

*Of the people? For the people?:  
ethnic minorities at the People's History Museum*

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Museums in Britain are currently under pressure to work alongside other public agencies in promoting 'social inclusion', a broad term embracing diverse efforts to address the problems of groups vulnerable to marginalization. A key area that social inclusion must deal with relates to the comparatively high levels of marginalization experienced by ethnic minorities in Britain. In documenting "the extraordinary history of ordinary people," the People's History Museum in Manchester has an avowedly inclusive agenda which its current involvement in the European project *Migration, Work & Identity* extends to migrant communities. This paper reviews both the main galleries of the museum and *Moving Lives*, a temporary exhibition staged as part of *Migration, Work and Identity*. It finds that while the latter may be seen as having made a positive contribution to the understanding of cultural diversity in Britain, the main galleries of the People's History Museum do little to challenge the myth of cultural homogeneity that has been identified as a fundamental obstacle to a more inclusive society.

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### Introduction

An area of considerable debate among museum professionals and academics concerns museums' potential to act as agents of social change. The last two decades have seen the emergence of a new generation of curators who see their *raison d'être* as extending beyond the traditional functions of collection, display and education to include a responsibility to engage with contemporary social and political issues. Sandell is typical of other advocates in seeing this responsibility as deriving from museums' cultural authority or their "capacity to make meaning and ... to influence and shape visitors' perceptions."<sup>1</sup> Ruth Abram of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York advocates a "memory activist" role for museums in encouraging the application of historical knowledge and experience to the solution of current social problems.<sup>2</sup>

WORKLAB is an association of European labour history museums which shares the view that the contemporary relevance of museums hinges on their ability to engage with current

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social and political issues. By presenting histories of working class life and culture, the members of WORKLAB have been active in countering the “high culture oriented” tradition in European museums.<sup>3</sup> They espouse an inclusive approach which extends beyond labour history *per se* and involves them in what Myna Trustthram has referred to as “the common task of dealing with marginal history.”<sup>4</sup>

WORKLAB has focused particular attention on the experiences of migrant communities. *Migration, Work and Identity* is a major three-year project sponsored by the European Union which brings together seven members of WORKLAB in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> The partners involved in *Migration, Work and Identity* acknowledge “an obligation and a responsibility” to produce exhibitions dealing with European migrant communities.<sup>6</sup> They recognize that hitherto museums themselves have been complicit in the marginalization of migrant groups: “museums play a role in the definition of national identity. In the past, migrants have been excluded from this definition.”<sup>7</sup> Each museum is conducting a separate programme of research, exhibitions and educational events to address issues of migration in its own country, but all share the aim of contributing to the ongoing discussion about cultural diversity and the hope that “greater knowledge of the different migrant communities within Europe will improve understanding and tolerance.”<sup>8</sup>

This paper focuses on one of the seven participants in *Migration, Work and Identity*, the People's History Museum in Manchester, England. Before turning to the work of this museum, the paper outlines some key ideas in the debate on ‘social inclusion’ in Britain. These ideas relate directly to the museum's aim to provide an inclusive ‘people's history’, both in its long-term displays and in its first major contribution to *Migration, Work and Identity*, the exhibition *Moving Lives*.

### **The social inclusion agenda – key ideas**

There are divisions within the UK profession over how museums should respond to the social inclusion agenda. Some museum staff view the expectation that they play a wider social role as placing unrealistic demands on an already under-resourced sector and requiring them to become involved in activities which are the proper function of social services. Others welcome the opportunity to develop new roles for museums within the community and in so doing, to underscore their contemporary relevance. Differences within the profession are compounded by the lack of clear guidelines on what social inclusion actually means. A recent report written by local authority museums acknowledged that “definitions of social inclusion are problematic; [it is] a fuzzy

concept, defined and used variously by government and by different local authorities.”<sup>9</sup>

## **Social exclusion**

For the UK government social inclusion is conceived primarily in terms of fighting economic disadvantage. It sees museums as having an important role to play alongside other public institutions in combating ‘social exclusion’ which it defines as “a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, poverty and family breakdown.”<sup>10</sup> In its policy document *Centres for Social Change* the Department of Culture, Media and Sport describes how museums can contribute to social cohesion by offering programmes that:

draw in specific groups within the communities they serve, including marginalised groups. ... Being involved in creating an exhibition ... can help enormously to increase individuals’ sense of self-worth, value and motivation. It can also release latent creative abilities and enhance imagination, vocabulary and self-expression. This in turn gives them the confidence to engage more fully in society and helps to reduce their experience of exclusion.<sup>11</sup>

*Centres for Social Change* refers specifically to those who face social exclusion because of “racial or ethnic origin.” There are important differences between different ethnic minority groups in Britain, but collectively they experience disproportionate levels of exclusion on a wide range of social indicators. Ethnic minorities experience higher levels of poverty than whites, with members of the Bangladeshi community being among the poorest people in Britain.<sup>12</sup> They are more likely to be in overcrowded accommodation and more likely to live in neighbourhoods with higher than average levels of vandalism and crime. Among the Caribbean and Pakistani / Bangladeshi communities, the rate of unemployment for men under 35 is 34% and 37% respectively, well over twice the 15% unemployment rate for white males of the same age.<sup>13</sup> Recent findings indicate a correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and poorer health among members of the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Caribbean communities.<sup>14</sup>

While policy documents like *Centres for Social Change* identify ethnic minorities as vulnerable to exclusion, current government thinking fails to come to grips with the full nature of the situation faced by ethnic minorities. Their experiences of exclusion are framed largely in terms

of economic disadvantage tending to lump them together with the problems of other vulnerable groups such as low income households and the unemployed. There is insufficient recognition in government policy that the disproportionate levels of social exclusion experienced by Britain's ethnic minorities are explained largely by continuing racial discrimination in areas like housing, employment, and education.

### Citizenship

Attempts to clarify the concept of social inclusion for museums have drawn upon the concept of citizenship. In a recent article, Newman and McLean propose a citizenship framework which could provide “a unifying structure to work within and could help initiatives to develop clearer aims.”<sup>15</sup> They recommend T.H. Marshall's rights-based notion of citizenship as a guide to museum practice. Marshall's model remains the dominant paradigm in the discourse on citizenship in Britain.<sup>16</sup> In an analysis first published in 1950, he conceptualised modern citizenship in terms of three broad categories of rights – civil, political and social. On Marshall's reading, modern British history traces the gradual extension of these citizenship rights to progressively wider sections of the population. Thus, civil rights, such as the right to free speech, and political rights, most obviously the right to vote, were achieved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. In themselves, however, civil and political rights were insufficient for ensuring “full membership of a community”<sup>17</sup> which is contingent on access to economic and cultural resources. For Marshall, then, the post-war reforms establishing the welfare state and guaranteeing minimum standards in areas such as housing, health and education inaugurated a third category of social rights and marked the full evolution of citizenship in Britain.

Whereas current government policy on social exclusion focuses on the areas of economic deprivation covered by Marshall's social rights, the citizenship framework recommended by Newman and McLean prescribes a broader role for museums as rights advocates: “the challenge to the museum community, if it is serious about being a force for inclusion within society, is to determine how to respond to a citizenship agenda comprising of Marshall's *civil*, *political* and *social* elements.” [original emphasis]<sup>18</sup>

Newman and McLean acknowledge, however, that a purely rights-based notion of citizenship forms an insufficient basis for a policy of social inclusion. The “rights” of citizenship have proved vulnerable to shifts in political ideology,<sup>19</sup> and as Faulks points out, Marshall's faith in the inclusive nature of citizenship appears to have been undermined by the tendency of governments to

link immigration controls, and therefore access to the rights of citizenship, to changing employment conditions.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Marshall's optimistic account neglected the impediments which in practice prevent many citizens from enjoying their rights in full. In what remains a fundamentally patriarchal society, the civil, political and social rights of British women are curtailed by continuing male domination. Ethnic minorities have also been denied full citizenship rights due to endemic racism at all levels of society. When the Macpherson enquiry into the police investigation of the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence published its findings in 1999, it pointed to the 'institutionalised racism' in the police force and the frequent civil rights abuses that this has led to. Appeals to the formal equality promised by the rights of citizenship cannot fully address the marginalization experienced by ethnic minorities. Museums seeking to promote greater social inclusion must also confront the dominant, frequently racist attitudes of the British 'majority' that work against the full acceptance ethnic minorities by privileging 'white' culture.

### **The Parekh Report**

A highly influential contribution to the debate on social inclusion was made by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain chaired by Professor Bhikhu Parekh. Its report, published in July 2000, offers a comprehensive analysis of relations between ethnic communities in the UK and charts ways in which Britain can become a more inclusive, more equitable society characterised by both 'race equality' and 'cultural diversity.' The report recognises that a purely rights-based notion of citizenship is inadequate to the task of constructing a society to which each person feels that he or she belongs: "citizenship is about status and rights, but belonging is about full acceptance, being recognised as an integral part of the community and able to move around it unselfconsciously and with ease."<sup>21</sup>

The Parekh Report sees dominant perceptions of the national identity as a fundamental obstacle to social inclusion. These perceptions are sustained by a collection of widely held myths about the past. These include, for example, the mistaken belief that Britain has had a long and generally peaceful history, for most of which its 'island race' remained immune from foreign infiltration and therefore, until the mid-twentieth century, culturally homogeneous.

These myths feed the imaginations of millions of people. As long as they are dominant in British recollections of the past the country cannot be a just and inclusive society in the present, for from these myths large numbers of people and many experiences are omitted.<sup>22</sup>

Based on this analysis, the Parekh Report makes some key recommendations which are directly relevant to museums' work to promote social inclusion. First, in order to dispel the myths of continuity and homogeneity there needs to be a thoroughgoing reinterpretation of British history: "it is a question of recognizing the experiences and contributions of those conventionally omitted, and seeing colonizers and colonized as sharing a single intertwined history"<sup>23</sup> with particular emphasis on contemporary issues associated with empire, decolonization and migration. Particularly important is the treatment of "the migrant experience itself."<sup>24</sup>

Second, museums must work to promote a broader public commitment to cultural diversity. Full membership of society depends on the individual being accepted not just as a bearer of civil, political and social rights, but also as a bearer of a unique cultural identity. What is required is a further extension of Marshall's notion of citizenship to include the right to pursue diverse cultures.<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, full acceptance demands that these diverse cultures are not confined to the private sphere but allowed equal opportunities for expression in the public realm: "for if only one culture is publicly recognised and institutionalised, other cultures will be seen as marginal, peripheral, even deviant and inferior."<sup>26</sup>

There is a longstanding tendency, however, for museums and galleries to represent cultural diversity through 'traditional' or 'ethnic' artifacts such as ceremonial clothing, food and music.<sup>27</sup> This is in contrast to representations of the dominant 'white' culture which, as Anthias observes, tends to be seen as "universalizing and taken for granted."<sup>28</sup> The Parekh Report stresses that if museums are to be a force for social inclusion there needs to be "greater clarity about what the notion of reflecting and respecting cultural diversity means in practice."<sup>29</sup> More attention needs to be given to the diversity, creativity and change within 'minority cultures' and there must be a break with the habit of presenting cultures as falling into mutually exclusive categories, for example, 'Western' and 'non-Western'.

Parekh acknowledges the progress that many museums have made over the last two decades in extending the boundaries of what counts as culture worthy of public exhibition. At last the place of popular culture in Britain's museums and galleries seems assured, but "this greater inclusiveness needs now to be extended to embrace Britain's diverse communities and the lifestyles, experiences, identities and creative work of its newer citizens."<sup>30</sup>

To summarize, current debates suggest a number of ways in which museums can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive society in which ethnic minorities can secure full member-

ship. Newman and McLean's recommendation of a citizenship framework goes beyond the government's preoccupation with social exclusion conceived in terms of economic disadvantage and suggests a role for museums in fostering a 'rights culture', developing the public's awareness of civil, political & social rights and nurturing a shared commitment to formal equality. At the same time, as public forums for the interpretation of history and the presentation of culture, museums can be proactive in challenging the myths of continuity and homogeneity identified by the Parekh Report as a fundamental obstacle to the full acceptance of ethnic minorities.

### **The People's History Museum**

As one of the seven WORKLAB members involved in the *Migration, Work and Identity* project, the People's History Museum in Manchester provides an instructive case study of museum efforts to better reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Britain. After hosting the inaugural conference of *Migration, Work and Identity* in 2000, the museum went on to organise *Moving Lives*, an exhibition produced in collaboration with members of Manchester's Caribbean community. As we shall see, this temporary exhibition succeeded in presenting cultural diversity in a way that addressed some of the concerns of the Parekh Commission. To begin with, however, the paper will look at the long-term displays contained in the museum's main galleries. Viewed in the light of the debate on social inclusion and the Parekh recommendations in particular, the museum's main galleries can be seen to fall short of providing an inclusive people's history.

#### **Main galleries**

With its focus on "ordinary people" the People's History Museum provides an example of the greater inclusiveness that has been achieved by many British museums in the last twenty to thirty years. The museum is politically unaffiliated but its roots are in the trade union movement and its long-term displays retain a focus on labour history.<sup>31</sup> Since its relocation to Manchester in 1990, however, the museum has broadened its scope to include other aspects of popular culture and it now offers a general social history of Britain.

At the entrance to the main galleries visitors watch a brief video introduction to the collections. This explains that the museum's main focus is the labour movement and notably the trade unions, but invites all visitors to identify with the history it presents:

This museum is dedicated to the working people of Britain and the story of how they

organized to change society, both individually and in groups. In the lives they led, the struggles they endured, they worked towards improving the future for later generations. This is their story. It is also *your* story.<sup>32</sup>

The video explains that the people's history is "not finished" and appeals for members of the public to become directly involved in the ongoing development of the museum. Visitors are thus invited to become participants in the representation and interpretation of their own history. The introduction ends with an allusion to Abraham Lincoln's classic formulation of democracy: "this is a museum of the people, for the people. This is *your* museum."

The main galleries of the People's History Museum present an account of the historical development of citizenship in Britain, documenting the evolution of the civil, political and social rights identified by Marshall. Effectively then, these long-term displays are organized around the concept of citizenship employed in Newman and McLean's framework. The main exhibits deal with key events, organizations and personalities in the history of social and political reform, such as the Peterloo Massacre, the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the trades union and co-operative movements, Votes for Women, the 1926 General Strike and the electoral victory of the Labour Party in 1945. Through interactive exhibits the museum aims to establish links between these historical events and contemporary issues of citizenship in Britain. Visitors use a voting card to respond to questions raised by the exhibits. For example, following a display dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century radical press, visitors are asked "Should everyone be able to express his or her own opinion?" and later, "Do you feel you have a say in the running of the country?" The results of this poll are displayed at the museum entrance on a board headed 'Compare Your Vote.'

What makes this history of the development of citizenship truly *democratic* is that the museum presents political and social reforms as the achievements of ordinary people who organized and agitated for change. Alternative interpretations see these reforms as part of a "top down" process whereby those in power made piecemeal concessions as a means of social control, for example, to secure the relative compliance of working people with industrial change.<sup>33</sup> At the People's History Museum the people are 'active citizens' rather than passive subjects, and democracy is the product of their struggle. In this respect, then, the museum challenges one of the "national myths" noted by the Parekh Report, confounding the widely held perception that British history has been largely conflict free. A panel that appears in a section dedicated to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 reads:

The fight to allow all sections of society a say in how the country is run has been long and hard. It has taken brave, determined, dedicated people, who have made great personal sacrifices for their belief in a democratic society.<sup>34</sup>

But although in its main galleries the museum celebrates the democratic impulses of the people, it offers little to suggest that their history has been anything other than white and English. Confining its coverage to the last two hundred years, the museum leaves untouched the question of how 'Britain' was formed and questions of national identity are not dealt with. The exhibits focus rather on the people's identity as workers and as members of trades unions or political organizations. The 'other' against which these people define themselves are factory owners, landed gentry, corrupt politicians, sword-wielding yeomanry, police informers and strike-breakers.

Occasional performances by actors portraying 'Living History' characters<sup>35</sup> offer some treatment of the black presence in Britain and in an isolated reference to the existence of migrant worker communities, the museum guide book explains that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century London's docks employed many Chinese and African workers and that Manchester's dock area was called 'Little Africa.'<sup>36</sup> In terms of exhibits, however, there are few places where one glimpses any evidence at all of the influence of migrants on Britain's history. In a rare example, a section on the 19<sup>th</sup> century reform movement includes a contemporary drawing of police officers foiling the Cato Street conspiracy in which one of the conspirators is shown to be a black male.

To be fair, the museum is aware of some of these shortcomings and has signalled its intention to address them. In the video introduction to the collections, the narrator concedes,

there ARE absences in the museum. ... As yet, the museum has not got a satisfactory exhibit on the development of a multi-cultural society.... In the past, the history of the poor, of women and of ethnic groups has not been taken seriously.<sup>37</sup>

But it is not only in the almost complete absence of ethnic minorities from its main galleries that the museum fails to present the inclusive history envisaged by the Parekh Report. A further cause for concern is the *mis*representation of ordinary working people and the labour movement as almost wholly benign in their influence. There is no acknowledgment of the fact that much of the racism which remains one of the primary obstacles to the enjoyment of full citizenship by minority ethnic groups stems from the attitudes of the very people celebrated in the

museum. In a cluster analysis carried out as part of the recent Voice Of Britain survey, researchers identified two groups within the population who are characterised by racial intolerance. One of these groups, dubbed 'Rule Britannia' by researchers, comprises about 13% of the population and is described as "generally working class."<sup>38</sup>

Racism is touched upon in the main galleries of the museum, most visibly in the inclusion of posters advertising anti-racist demonstrations and a 'Rock Against Racism' concert. There is an example of a Labour Party campaign leaflet bearing the slogan 'Racists divide' and a more recent poster promoting the Football Association's initiative to 'Kick Racism out of Football.' These are authentic examples of anti-racist campaign publicity, but no questions are asked about where this racism is experienced or who the racists are. In the absence of a fuller treatment of the problem of racism in Britain the posters give the impression that *anti-racism* has been a permanent feature of the labour movement and that relations between white and non-white workers have been characterised by enduring solidarity. The museum guidebook acknowledges that the labour movement has not always been united and that "people had different interests depending on where they worked and lived and whether they were black or white, a man or a woman."<sup>39</sup> But although there are exhibits that address the historical conflict of interests between women and men, there is nothing to indicate that the interests of ethnic minorities have diverged from those of other workers.

The museum's uncritical attitude towards the labour movement and its failure to come to grips with the problem of racism are demonstrated by its treatment of the Grunwick strike of 1976-78 in which, it says, a "largely female labour force, mainly Indian immigrants from East Africa, struck against low pay and poor conditions."<sup>40</sup> A photograph shows Mrs Jayaben Desai, treasurer of the Grunwick strike committee, arguing with police officers prior to her arrest. It is juxtaposed with images of other landmark disputes, most notably the 1984 miners' strike, thus placing Grunwick squarely in a tradition of industrial action against "low pay and poor conditions." The exhibit fails to mention that Mrs Desai and her colleagues were striking not only against their exploitation as workers but also against racism. Sweatshop conditions at the Grunwick photograph processing plant involved discrimination on racial lines with black employees paid lower wages than white colleagues. The brutality shown by police towards strikers on the picket line was also accompanied by racist abuse. The two-year long strike drew support from workers in other industries, notably the postal workers, but the ultimate failure of the Grunwick strikers to gain reinstatement or the union recognition they were seeking is partly explained by the relative lack of solidarity shown by the trade union movement. Indeed, at one

stage in the dispute Mrs Desai began a hunger strike outside Congress House to pressure the Trades Union Congress into offering more support.<sup>41</sup>

The People's History Museum has signalled its plans to expand its displays to include the development of a multicultural society. In a museum dedicated to the development of democratic rights this requires a more critical assessment of the labour movement and, in particular, an acknowledgement of working class racism. An example of what this might include is provided by another museum that has strong roots in labour history – the Museum of Liverpool Life. Like the People's History Museum in Manchester, the Museum of Liverpool Life is predominantly a celebration of solidarity among working people, but it also acknowledges the hostility that migrants have often encountered from the labour movement. It points out, for example, that sometimes the National Union of Seamen “did not live up to its principles of workers' solidarity and democracy.” Black British seamen, looking for union assistance, “often found that union officials did not give them the support they deserved as union members.” The Coloured Colonial Seamen's Union was founded in 1935 “in response to the discriminatory practices of officials at the NUS.”<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps the most explicit way the Museum of Liverpool Life attempts to confront the problem of racism is in offering an alternative perspective on the rioting that occurred in 1981 in the predominantly black area of Toxteth, Liverpool. The common perception of these ‘riots’ is that they were caused “by a band of thugs and hooligans who ... do not want to live to a civilized system.”<sup>43</sup> An exhibit at the Liverpool museum includes a police helmet and riot shield, and photographs of overturned vehicles and burning buildings – all common enough images of the riots. The accompanying panel, however, challenges the visitor to reassess the significance of the disturbances with the question “1981 – Riot or Uprising?” Visitors are invited to see the disturbances not as a random outbreak of black lawlessness but as a reaction by the black community to prolonged harassment by police and white racists. The exhibit also includes the short film *If You Really Want To Hear Our View* in which members of black and white communities corroborate this interpretation.

As we saw above, in its main galleries the People's History Museum fails to address the problem of racism in modern Britain and this is a glaring omission from a history that takes as its principle theme the oppression and exploitation of ordinary working people. Racism is only alluded to in a few references to anti-racism and this is presented uncritically as part and parcel of a progressive labour movement. By describing the historical development of citizenship rights

and encouraging visitors to reflect on the quality of their own citizenship it can be argued that the museum is contributing to the formation of a public consensus on the value of civil, political and social rights. In Parekh's terms, however, the history presented in the long-term displays is overwhelmingly the history of a mono-cultural, homogeneous white majority and as such its relevance to a project of social inclusion is very seriously undermined.

### **Moving Lives**

The People's History Museum runs an ongoing programme of temporary exhibitions and these are viewed by museum staff as a way of addressing omissions in the main galleries.<sup>44</sup> The museum saw involvement in the *Migration, Work and Identity* project as an opportunity to better reflect cultural diversity and its original plan was to present a comprehensive account of migration to the city with an exhibition called 'The Peopling of Manchester.' The decision to stage two exhibitions focusing on specific migrant groups from the Caribbean and South Asia<sup>45</sup> was taken for practical reasons, mainly to do with budgetary and time constraints. It was also felt that the existing living history character, Gabrielle Walker, could be further developed as a central element in the *Moving Lives* exhibition.<sup>46</sup>

*Moving Lives* ran from April to October in 2002 and occupied two floors of the museum's temporary exhibition galleries. It comprised photographs and other personal effects lent to the museum by members of the city's Caribbean community, video clips, excerpts of oral history and a collection of photographs taken by the black photographer Clement Cooper.

Exhibited at the entrance to *Moving Lives* was a series of objects relating to the actual experience of migration. Two suitcases were displayed along with tickets, passports and other documentation that were required for the journey to Britain.<sup>47</sup> The British passports from Jamaica and Barbados were a reminder that in the immediate post-war years, migrants from the Caribbean were subjects of the British Empire and had a legal right to come and settle in 'the mother country.' Between 1945 and 1958, some 125,000 people made the journey from the Caribbean to begin living and working in Britain. The majority seem to have viewed the move as temporary and planned to return home after a stay of some years. Many did in fact return to the Caribbean, but thousands of others stayed, set down roots and began to view Britain as a new home. Today, the Black Caribbean community constitutes one of the largest minority ethnic groups in Britain accounting for almost 1% of the total UK population.

A vivid impression of the experience of post-war migrants was provided by Gabrielle Walker, a living history character based on the lives of three historical women who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Gabrielle's 30-minute performance brought home to museum visitors the multiple factors involved in the decision to migrate to the UK. They met Gabrielle as a young woman on the Caribbean island of St Kitts where she had just received a letter from a childhood friend, inviting her to join him in England with a view to possible marriage. Interacting with Gabrielle as she weighed the pros and cons of accepting this offer, the audience was encouraged to view immigration from an individual perspective. The experience is likely to have challenged some visitors' understanding of why the Caribbean islanders came to Britain. The common perception is that they were responding to the active recruitment campaigns launched by the government throughout the colonies to address the chronic labour shortage in post-war Britain. As the writers of one recent history of the black British community observe, "in the present day, popular and 'common sense' accounts describe this first group of Caribbean emigrants as having been 'brought' to Britain, rather as if they were naïve and passive, manipulated by unseen puppet masters."<sup>49</sup> As part of the living history dramatization, Gabrielle discussed a range of personal motivations for going to Britain in which the opportunities for marriage, adventure and personal enrichment figured more powerfully than the promise of ready employment. Thus, by drawing attention to the multiplicity of personal motives for migration, the exhibition can be seen to have provided the kind of historical reinterpretation recommended by the Parekh Report.

Later in her performance, Gabrielle showed that after arriving in Britain she was anything but "naïve and passive." The Caribbeans encountered a mixed reception in Britain. Although most found work this tended to be in jobs that were unattractive to locals, and racial prejudice also limited their access to accommodation.<sup>50</sup> Gabrielle described her experience of arduous working conditions at a canning factory and the discomfort of living in cramped, shared accommodation without basic amenities. Her refusal to accept her situation, the assertive way in which she dealt with racist taunts at the workplace and her efforts to improve her employment prospects through studying for a professional qualification were all in tune with the museum's general depiction of working people as self-confident in their pursuit of better lives for themselves and their families.

Elsewhere in *Moving Lives*, Caribbean migrants' experience of racism was alluded to but underplayed. The themes of the exhibition were suggested to the Outreach Officer by members of Manchester's Caribbean community. According to the Exhibitions Officer, Sarah Gore, racism

was not a subject that they wanted *Moving Lives* to deal with overtly. There was a concern to avoid presenting negative stereotypes of disadvantage and victimhood, to stress the positive aspects of Caribbean culture and the contributions the Caribbean communities have made to wider society.<sup>51</sup> The people interviewed nominated Caribbean 'role models' and the exhibition included photographs of these nominees accompanied by brief descriptions of their personal achievements. Role models included the late Yomi Mambu, who in 1990 became the first black Lord Mayor of Manchester, and Martin Harding, Operative Superintendent for Manchester and Britain's highest-ranking black police officer.

In *Moving Lives*, racism was acknowledged as something that Caribbean migrants have encountered and continue to struggle against, but also something that individuals have overcome. In one exhibit, Mrs Dacacodia described how as a trainee nurse in London in the early 1950s, senior nurses made her spend whole days washing the bedpans of incontinent patients. Later, as Assistant Superintendent of District Nurses in Manchester, she discovered that some white nurses did not like taking orders from a black woman, but "there was nothing they could do about it because I had the authority."<sup>52</sup>

Canon Pat Taylor's oral history exhibit described the racism that Caribbean migrants encountered in Britain when they tried to attend local churches: "I heard stories of people being told '...if you have to take communion wait until all the white people have taken communion because they don't like drinking from the communion cup after you.'"<sup>53</sup> Again, *Moving Lives* emphasized the positive way in which Caribbeans reacted to this kind of treatment by holding prayer meetings in their own homes and eventually establishing their own Pentacostal churches. This is another example of how the exhibition challenged common perceptions of the Caribbean community. The still predominantly black Pentacostal churches are often presented as evidence of a reluctance to integrate, but Canon Taylor's oral history exhibit made it clear that black churchgoers were effectively turned away by white congregations.<sup>54</sup>

Consistent with the general orientation of the People's History Museum, the artifacts and photographs presented in *Moving Lives* told the story of 'ordinary people'. Contrasting with the emphasis in the main galleries, however, *Moving Lives* had little overtly political content and focused on the everyday cultural life of the Caribbean communities. With the exception of the colourful costumes, artwork and drum included in a section about the Manchester carnival, the exhibits all related to day-to-day activities such as work, churchgoing, hairdressing, and cooking. The exhibition thus avoided the tendency noted earlier of museums and galleries to present

cultural diversity through displays of 'exotic' or 'ethnic' material.

Some of the exhibits were startlingly mundane. One case in the exhibition contained a motley assortment of what at first glance appeared to be almost worthless items: a cheap plastic soap dish, a lump of coal, an empty glass bottle. Panels explained that in fact the items were of immense personal value to individual men and women who had made the long journey from the Caribbean. "This soap holder was given to me by my friend for my journey from Jamaica to Plymouth. My friend died soon after I arrived here. The soap holder reminds me of him." The coal was picked up in Manchester by a new arrival from the Caribbean and kept safe for many years as a souvenir: "the reason I picked it up was that it reminded me of the charcoal I used to make when I was a girl in Jamaica. We made it to sell and to use at home and this piece just reminded me of my childhood." A handwritten label attached to the neck of the empty bottle explained, "this was the bottle of white rum I drank on my way to England."<sup>55</sup> Curators at the museum were initially sceptical about including these items, concerned about whether they would make interesting exhibits. In the event, visitors appear to have been particularly fascinated by these 'cultureless' items, empathizing with the personal stories of migration attached to them.<sup>56</sup>

*Moving Lives* presented the cultural life of Caribbean migrants as interconnecting with the cultures of other British communities. Accompanying an oral history exhibit in which Enoch McKlennen described his favourite Caribbean recipe, examples of ingredients such as cornmeal, dried coconut and hot pepper sauce were piled in a typical British supermarket trolley of the sort that all visitors would have been familiar with. In another section, visitors could sit at a traditional British pub table to watch a short film about the Caribbean version of dominoes, a game which for many has quintessentially English associations. In another area visitors sat beneath a vertical hair dryer to listen to a black stylist talking about Caribbean hairdressing and the influence it has had on the hairstyles of other communities in Britain. Such displays avoided setting the Caribbean community off from mainstream British culture suggesting rather the ongoing interaction between communities that is the essence of cultural diversity in Britain.

Judging from comments entered in the exhibition visitors' book, reactions to *Moving Lives* were mainly positive. Many visitors saw the exhibition as addressing aspects of British history that have long been overlooked by museums. "It was about time the excellent stories of everyday people and their significant lives was told in full,"<sup>57</sup> one visitor wrote. Another commented, "this museum/exhibition is the truest reflection of the black British experience I have ever seen, long

overdue.”<sup>58</sup> Black visitors appear to have responded favourably to the exhibition’s emphasis on the positive aspects of black culture and the decision by those who collaborated in producing *Moving Lives* to underplay the experiences of social exclusion:

I am a professional black female and it has been very informative to see the history of black people that has allowed me to be where I am today. ... Brilliant to see the positives of being black and the history and culture that we possess.<sup>59</sup>

Another black visitor commented:

the People’s History Museum is a great reminder of how far the blacks have come. It is an inspiration to me. ... I keep photos of almost every major event in my life. Hopefully one day I can contribute some to a museum like this one.<sup>60</sup>

These sorts of responses reflect the importance to individuals of seeing their own history and culture represented in the public domain and also recognise the important role that museums play in this respect. Some people used the visitors’ book as an opportunity to record details of their own family histories.

A few visitors expressed concerns about what they saw as omissions from *Moving Lives*. One person wrote, “I feel that slavery is missing from the exhibition. This is very important to me. We have to know where we are coming from if we are to make any progress.”<sup>61</sup> The Parekh Report identifies slavery as having been central to the development of anti-black racism, fostering prejudices about the cultural inferiority of people of African descent. Recently museums have played an active part in trying to raise public awareness of Britain’s role in the slave trade. Of particular note was the opening of the permanent Transatlantic Slavery galleries at Liverpool’s Maritime Museum in 1994. Although when planning *Moving Lives* curators considered incorporating a section on slavery to place Caribbean migration in historical context, limitations on space meant the issue was not mentioned in the final exhibition. Since *Moving Lives* focused on the achievements of contemporary black culture it might be felt that the absence of the slavery issue was not a serious omission from that particular exhibition. Given the fundamental link between the history of slavery and the problem of anti-black racism in Britain, however, the fact that the main galleries fail to deal with slavery amounts to another conspicuous absence from the museum’s long-term displays.

### Conclusion

Writing almost a decade ago, Lavine saw cultural diversity as presenting a dilemma for museum programming, asking, “should museums, as publicly supported institutions, encourage the celebration and retention of difference, or should they be working to create shared cultures?”<sup>63</sup> More recent commentators see no inherent contradiction between celebrating difference and nurturing shared culture. Indeed, the Parekh Report is insistent that in the context of a multicultural society, the only feasible basis for what it calls “a community of communities” is a shared culture of openness and mutual respect that embraces cultural pluralism.

The People’s History Museum presents itself as “a museum of the people, for the people” and in so doing signals its commitment to democratic ideals. As we have seen, its main galleries tell the story of ordinary people’s struggle for democracy in Britain. This history employs an expansive language of rights and liberties, a language that extends a promise of formal equality transcending gender, ethnicity, and ‘race.’<sup>64</sup> For Britain’s ethnic minorities, however, the racism encountered at all levels of British society means that the equal treatment promised by T.H. Marshall’s rights-based notion of citizenship remains illusive. At the People’s History Museum the relative absence of ethnic minorities from the main displays and the failure to address the problem of racism in Britain both reflect the inadequacy of citizenship conceived solely in terms of Marshall’s civil, political and social rights.

While these rights remain at the core of the ‘shared culture’ of democracy, citizenship as “full membership of the community” also rests on achieving a consensus that each of the plurality of cultural identities that makes up modern Britain, has a legitimate place in public life. By fully reflecting cultural diversity in their displays, museums in Britain can play a proactive role in building and sustaining a more inclusive public domain. This requires not only exhibitions that focus on contemporary themes and which, like *Moving Lives*, tend to be temporary features of the museum programme. It also calls for greater recognition in long-term collections that cultural diversity has been a fundamental, constructive element in the history of the British Isles. As the Parekh Report suggests, this latter approach demands that museums confront and dismantle certain ingrained historical misconceptions or ‘myths’ which conceive the nation as being deeply-rooted in a culturally homogeneous past. Through its involvement with the *Migration, Work and Identity* project and its exhibition *Moving Lives*, the People’s History Museum has made important strides towards reflecting cultural diversity. Its main galleries, however, are severely wanting in this respect. A more inclusive “people’s history” demands a more reflexive, critical assessment of “the

people” and a greater willingness to confront the exclusive, racist attitudes that they often exhibit.

## Notes

- 1 Sandell, Richard. 'Museums and the Combating of Social Inequality: Roles, Responsibilities and Resistance.' in Richard Sandell (ed.) *Museums, Society, Inequality*. London: Routledge. 2002: 3 - 23.
- 2 Abram, Ruth, J. 'Harnessing the Power of History.' In Sandell (ed.). 2002: 125-141.
- 3 Peter Ludvigsen. *WORKLAB newsletter no. 1*, April 1998: 18. available on-line: <http://www.migration-identity.org/>
- 4 Trusthram, Myna. 'Dealing with Controversy at the National Museum of Labour History.' *WORKLAB newsletter no. 1*, April 1998: 9. available on-line: <http://www.migration-identity.org/>
- 5 For further details, visit the project website at <http://www.migration-identity.org/>
- 6 Summary of Conference on Migration, Work and Identity, Copenhagen November 2001, *WORKLAB newsletter no. 4*. Sept. 2001 : 6. available on-line: <http://www.migration-identity.org/>
- 7 *WORKLAB newsletter no. 3*. April 2000 : 3. available on-line: <http://www.migration-identity.org/>
- 8 '*Migration, Work & Identity: A History of People in Europe, Told in Museums.*' Pamphlet available from the People's History Museum. (undated)
- 9 Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM), 'Museums and Social Inclusion,' October 2000, cited in Josie Appleton, 'Museums for the People?' *Spiked*, 8 November 2001, <http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/00000002D2BA.htm> retrieved December 18 2002.
- 10 Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). *Centres for Social Change. Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*. May 2000: 7.
- 11 DCMS 2000: 8.
- 12 Policy Studies Institute. *Ethnic minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage. The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities*. London: Policy Studies Institute 1997:161.
- 13 *ibid.*: 91
- 14 *ibid.*: 351
- 15 Newman, A. & McLean, F. 'Architectures of Inclusion: Museums, Galleries and Inclusive Communities'. in Richard Sandell (ed.). 2002: 61.
- 16 For example, the Advisory Group on Citizenship established by the government in 1997 to consider recommendations for the inclusion of citizenship education within the National Curriculum based its working definition of citizenship on Marshall's model. Advisory Group on Citizenship. *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools*. (The Crick Report). Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. 1998: 10-11.
- 17 "Full membership of the community" is Marshall's phrase. Faulks, K. *Citizenship in Modern Britain*. Edinburgh University Press. 1998: 37.
- 18 Newman & McLean. 2002: 62.
- 19 The neo-liberalism of Conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major did much to undermine the concept of social rights emphasizing rather the responsibility of the individual. Under Thatcherism, 'active citizenship' meant being able to provide for oneself rather than relying on public welfare handouts. With Tony Blair's New Labour administration there has been a fresh recognition of the limitations that 'social exclusion' can place on an individual, but current government thinking on citizenship continues to seek a balance between 'rights' and 'responsibilities.'

- 20 Faulks. 1998: 49.
- 21 The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*. London: The Runnymede Trust & Profile Books. 2000: 54.
- 22 *ibid*: 103.
- 23 *ibid*: 163.
- 24 *ibid*: 165.
- 25 Anthias, F. 'Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Struggles for Multicultural Democracy.' In Maurice Roche & Rik van Berkel (eds.) *European Citizenship and Social Exclusion*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. 1997: 259.
- 26 The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. 2000: 46.
- 27 These 'ethnic' artifacts have been referred to as the 'icons of diversity' see Jane Pierson-Jones, Colonial legacy and community: the Gallery 33 project. in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kramer and Steven D. Lavine (eds.) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1992: 229.
- 28 Anthias : 255.
- 29 The Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. 2000: 163-164.
- 30 *ibid*:162.
- 31 The main collections were started by the Trade Union, Labour, Co-operative, Democratic History Society (TULC), a small group of committed trade unionists who opened their first museum of labour movement memorabilia in 1968. In 1975 the collection was moved to Limehouse Town Hall in London where it operated as the National Museum of Labour History until funding problems led to its closure in 1986. In 1990 an offer to re-house the museum was made by the local authorities in Manchester. To reflect the fact that the collection now embraces a general social history of Britain, in 2001 the museum decided to drop the word 'labour' from its name and has since been known simply as 'the People's History Museum'
- 32 Transcript of audio introduction to the People's History Museum, as recorded 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 33 A brief discussion of this 'top down' interpretation appears in Elizabeth Meehan, 'Citizenship & Identity,' in Ian Holliday, Andrew Gamble & Geraint Parry (eds.) *Fundamentals in British Politics*, Macmillan Press, 1999: 234~236
- 34 Caption on *Spin the Wheel of Fortune*, hands-on exhibit at the People's History Museum
- 35 One such living history character is black Chartist William Cuffay. Born in Kent in 1788, Cuffay was the son of an African slave and became a key figure in the Chartist movement, Britain's first mass working-class campaign for political reform At one stage, the magazine *Punch* referred derisively to the chartists as "the black man and his party." In 1848 Cuffay was transported to Tasmania for his alleged involvement in planning a popular uprising. *The Black Presence in Britain: William Cuffay – Chartist*. <http://www.blackpresence.co.uk/html/cuffay.htm>, retrieved 6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2002
- 36 The National Museum of Labour History. *The Pumphouse: The People's History Museum: a Guide*. 1998:19.
- 37 Transcript of audio introduction to the People's History Museum, as recorded 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 38 Commission for Racial Equality. *The Voice of Britain: a Research Study Conducted for the CRE by MORI*. Executive Summary. 2002: 13. available on-line at [www.cre.gov.uk/pdfs/moripoll.pdf](http://www.cre.gov.uk/pdfs/moripoll.pdf) retrieved July 12 2002.
- 39 The National Museum of Labour History. 1998 : 1.
- 40 Explanatory panel. The People's History Museum.

- 41 *Secret History: Rough Justice*, Brent Council. <http://www.brent.gov.uk/news>, retrieved 30 September 2002.
- 42 Explanatory panel. The Museum of Liverpool Life.
- 43 Comment by Sir Kenneth Oxford, former Chief Constable Merseyside Police. *If You Really Want to Hear Our View* – documentary directed by Brenda Freeman, March 1993, screened at The Museum of Liverpool Life. as recorded 11th August 2002.
- 44 Personal interview with Sarah Gore, Exhibitions Officer, the People's History Museum. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 45 The museum's second major contribution to *Migration, Work & Identity* will be *Moving Stories*, a primarily photographic exhibition focusing on Manchester's South Asian communities and scheduled for 2003.
- 46 Personal interview with Catherine Rew, Assistant Director, the People's History Museum. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 47 The People's History Museum. Exhibition pamphlet for *Moving Lives*, 2002.
- 48 Live performances by Gabrielle were a regular feature of the exhibition and at other times visitors were able to watch a video recording, which while inevitably lacking the interactive element of the live performance opened the dramatization of the migrant experience to all visitors.
- 49 Phillips, M. & Phillips, T. *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain*. London: Harper Collins. 1998: 46.
- 50 Policy Studies Institute. 1997: 339-340.
- 51 Personal interview, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 52 Panel quotation from Mrs Dacacodia, *Moving Lives*, People's History Museum, 13 April ~ 27 October, 2002.
- 53 Transcript of interview with Canon Pat Taylor, oral history exhibit in *Moving Lives*, the People's History Museum, 13 April ~ 27 October, 2002.
- 54 "I remember a very famous Anglican who brought out a booklet in which he said that these people who - Pentacostals who used church halls for their Pentacostal services - they're in this country, they should, When in Rome do as the Romans do. They should come to our churches, not have their own. He forgot the fact that when they came he did not welcome them." Interview with Canon Pat Taylor, oral history exhibit in *Moving Lives*, the People's History Museum, 13 April ~ 27 October, 2002.
- 55 Explanatory panels / label. *Moving Lives*, the People's History Museum, 13 April ~ 27 October, 2002.
- 56 Personal interview with Sarah Gore, Exhibitions Officer, the People's History Museum. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 57 Entry in Visitors' Book for *Moving Lives*. Undated.
- 58 *ibid*. Undated.
- 59 *ibid*. Undated.
- 60 *ibid*, dated 15<sup>th</sup> April 2002.
- 61 *ibid*, dated 13<sup>th</sup> April 2002.
- 62 Personal interview with Sarah Gore, Exhibitions Officer, the People's History Museum. 8<sup>th</sup> August 2002.
- 63 Lavine, Steven, D. 'Audience, Ownership and Authority: Designing Relations between Museums and Communities.' in Ivan Karp, Christine Muller Kreamer & Steven D. Lavine (eds.) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press. 1994:143
- 64 Stuart Hall points to the need to reconfigure this language: "... unless the universalistic language of citizenship, derived from the Enlightenment and the French revolution ... is transformed in the light of the proliferation of cultural difference, the idea cannot and does not deserve to survive in the transformed conditions of late-modernity in which it is required to become substantively operable." Hall, Stuart. 'Culture, Community, Nation.' *Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3. 1993. reprinted in David Boswell & Jessica Evans (eds.). *Representing the Nation: A Reader*. 1999: 42.

## 「人民の，人民のための博物館」？ People's History Museumにおける人民の歴史と移民マイノリティ

ホザック・イアン\*

近年，イギリスにおける歴史博物館は，他国のミュージアムと同様にその社会的機能について広く議論されている。とりわけ，貧困や失業等により社会から孤立・周辺化された人々も社会の一員として包含することを目指すソーシャル・インクルージョン（social inclusion）の観点からミュージアムの展示と教育活動への関心が向けられている。イギリスにおけるソーシャル・インクルージョンの重要な論題の一つは被差別の移民コミュニティの歴史と文化についての一般への公開方法である。この論文は，移民マイノリティとソーシャル・インクルージョンの議論を踏まえて，18世紀からイギリスの民主政体と市民性の展開について展示する People's History Museum（イギリスのマンチェスター市）を取り上げている。そのミュージアムの主な展示を論じる一方で，2000年に開始された他のヨーロッパ博物館との共同プロジェクトである「移住・労働・アイデンティティ」の一環として，People's History Museumが開催した Moving Livesの特別展についても分析する。Moving Livesは，イギリスの文化の多様性がさらに深く理解されることに貢献したと思われる。イギリスの移民社会の展開とそれに関連した問題について十分取り組んでいないことから，その展示の姿勢に再検討すべき点がある。

**キーワード：人種差別，ソーシャル・インクルージョン，文化の多様性，ミュージアム**

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Natural science & people of Yakutia. Informative and interesting. Amazing displays of everything about the ecology and geography of Yakutia, the traditional life of Yakutians, as well as modern history. [Read more](#). Date of experience: July 2019.Â We had difficulty finding this museum, but were pleasantly surprised on entering. The museum is a 5 minute walk from Prospekt Lenina, so is not visible from the street. We had just visited the House Museum for Political exiles and decided to walk to the nearby Savior Monastery,â€ Read more. Date of experience: July 2017.