know what quite that means but it makes me feel (pause). I don't. (pause) Er. Well the obvious thing to say is that it makes me feel guilty but it doesn't really, it makes me feel privileged. I don't think it makes me feel guilty.

(BE3(132): female, 45-54, software designer, white British)

... it's very emotive sometimes, it... you know you feel a bit guilty being here, you see a couple of Afro-Caribbeans and Nigerians, there you are staring, and you feel it's their place and you shouldn't be here at all. In the wrong kind of way, it's like you I don't know, it's like being a spectator in a kind of you know their history and I feel as if a bit it's their history and here we are instructing for education purposes and I feel it's a bit patronising.

(LB23(103): female, 35-44, white British)

In these responses, the speakers are struggling with their emotional responses to the exhibition, and attempting to negotiate issues of guilt and feelings of privilege. The point here is that these people are, in different ways, acknowledging a sense of guilt and responsibility, but they do not know how to deal with it. The history confronted by these exhibitions is highly emotional and dissonant, and a key issue that emerges from the audience interviews is that people did not have the emotional or intellectual tools to deal with feelings of historical shame and guilt, nor, in large part, were these clues or tools provided by the exhibitions themselves. Occasionally, personalized stories of the enslaved, as noted above, were used to negotiate difficult feelings via empathy. However, for the most part these feelings were too confronting and strategies of avoidance and disengagement were the responses.

This avoidance or disengagement was evident in the overall lack of recognition given to both the history itself and its legacies. For instance, in response to the question 'whose history is being represented in the exhibition?' only 11% acknowledged that it was British or English history, while 14% gave the descriptive response 'history of slave trade'. A further 18% noted it was African History with the inference it was thus not British history as such, and 43% noted in various different ways it was 'everybody's' history or 'world' history. This latter response is interesting. When offered by African-Caribbean British respondents, it tended to suggest everyone in an inclusive way. However, when uttered by a white British respondent, 'everyone' became a way of distancing themselves from the history. For instance,

(exhales) Everyone's history, at the time that was the way it went.

(DH5(126): Male, 55-64, white)

Erm, I'm not sure, how I would answer that question, obviously, erm, it is part of the the sort of national history for many countries. In terms of whose history I don't know because it seems to be a question is it my personal history, does that induce feelings of guilt for me, yes it is British history as much as an, sort of, exhibition on the Tudors is, but its also more widely history of anywhere involved with the

slave trade so its international history isn't it. It's everyone's.

(BB8a(72): male, 45-54, policy officer RDA, white British)

Alternatively, more specifically it was not white history:

The coloured peoples.

(BA129(129): male, over 65, retired university lecturer in history, white English)

Africans, I don't know, black people.

(BE6(135): female, 16-24, nurse, white British)

The non-inclusive response it was 'everyone's' history, or other statements that it was simply African history, was a significant motif and is a form of 'geographical distancing'. Traditional historical accounts of the British slave trade are often centred on the so-called 'triangular' trade – in which the movement of ships is traced across the Atlantic from British ports to West Africa to the Caribbean and back again to Britain. In this portrayal, enslavement and the trade is something that happens 'over there' in Africa and the Caribbean or 'out there' on the Atlantic and not on English soil. The middle passage – the route between Africa and the Caribbean – is often the focus of the empathetic historical gaze, which serves to fix the brutalities of enslavement into an Atlantic and thus international setting, rather than a specifically British setting replete with implied responsibility.

In response to the question 'are you part of the history represented here', 41% noted that they were not, while 54% noted that they were. White British were more likely to say no to this question (42% said no compared to only 19% of African-Caribbean British). Of the 54% who said yes, only 20% made, however, an active association:

Well I do feel I'm part of the history because my family was living, and passed on most of the proceeds of the slave trade, but we all do, anyone whoever put a teaspoon of sugar in their tea had something to do with it, but realising that my family had inherited money, though it wasn't a direct bloodline to me, but it was somebody in my family...so it has to have a significance for me and its made me, and I think there's been so many television programmes and the film of Wilberforce and have sort of enforced it really... [tearful].

(DI29(176): female, over 65, counsellor, white British)

When asked 'what for you is the exhibition about' 15.3% noted it was about acknowledging hidden histories and its legacies, a response dominated by African-Caribbean British, while 33.8%, considered it was blandly about the provision of information, a response dominated by white British, as were the responses that it was about 'the slave trade' (17.3%) or about 'abolition' (15.6%).

In response to the question 'are there any messages that you can take away from this exhibition?', 18.9% stated that they took away no message, while another 10.5% took away information only:

Messages? (pause) Erm...well its past, and erm, its colonial past. How it amassed wealth and how it became a super power and that happened 200 years ago. So apart from that, it's that knowledge, but for messages, I do not see any message here.

(DE43(112): male, 45-54, journalist, white British).

A further 10.1% made bland statements in response to this question, 8.2% noted that it reaffirmed what they already knew, and another 12.8% made active distancing statements, responses that tended to be made by white British. Just 2.6 and 1.9% respectively took away messages about multiculturalism and racism, 4.7% took away humanitarian messages and

another 4.9% were rethinking their sense of national, regional or ethnic identity, while 9.7% noted the messages were about acknowledging history, the latter most frequently expressed by African-Caribbean British. When asked if a respondent's views on the past or the present had been changed at all 76% said 'no'.

The active distancing statements made in response to this question are revealed strikingly in response to the next two interview questions. The question 'What meaning does an exhibition like this have for modern Britain?' was also met with a relatively low recognition of racism (4.1%) and multicultural issues (6.3%), although 15.4%, predominantly African-Caribbean British, noted the importance of the exhibition lay in its recognition of hidden histories. A further 15.2% found the exhibitions educational. On the other hand, 20.5% offered vague or clichéd statements about 'moving forward' and/or 'learning from the past so we don't repeat mistakes'. This latter response was most likely to be made by white British respondents. This use of cliché was a significant discursive device of avoidance. Clichés can be a handy or short hand way of expressing difficult concepts, however, their use in many (but not all) of the interviews for this study, was to insulate the speaker both from negative emotions and the implications of these emotions for identity work. 'We must learn from the past so as not to repeat our mistakes', we must 'move forward and look to the future' and 'it's all in the past' and variations of these, were frequently used to indicate that a respondent had felt that they understood the significance or message of the exhibition. Nevertheless, these were also being used to insulate the emotional and intellectual impact of the exhibition and the bicentenary. Favoured among these clichés was 'Man's inhumanity to Man', a line from the Robert Burns poem *Man was made to Mourn: A Dirge*, 1785:

Well I think it's a sort of indictment on our past really, its very sad and unfortunately with these sorts of atrocities carry on today, its man's inhumanity to man, that's what you think about.

(DI2(30): female, 45-54, accountant white British)

I think commemorations like this are always important to mark, people need to be aware of the horrific going on and man's inhumanity to man.

(BB10(74): male, 55-64, teacher, African-Caribbean British)

[this exhibition makes me feel] ... Well depressed really which is a pity because we're on holiday! (laughs) No but, erm.... I'm always upset by unfairness that I can do nothing about and cruelty that I can do nothing about, I can't do anything about this its retrospective isn't it so...there's nothing anyone can do today except it makes me think what are we doing wrong today because it seems to me that we can repeat mistakes they can be different mistakes but man's inhuman.

(BA44(45): female, over 65, retired teacher, white British)

While for some the use of cliché was a handy response when the emotions were too strong and words failed them, for many, clichés offered a source of refuge, as in the last response. Here, the respondent feels powerless against cruelty, but is relieved of feeling too much responsibility as it is, after all, 'man's inhumanity to man'. Moreover, the cliché works to make this history almost enviable – it is 'man's inhumanity to man', and thus any acknowledgement of cultural and historical responsibility can be sidestepped. Refuge found in the 'moving forward' or 'learning from the past' motif was also important in shifting responsibility and guilt into a morally neutral future (see Waterton et al, 2010, Waterton this issue).

It needs to be acknowledged that some respondents were telling us what they thought we wanted to hear, or what they thought were the 'right' answers. This may, in part, account for the blandness and a certain uniformity in some of the answers to our questions. Occasionally, respondents would ask – 'is this the right response'? The final question in the interview asked: 'The issue of apology has been raised this year over the bicentenary. What is your opinion on this issue'? It was in answering this question, which was often met with outright anger or

frustration, that people sometimes contradicted earlier 'feel good' statements, or revealed a more negative engagement with the issues than they had previously indicated. Here, 55% felt that Britain should not take or acknowledge any responsibility and say sorry, while 33% felt that they should say sorry or offer some other sort of acknowledgement. Within the white British response, 62% said no to this question, compared to 36% of African-Caribbean British who said no.

Distancing and avoidance was a significant motif in discussions of apology. These motifs were so prevalent that they became clichés within the context of the interviews, and these avoidance strategies followed five distinct themes. These themes echoed answers to other questions by some respondents, but also came into play to contradict earlier more neutral responses from some of those interviewed. In effect, when asked a question that made the issues raised by this history personal, the discursive strategies of avoidance became more pronounced.

The five themes identified can be allayed with five distinct self-sufficient arguments, that is, statements that are perceived to be based on 'common sense', are 'clinching' or are beyond question, and which have a similar status to socially acceptable clichés (Wetherell and Potter 1992: 91; Augustinous *et al* 2002: 110). The five arguments were: temporal, moral, geographical and class distancing and 'Africans were party to it'. The most frequent of these was temporal distancing or disengagement:

...it shouldn't have happened, but it was a different generation, it was a long time ago.

(WHD3(102) : female, 45-54, teacher, white British)

oh it's a long time [ago] people of today have nothing to do with this...

(BME 106 (173): male, 35-44, teacher, French)

It doesn't really affect me that much. I don't feel anything, no. It's such a long time in the past.

(BME 6 (73): male, 25-34, archaeologist, white British)

I don't think we should apologise because it was something that happened 200 years ago and people living today weren't around then so I think it's a pointless gesture.

(BA110(110): male, 45-54, driver, white British)

You cannot be responsible for the past.

(LA47(81): male, 25-34, teacher, white British)

This temporal self-sufficient argument is interesting given the degree of pride that has been documented about the significance given to the age of much of Britain's valued cultural and historical heritage. Age depth, normally a source of pride and a signifier of 'heritage', is here used to dismiss the relevance of history. Another frequent self-sufficient argument developed a sense of moral distancing. In this context, it was observed that morals were different in the past and you cannot judge those times by the morals of today. This was interesting in the context of the bicentenary, which was meant to mark, if not celebrate, the moral actions of abolitionists. Examples of these statements include:

Er, (pause) I always find that things like this where you're trying to reevaluate something with hindsight and with different values is a little, a little pointless really, it was what it was at the time and times have changed, so...so, you know I don't think one can be too critical in a way.

(DE39(107): male, 35-44, manager, white British)

...its just what they did at the times moral values have changed...

(BA99(99): male, 35-44, accountant, white English/Irish)

Geographical distancing was another common self-sufficient argument, which asserted the idea that it was not just Britain, other nations started it, although Britain finished it:

Its not my fault they did that or whatever, its not a great part of British history but they weren't doing anything different than the French you know or the Spanish or Portuguese...

(BA99(99): male, 35-44, accountant, white English/Irish)

No, because predominantly African slavers were Africans and Arabs so all we did was utilise an existing trade, that's all, so we didn't start it, we just continued something that was already going on and still is to this day.

(LE62(309): male, 35-44, company manager, white British)

The next most frequent self-sufficient argument was 'Africans were party to it':

Personally myself I don't think we should apologise because it wasn't us who started it we just got in it, ... ok, so we chained up another species of human we shouldn't have done that, but it's, if they didn't sell them to us, people wouldn't buy and the slave trade wouldn't exist so I think they should start apologising first because it started in Africa.

(BHE 22 (95): male, 45-54, administrator, white English)

...the Africans should be apologising to themselves, if they didn't catch the slaves we wouldn't have shipped them.

(HHD17, male, 45-54, insurance broker, white British)

The fifth argument, less frequent than those above but nonetheless of importance, used issues of class to achieve distancing. In this argument, the aristocracy were identified as the perpetrators and the key beneficiaries of the trade. This ignores the wider social benefits accrued by Britain, and again shifts the gaze of recognition from contemporary legacies:

We're just working class people aren't we? I don't think we can be held responsible for what happened to them.

(LF4(290): male, 35-44, aircraft fitter, white British)

It's a difficult question...but I'm not one for making an apology for what's happened because I believe it was only certain classes that did it, that my family weren't a part of that class so in some sense yeah [not part of the history].

(BA104(104): male, 45-54, white British)

I don't actually know, I've done some family history and I think all of my family were just working class and didn't really own slaves ...

(BA103(103): female, 45-54, librarian, Irish)

What is revealing about these arguments is that they map onto some of the self-sufficient arguments initially identified by Wetherell and Potter (1992) in a study of Pakeha (or white New Zealand) talk about Maori-Pakeha relations. In this study Wetherell and Potter (1992: 177) identified 10 such arguments that included 'you cannot turn the clock backwards', 'present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations' and 'we have to live in the twentieth century'.

Discussion

Although disengagement was not the only response to the exhibitions, it was the marked response within the sample of white British. While those white British that had planned to come to the exhibitions tended to be more engaged than those who had simply wandered in, it is important to note that strategies of disengagement and avoidance were being utilised by respondents who at some level were interested enough in the issues to visit the exhibitions⁴. What is evident in many of the responses is the lack of emotional tools to negotiate constructively issues of guilt and collective historical responsibility. Museum exhibitions, as advocates of the new museology would have it, are venues in which contemporary and historical meanings are negotiated and mediated. The negotiation here is predominantly maintenance of the status quo via emotional disengagement, and passive and active avoidance. Heritage sites and exhibitions are places where, as Poria *et al.* (2003) state, you go to *feel*. Work on visitor responses by a range of researchers have all demonstrated the extent to which emotions and feelings are used to enable and promote a sense of belonging and sense of place (Dicks 2000; Cameron and Gatewood 2000; Longhurst *et al.* 2004; Palmer 2005; Prentice 2001; Smith 2006; Gregory and Witcomb 2007). Despite this body of work, however, the emotional aspects of heritage tend to be ignored, often with the result that little consideration is given to how feelings mediate the use of heritage and history (Byrne 2009; Smith and Waterton 2009: 49). The extent to which some visitors to these museums were attempting to insulate themselves from perceived negative emotions is a function of the inability of the AHD to provide the intellectual and emotional tools necessary to engage with dissonant and controversial histories and heritage. If heritage is not 'good', grand or monumental, it is not heritage within the AHD. Thus, such areas of history do not need to be considered in terms of heritage or inheritance.

Cameron (2006, 2007), in her study of visitor responses to dissonance in museum exhibitions, reveals that museum audiences may value the pedagogic and authoritative position of museums, particularly when dealing with dissonant or contentious topics (see also Ashton and Hamilton 2003). Drawing on her interview data, she suggests that museums may be seen as protectors of morality, of setting and 'offering moral certainty'. As is well established in the museology literature, museums are often also perceived as places to display national triumphalism (see Walsh 1992; Bennett 1995; Macdonald 2003; Witcomb 2003 for critique). What we may be seeing in the disengagement of some sectors of the 1807 audience is not only a failure to deal with the emotions generated by the topic, but also a reaction to the degree to which the museums in this study had become 'unsafe' by allowing community voice to destabilize the authoritative narrative (see Cubitt, Kalliopi this issue) and question the moral certainty of British identity.

The bicentenary, and the exhibitions associated with it, required a remembering of the history of British enslavement that necessitated a significant remaking of British self-identity. The silences in British collective memory of the African enslavement are an example of forgetting as humiliated silence, where there has been an attempt 'to bury things beyond expression and the reach of memory' (Connerton 2008: 68). Such forms of forgetting, Connerton (2008) notes, may be an essential ingredient in the processes of survival – what was at stake here was the survival of a certain sense of certitude in British morality. The processes of remembering that were triggered by this act of commemoration, in exposing previous silences, or 'blank spots' in collective memory, not only 'unsettled' previous memories but raised questions about power and privilege (Macdonald 2010:93). However, as Wertsch (2002) notes, remembering does not occur in a vacuum. Various cultural tools are required to help us remember, and any act of remembering will be framed and influenced by dominant discourses (Misztal 2010:27). During the bicentenary, visitors to the exhibitions were being asked to remember in the context of a dominant historical narrative that was undergoing public critique – here, the cultural tools for remembering provided by the AHD were found to be insufficient to the task. Given this failure, and the 'unsafe' situation offered by the museums, many of those interviewed turned to repertoires of cliché and self-sufficient arguments to help them mediate what they were being asked to remember.

The self-sufficient arguments identified by Wetherell and Potter (1992) were also identified by Augoustinos and colleagues in political speeches and debates in Australia over the

apology to the Stolen Generations⁵ (Augoustinos et al 2002; Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2004; Augoustinos and Every 2007). These rhetorical devices have been identified as 'modern', 'symbolic' or new forms of racism, and have been documented in a range of Western nations (Augoustinos and Every 2007: 124). Augoustinos and Every (2007:124) suggest that 'old fashioned' or overt racism has been supplanted by the development of discursive strategies that, while still presenting negative views of out-groups, work nonetheless to protect the speaker from charges of racism and prejudice. While Augoustinos and Every (2007) are at pains to point out that what counts as racist discourse is difficult to define and much debated, it is important to note that whether prejudice is intended or not in the use of these self-sufficient arguments, if the consequence of their use is to deny recognition, and thus social justice, then their effect is discriminatory.

Carol Johnson (2005), in a study of the tensions that arise between privileged and marginalized identity narratives in Australia, the US and Britain, identifies a range of stock narratives similar to those identified above. She notes that not only do these 'discursive strategies ... often seem to be motivated by a desire to feel well about ourselves' (p. 57), they also work to cut off possibilities for empathy (p. 47). Empathy, which she notes is more than just an expression of sadness or pity, is key to issues of imagination. Asking the privileged to image themselves in the position of subordinate groups not only asks them to 'imagine alternative stories about the past' but also 'alternative futures and presents' (2005: 42). This is a point emphasised by Eric Gable (2009) in his study of the portrayal of the history of slavery at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson. He notes that an ability of white visitors to *identify* with the enslaved is vital if messages of exploitation, inequity and injustice are to be effectively conveyed. Empathy was often a key factor in active positive engagements with the 1807 exhibitions. White British respondents that were actively engaging with the exhibitions, through undertaking critical identity work or through making critical social commentaries, used expressions of deep empathy to do so. As the example given above in relation to the Mary Prince installation in one museum illustrated, empathetic imagination was important in the constructive mediation of dissonant and distressing history. In closing down empathic links to the exhibition content, the self-sufficient arguments used by many respondents blocked engagement, and reaffirmed and remembered a sense of comfort and moral certainty.

The implications of this are that the opportunities for the collective recognition of African-Caribbean British identity, and the history and experiences that underpin this, are missed. Misrecognition and humiliated silence continues. The issue of empathy is important for the ability to imagine identity, for, as Johnston notes, like nations identity is also an imagined community (2005:42). It is important, however, for not only imagining identities that are not your own, but also in imagining your own shared identity. The politics of recognition not only requires recognition of other identities, and all that is tied up in that, it also requires a degree of self-knowledge and self-recognition. Tied up with the recognition and remembering of the history of the British slave trade, is recognition that one's own sense of self is predicated on the membership of a society that is not only not perfect, but is responsible. It requires not only empathy towards those who have had their rights violated, but requires the navigation of the emotional issues of shame, guilt and responsibility.

Conclusion

The self-same demographic that waxed lyrical about the national and emotional meanings of the country house was unable to bring the same levels of emotional acuity to exhibitions on British enslavement. There is a great deal of irony in this. The United Kingdom is a nation obsessed with its past – or, more accurately, a narrow range of narratives about its past. My previous work at country houses (2006) showed the extent to which the material culture of the aristocratic elite represented, to many people, all that was great and good about Britain. Even at a distance in time of hundreds of years there was a very strong, and often emotional, identification with what those material remains seemed to stand for in the present day. The irony was particularly pointed in regards to 1807, as the most reactionary and hostile rejections of the relevance of commemorating this anniversary were collected at a country house whose origins were directly linked to the slave trade in the Caribbean. This was not a secret – to their credit

the owners of the house presented that history. But in our interviews, people who walked past a huge banner advertising 1807 events at the house often did not recall seeing it, or noting the related material in the displays. If they did, there were frequent, and quite aggressive, attempts to downplay the significance or relevance of the 1807 and related slavery material. The self-sufficient arguments of time depth, moral relativism and moving on were used. Yet these self-same people were visiting a house that was built in the same period, out of the profits of slavery and sugar – they were there to eulogise the exact same past, yet when it made them uncomfortable, contemporaneous events suddenly became too distant in time to have meaning. Age depth and the appreciation of the values of past times that were aspects of the AHD's framing of the country house experience, and that promoted confidence in identity and sense of place, were turned on their heads. In the face of emotionally difficult and unsettling heritage, aspects of the AHD that were previously used to promote wellbeing and belonging were now used to deflect. Thus, time depth became a weapon to repel rather than to embrace emotion. Morality became relative and uncertain. The past became irrelevant as respondents determined to 'move forward'.

The idea of the museum as a site of social action is one that is continually stressed in museological debate. Government policy, particularly in Britain, as Message (2009) documents, has asked museums to promote ideas of cultural citizenship and social cohesion. What this study illustrates is that, in the context of the bicentenary exhibitions and in terms of the white British audience at least, there has been a palpable failure to promote an inclusive sense of citizenship. Misrecognition of history and heritage, and the legacies of these, appears to have been the dominant and immediate response of those white British interviewed for this study. It is important to note, however, that these were exit interviews that recorded people's immediate responses to exhibition content. It is beyond this study to know how people may have mediated what they had seen once they got home and discussed the exhibition (or if they did so) with friends and family. It is possible that the mediation of difficult heritage and history takes time, both in personal and national contexts. It may be useful to return to the permanent exhibitions discussed in this study, say five years post-the bicentenary, to determine if responses to the exhibitions change. The percolation of public debates associated with the bicentenary may increase the resources available to audiences in mediating these exhibitions. Perhaps increasing familiarity with the issues will help engagement and recognition, or perhaps the bicentenary will have been forgotten as Britain, in noting 'man's inhumanity to man', 'moves forward'.

What, however, are the practical implications, given that the broad aim of the *1807 Commemorated* study was to identify issues in the development of exhibitions dealing with dissonant and controversial topics? There are three points to note. Firstly, exhibitions are, of course, developed and displayed in the context of wider political and social debates. Understanding those debates and what is *at stake* both politically and emotionally for the various groups involved is, needless-to-say, a key issue. Secondly, identifying and understanding the emotional and discursive strategies used within these debates, and why and how they are deployed, is also important. Consideration of the role of the AHD and the various clichés, mythologies and rhetorical devices that come into play when social and national narratives are under stress is vital, as any understanding of how and when these are used may provide opportunities to challenge their persuasiveness. However, any challenges to existing recalled knowledge, and the cultural tools used to maintain and protect that knowledge, must also understand the significant role emotion plays in mediating museum exhibition and heritage interpretation. Thus, the third issue notes the importance of identifying and understanding the emotional context of any planned exhibition. Exhibition strategies and interpretative materials may need to provide the resources and skills for visitors to navigate the emotions that visitors may bring to, or that are triggered by, their visits. Negative emotions, such as guilt and shame, were controversial and difficult issues for a significant set of those interviewed for this study. Although they were emotions that were not intended to be generated by the exhibitions, the point here is that these emotions should not have been ignored by curatorial staff. Rather it is important to recognise that such emotional issues exist and to develop the tools or opportunities within an exhibition to help visitors constructively mediate them. Providing such resources may help to challenge strategies of disengagement and avoidance and should be considered as an

integral aspect of any attempt to recall and exhibit dissonant heritage and history.

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Notes

- ¹ The 1807 Commemorated Project was funded by an AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship (2007-2009). Further details about the project and its outcomes can be found at the project's main web site: <http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/> and at the MLA funded toolkit web site: <http://www.york.ac.uk/1807commemorated/index.html>
- ² A generic example of the interview schedule/questionnaire, and the detailed findings for each question, alongside tables of the frequencies of responses, can be found on the 1807 Commemorated web site: <http://www.history.ac.uk/1807commemorated/>
- ³ Socio-economic categories were determined by asking visitors their occupation (or where relevant that of parent/guardian/head of household) and coding these occupations according to the Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>.
- ⁴ Entry was free to all but two of the museums (Docklands and Harewood House) at which interviews were taken.
- ⁵ Stolen Generations refers to the Indigenous Australian children that were forcibly removed from their families as part of governmental policies of 'protection' and assimilation.

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