



STATUES AND COLONIALISM

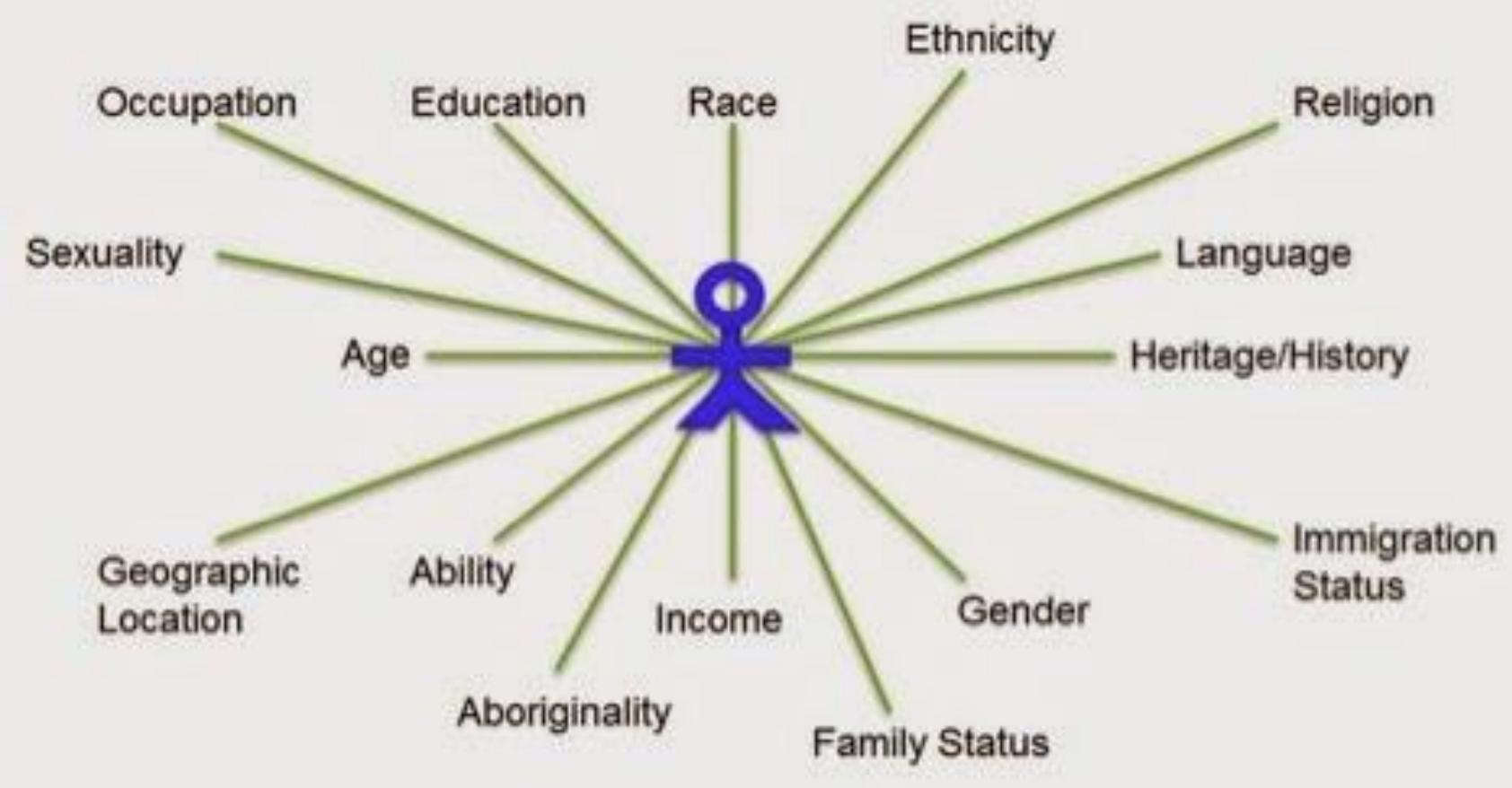


WELCOME!

Who are we?

What is a tutorial at Oxford actually like?

What will we be covering today?



LET'S TALK ABOUT POSITIONALITY

WHAT IS COLONIALISM?

'The physical occupation of one place by an external power. Colonialism involves not just the removal of resources and wealth from the new land, but actually occupying the territory, building settlements, and often also agriculture, and industry' (Sharp, 2009:3)

Geographical exploration helped to perpetuate colonialism so as a discipline we are deeply entangled with racist practises

Where is Oxford in all of this?

WHAT ARE STATUES?

- Hard to define specifically.
- “a carved or cast figure of a person or animal, especially one that is life-size or larger.” (Google)
- What does this definition ignore or leave out?
- Dalits have historically been oppressed, deemed ‘unclean’.
- Right-wing BJP supporters are vandalising statues of Ambedkar.
- This suggests that there’s only 1 acceptable version of Indian/Hindu identity (from which Dalits are excluded).
- BUT resistance from Dalits (e.g., protecting statues).



Why are statues of Indian icon Ambedkar being caged?

© 2 October 2015



A caged statue of Ambedkar in Tamil Nadu



**WHY ARE
STATUES
CONTROVERSIAL?**

The Rhodes Statue



This building was constructed by Oriel College in 1909-11 with money left in the will of Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902), a former student of the college. The college commissioned a series of statues to front the building which included Rhodes at the top.

Rhodes, a committed British colonialist, obtained his fortune through exploitation of minerals, land, and peoples of southern Africa. Some of his activities led to great loss of life and attracted criticism in his day and ever since.

In recent years, the statue has become a focus for public debate on racism and the legacy of colonialism. In June 2020, Oriel College declared its wish to remove the statue but is not doing so following legal and regulatory advice.

Find out more: www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/rhodes-contextualisation



RHODES MUST FALL

*Srinivasan rightly notes, ‘complaints of structural racism and calls for **curriculum reform** don’t draw public attention like the toppling of a statue, and the RMF leaders know this.’*

*“statues and symbols matter; they are a means through which communities **express their values**. The normalised glorification of a man who for so many is **a symbol of their historical oppression** is a tacit admission that – as it stands – Oxford does not consider their history to be important. This is incompatible with a community that posits itself as progressive, enlightened and intellectually honest.” RMFO*



THE RETURN OF CAMBODIAN ARTEFACTS

The Cambodian government are seeking the return of all stolen artefacts taken during the country's civil war and political unrest in the 20th century.

“This was a time of conflict. The whole world knew it. Large museums like the British Museum or the V&A, they shouldn't have accepted these pieces,” said Cambodia-based lawyer Brad Gordon in May 2022.

US returns stolen Benin Bronzes to Nigeria

Nigeria's cultural minister is calling for Britain to also return its collection of looted Benin Bronzes



Why Buckingham Palace is so keen to avoid the Koh-i-Noor diamond becoming a 'massive diplomatic grenade'

Glasgow Museums to return seven stolen artefacts to India

OPINION

Why The British Museum Should Not Return Stolen Artifacts

Maybe it's time to stop arguing about certain artifacts in the British Museum.

British Museum is world's largest receiver of stolen goods, says QC

Geoffrey Robertson says it should 'wash its hands of blood and return Elgin's loot'

Cambodia 'highly suspicious' about statues in British museums in hunt for looted art

UK museums urged to return stolen Zimbabwe warrior skulls taken during colonial era

The Zimbabweans fighting against the British colonisers during the 19th Century were known as the First Chimurenga.

African Prince calls for Bristol Museum to return stolen artefacts

Artefacts worth £1.8m stolen from Durham University's Oriental Museum

OTHER DYNAMICS

Race

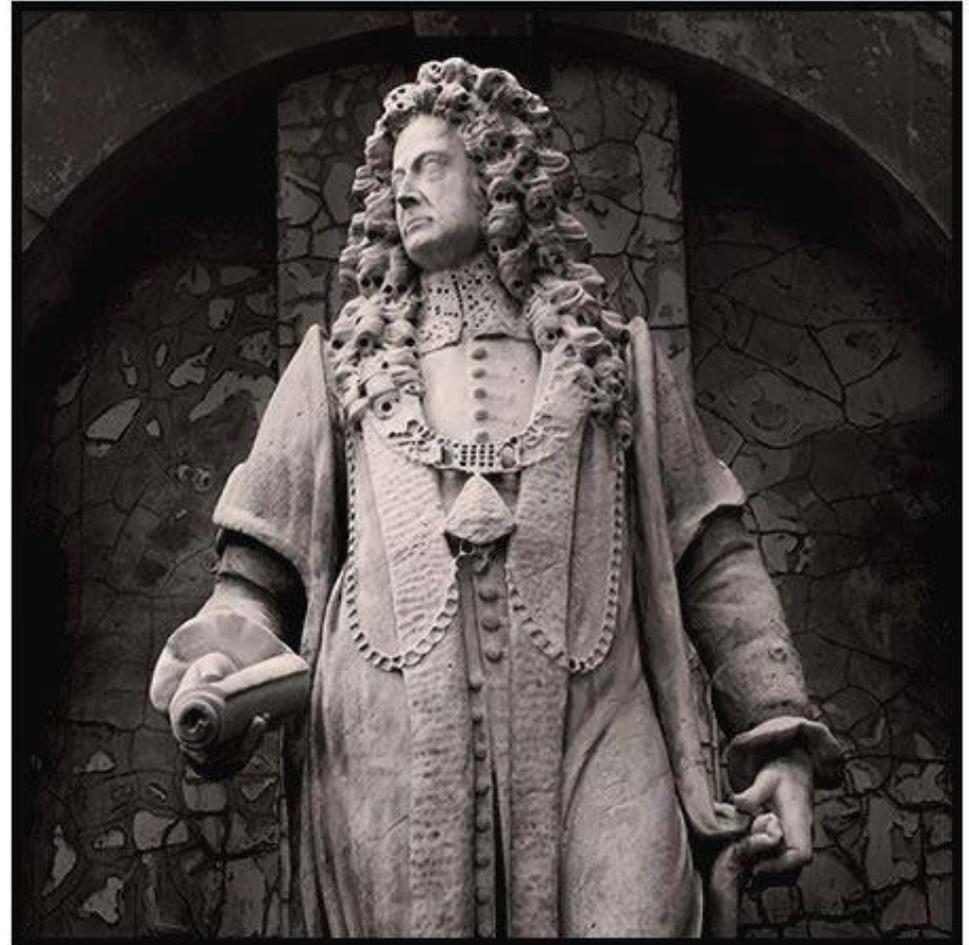
Class

Gender

What else?

RACE AND CLASS

The London statues set up between 1700 to 1779 to commemorate private individuals... include those of a dozen or so *merchants or professional men*, at a time when it was still *relatively novel to sculpt someone not a noble or member of the royal family*. At least half are of men with links to the African trade or slave plantations. (Dresser, 2007:169)



Sir Robert Clayton



Photograph © Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey (Box 44a)

Fig. 8. Charles James Fox (1749–1806). Monument sculpted in 1822 by Sir Richard Westmacott (1775–1856), Westminster Abbey. Fox lies in the arms of Liberty while at his feet Peace weeps, and a male figure – in Westmacott’s words, ‘an African Negro’ – kneels at his feet in prayer.

GENDER

Cropples
Memorial Park





Religion, sexuality, age, occupation, 'tribe', community, home country/city, birthplace, spirituality...

...The list goes on!

THE FUTURE...

- Take them all down?
- Leave them standing?
- Guard/protect them?
- Put them in museums?
- Vandalise them?
- A plaque?
- A mixture?
- How do we distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' statues?
- Araujo (2018) – bench memorials, building museums on mass graves, guided tours, honouring descendants
- Celik (2020) – erasure, substitution or manipulation.



SUMMARY

- Statues are not an easy topic to discuss, since they are emotionally charged and tied to historical figures/periods.
- Statues have been used during periods of colonial rule to assert control over space and symbolise power dynamics.
- Although statues are physically fixed in place, their meanings change over time.
- Some statues receive more critical attention than others.
- This means that statues are not artefacts of the past, but are, in many cases, vibrant and contested aspects of everyday life.
- People do not passively accept statues – they resist their presence and lobby for change, often at an international level (e.g., Rhodes Must Fall).

FURTHER RESOURCES

- We will send you a document with lots of readings, videos, podcasts, etc.– there's no pressure to look at any of them, it's just in case you found this session interesting and want to learn more!
- We are also collating useful resources onto the Geography Society website, under the 'further resources' tab – there you can find our alternative prospectus.
- Email: access-outreach@ox.ac.uk with any questions and they can be passed on to us!

**THANK YOU
FOR LISTENING**



Let's discuss further in breakout groups...