The Cultural Politics of York's Heritage Industry

and a Community-Based Shift Towards a Radical Redefinition of a Multicultural 'Yorkness'

As one of Britain's most attractive tourist cities, York is full of souvenir shops. At least a dozen fill the city centre, perching on street corners and bursting out onto the pavements, so passersby find themselves tripping over racks of keychains, kitchen towels, and kitschy postcards, all displaying illustrations of one or another of York's great cultural sites. One shop, Fabrication, sells assorted York-themed gifts by local artists, including a series featuring a comical image in a railway poster aesthetic: an illustration of a street resembling Low Petergate with such shops as "Ye Olde Trinkets" and "Craft Mead." An elegantly dressed elderly couple walks down one side of the street, three female Asian tourists pose with a selfie stick on the other, a group of women on a Hen-Do are visible in the background, and in the foreground, two drunken individuals are slumped against the historic walls of the picture perfect York street. Over this dynamic - and somewhat chaotic - scene looms the Minster. The caption, in big, bold letters, reads, "Death by Heritage." Illustrator Jack Hurley explains his interpretation of York: "...[York is] part genteel mediaeval gawpathon, part theme park for some fantasy projection of a Britain that only exists in fiction and part solid bastion of well-heeled, burgundy cord-wearing North Yorkshire." While Hurley's illustration of York is comical on the surface, the image - and especially Hurley's words - capture an important issue, that of the imagining and shaping of York as one of the focal points of the British heritage industry. That imagining attempts to offer a historically cohesive, unproblematic - and therefore one-dimensional and largely fictional - account of the idea of Britishness.

In her introduction to *The Politics of Heritage, The Legacies of 'Race'*, Jo Littler explains this idea as she writes that "white (and often upper- or middle-class) Englishness is used to define [Britain's] past." But, Littler points out, "British heritage is the heritage of a nation of nations, shaped through waves of migration and diaspora, wide-ranging histories and contemporary flows of globalisation. Not that you would necessarily know this from a cursory glance at many of its key sites and symbols." When considered alongside Littler's opening assertions, Hurley's "Death by Heritage" postcard ceases to be a comical, tongue-in-cheek scene of a quaint English town. Instead, it emerges as a critique of the process of erasure. What is being erased by York's beautifully imagined heritage landscape is the culture of York's multiethnic residents. The postcard image conspicuously omits from its selection the ethnic restaurants and Turkish kebab stalls in York's historic centre, and the Polish supermarkets and Traveller's sites at the city's outskirts - all important heritage spaces. Furthermore, the postcard stresses that non-white people (represented by female Asian tourists) interact with British heritage only as consumers and are not seen as heritage producers. To shift that perception, we need to

recover York's minority ethnic residents and their heritage spaces and to save them from a Death by [Official] Heritage. That is, we need radical redefinitions of 'Yorkness' and of York's heritage, redefinitions that are informed not only by critical race and feminist theories but, more importantly, are shaped and shared by York's own contemporary and diverse residents. Understanding how marginalised communities in York relate to the City, and how they imagine their own place within the City, necessitates an investigation into the historical structuring of York's tangible and intangible heritage by looking at its social and spatial politics.

Focusing on contemporary migrants in the city of York, this project explores how these communities (including both the well-established Ugandan Asian, Polish, and Chinese ones and those of the more recently arrived Ukrainian refugees) contribute to and interact with the official heritage story of York while striving to preserve their own cultural identities. In the process, they create a rich heritage layer that complicate the official image of York as a site of traditional heritage production that often does not reflect the presence of these communities. Methodologically, the project relies on the Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) model that grants community members and stakeholders an active role in the project through focus groups and oral history interviews that aim at creating a more democratic, participatory, grassroots heritage practice. On a theoretical level, the project seeks to expand our understanding of what constitutes heritage by including sites and practices important to migrant communities. In particular, the project argues that while the Authorised Heritage Discourse sees York as a place central to maintaining the homogenous idea of Britishness through the preservation of historic buildings and construction of such attractions as Jorvik and the Castle Museum, another idea of Britishness emerges from oral history interviews and community interactions. This Britishness is rooted in ethnic shops, restaurants, community centres, Mosques and Temples, as well as material elements and cultural practices that define migrant experience in York.

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A historian by training, my research has engaged with migration studies, spatial politics, and community-based participatory research in Germany, Austria, Turkey, India, Azerbaijan, the United States and England. My immigrant identity shapes my work and as such I am interested in questions of shifting identities, mobility, and emplacement. I earned a Master's in Modern European History at the University of Oxford (2020, University College) where my dissertation focused on environmental and migrant history, with a particular emphasis on the spatial politics of urban gardens in Germany and the involvement in them of migrant communities. Following this degree, I completed a certificate in Sustainable Cities from TU Delft, exploring how global cities can mitigate the impacts of economic and spatial inequalities as well as those of climate change through policies that centre and prioritise resilience and adaptation. I am currently a PhD candidate in Heritage Studies & Archaeology at the University of York. My research is funded by the White Rose College of Arts & Humanities and is conducted in collaboration with the York Civic Trust. I am driven in my work to find solutions to issues of inclusion, representation, and accessibility.

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