

## TALES OF HUNTING

### Jaya Graves

#### Introduction

An old Yoruba proverb states ‘until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will glorify the hunter’. Succinctly, the proverb captures the essence of the work of Southern Voices (SV) and the rationale for our current project, ‘Weaving Stories’, which is delivered in collaboration with the Museum of Science and Industry (MoSI) in Manchester.

Priyamvada Gopal (*Guardian*, 28 June 2006), lecturer in postcolonial studies at Cambridge University, suggests that the history of British colonialism is being ‘reworked into a fairy tale of our times’ by historians like Niall Ferguson, who ‘puts the white man and his burden back at the centre of heroic action’. A story of ‘slavery, plunder, war, corruption, land-grabbing, famines, exploitation, indentured labour, impoverishment, massacres, genocide and forced resettlement...is rewritten into a benign developmental mission marred by a few unfortunate accidents and excesses’. (Ferguson’s response can be found in the *Guardian* 11 July 2006.)

Gopal’s views are echoed by historians like Piers Brendon, John Newsinger, Mike Davis, Caroline Elkins and Gideon Polya. Davis (author of *The Blood that Never Dried*) explores the relationship between English policies and famine in India over a 200 year period. He concludes that over 30 million deaths, the total estimated to have resulted from famines under British colonial rule, could not be attributed to ‘natural causes’, but instead were a result of the British laissez-faire policy of non-intervention; that in fact, they were preventable. Wilby, in the *New Statesman*, quoting from AN Wilson’s *The Victorians*, describes how ‘bayoneted prisoners were roasted over fires and Muslims sewn into pigskins before execution’ in the aftermath of the 1857 War of Independence in India. Brendon (author of *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*) describes white settlers in Kenya who ‘hunted down Kikuyu trouble-makers’ like wild animals, torturing them at will. Lindqvist, traveler and historian, uses newspaper accounts to describe a genocidal picture of European colonialism: British massacres of wounded Sudanese rebels after the siege of Omdurman; German concentration camps in southwest Africa; a Belgian captain who used the skulls of troublesome plantation workers as lanterns to

decorate his garden. His book traces Belgium, Swedish, French and British intervention in Africa, and claims that such actions were routine not exceptions (Lindqvist, 1997).

This article does not aim to make an unbiased presentation of history but instead argues that *all* history is biased. Even academics from the global South use the same frameworks and terminology in their description of history. For instance, it is quite normal to hear Indian historians referring to the 'Indian Mutiny' and the 'granting' of independence. Some redress to this imbalance is necessary. This is not to suggest that young children should be exposed to narratives of such barbarity, but that our presentation of history from all sides of events needs to be better known, particularly among educators. I have deliberately included graphic examples because the notion of 'benign colonialism' still stalks educators, the media and image-makers. For example, some politicians believe that colonialism has 'good aspects'. Many development education (DE) practitioners have limited awareness of the complexities of colonial history. Countries in the global North are still propelled to violent intervention on the assumption of superiority, and the goodwill notion of sharing 'our values' and 'our way of life'. They continue to inscribe our attitudes onto each other, preventing cohesion and sustaining racism.

Many issues and themes addressed in global education and global citizenship have roots in colonialism, like poverty, various ethnic conflicts, social injustices, environmental degradation, and a global imbalance of power and racism. Unless we have a deeper understanding of our history and its mythologising, the excesses of the past will be repeated. We will continue to imagine that the Northern way of life - its systems, ambitions and values - *must* be recreated elsewhere.

In a society that has been inter-racial for hundreds of years, this partial view of history is increasingly challenged. It alienates people who see no reflection of their reality and experience, either in terms of their countries of origin or their histories. This article will consider how Southern Voices's Weaving Stories initiative uses education and awareness raising to consider the enduring impact of colonialism and how it can reclaim history deleted by many mainstream historians.

## Weaving Stories

Weaving Stories is an initiative that aims to challenge the casual deletion of colonial histories and the outcomes of colonial oppression. Although this initiative alone cannot comprehensively address the inaccuracies of history as it has been written, it can draw attention to the continuing legacy of colonialism and how it influences contemporary thinking.

The Weaving Stories project has two major strands: an exhibition and workshops, both of which are carefully and widely researched. The exhibition uses artifacts from the MoSI's archives as well as from community members. Workshops are led by presenters from the global South in the Museum, schools, community centres and libraries using widely researched exhibition material, personal and social narrative and community methodology. The workshops feature a mix of experiences, perceptions, methodology and opportunities, to essentially produce a potent and living experience for children.

For the exhibition theme, the textile industry was chosen because of its centrality to Manchester's industrial supremacy and the rise of England as an imperial power. Consistently ignored in the written history of the textile industry is the destruction of a thriving textile industry in India, of an established trade in textiles between India and China, as well as the wrecking of small-scale rural manufacturing in England. As the textile industry grew to thrive in England, textile manufacturing in India was almost entirely destroyed and raw Indian cotton fed the hungry mills of Lancashire. Later the textile industry in Egypt and Sudan suffered similar destruction. The Egyptian historian Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot says, 'Egypt (was seen) only as a provider of raw material'. Various European countries, particularly France and Russia, fought for control over the region as it also guarded access to India. This demonstrates how European colonialism impacted upon countries outside their direct realm of colonial control, but were subject to the regional economic and social consequences of colonial expansion.

Related events in the Weaving Stories programme of activities (for example exhibition launches, cross-sector workshops, interactive discussions) are organised to bring together different sectors and communities to encourage cross-sectoral learning and catalyse new partnerships and work. This is based on a broad public education agenda.

Weaving Stories thus aims to bring different interpretations to museum collections and different perspectives to education. It also aims to

suggest that different *kinds* of knowledge have value. In many Southern countries and ancient cultures, memories and narratives are both important tools in the preservation of culture and identity, and are maintained as a reservoir of historical data. Often the primary means of historical education is the retelling of narratives by elder members of the community, that is subsequently reinforced by reading. This does not undermine its value; ‘transmission’ validates our most sacred teachings. These can be *experienced* and *tested*, which is indeed being done in sectors like the cognitive sciences. Knowledge and understanding therefore cannot be reduced to a Western matrix.

## Education and engaging with difference

Education allows learners to be exposed to different perspectives, narratives and analyses through which they can shape their understanding of the world. However, society often legitimises some knowledge and narratives while excluding others. The content and delivery of education is subject to the scrutiny of government and other external influences including the agendas of grant-giving agencies, which has consequences beyond what organisations know or intend. An example is the bi-centennial commemoration of the abolition of the Slave Trading Act in 2007, for which funds were accessed through the Heritage sector rather than going directly to black community groups. The proposals and applications were developed without the involvement of black community groups and/or the descendants of slaves even at the *project development* stage. This lack of participation from representatives of the black community in either the planning or operational aspect of the commemoration was met with anger and criticism. A similar scenario occurred in a development education (DE) Network with which I used to work. The Network decided it needed to ‘do something’ about slavery, to which I suggested that it commission black individuals or organisations to develop a project to address the issue of slavery considering the lack of black or minority ethnic representation in the group. An added benefit to externally commissioning an educational initiative on slavery was the opportunity it afforded for collaboration by the DE organisation with the BME sector; a sector with which the Network had not previously engaged. However, the Network chose to instead host an event on ‘modern day slavery’, thus not requiring any external engagement outside of their comfort zone or any reflection on their current practice or knowledge.

In order to critically engage with different perspectives, they need to be known and understood. It must also be understood that different perspectives

cannot always be encountered through normal educational channels and must be gathered from a variety of sources and educational pathways. The development and DE sector do not engage with communities outside the sector or seek out different perspectives as often as they should. Habitual and traditional views are more likely to be challenged outside comfort zones, but such 'nodes of tension' also serve as origins of creativity. In a Freirean model of education, 'schools become spaces where students interrogate social conditions through dialogue about issues significant to their lives' (Coffey, 2006). But when someone works in the sector long enough feel they have become or have come to be seen as an 'expert', critique becomes criticism and is difficult to countenance. An ethos has emerged in DE where discussion or self-examination is minimal. 'Learning' and 'training' events are concluded with information *about* this or that, and the gathering becomes more about 'knowledge transfer' than self-reflection.

## **Southern Voices and Southern perspectives**

Southern Voices (SV) was founded on the perception that there were few Southern people visible or involved in development NGOs, development education networks, charities and university departments. SV took the view that in the late 20th century this was an inexcusable state of affairs. Initially, the fairly unique perspective of SV was welcomed; however as it became apparent that SV was prepared to critically assess the positions and perspectives of agencies and centres, its critique and analysis has become less welcome.

Methodologies have evolved that focus on the need for different perspectives and varied experiences within a group. Some proponents of these methodologies have suggested that Southern Perspectives (SPs) are no longer more relevant or valid than other perspectives, and that SV in particular does not engage with the 'complexity of our current society'. SV was set up as an international and intercultural network of people, with the specific rationale of engagement between differences. SPs are still crucial to the North-South dynamic and cannot be lost in the notion of 'different perspectives'. Our own learning and the development of SPs is created by dialectical engagement. We do not claim to be 'experts' but we do have perceptions and understandings central to global education and DE, which may challenge mainstream assumptions and documentation. Our sources and analyses are different, but our experiences are raw and our commitment is constant. We base our analyses on dialogue with others to help interrogate our own assumptions, thereby strengthening our knowledge and understanding.

A variety of ethnicities present within an organisation or event does not ensure the presence of SPs. An organisation ‘can be multi-ethnic but mono-cultural’. Organisations that have made a conscious effort to include various ethnicities may be promoting ‘equal opportunities’, but it does not imply an actual ‘engagement with differences’.

SV has written on the eight concepts elsewhere (Graves, 2002; Graves, 2007). However I feel that they fail to address additional crucial underlying issues in global development. First, economic poverty is not a measure of poverty in every sphere. There are different measures of poverty and wealth. Attempts at ‘wealth creation’ will leave our planet a husk in which life is unsustainable. If we are serious about environmental challenges and ‘poverty’ alleviation we must address the issues of over-consumption of resources. If the current ‘Make Poverty History’ slogan was ‘Make *Wealth* History’ (as in insatiable greed), what would have been required of the North? At the very least, the spotlight would be turned upon this society. Consumption and re-distribution would have to be considered, a concept far more challenging to the stimuli of our current socio-economic system.

The second issue is power. We cannot address any of the concepts and ignore the imbalance of power that distorts all relationships. Interdependence and social justice (two of the eight global dimensions), for example, are meaningless terms without examining power.

## Conclusion

A project exploring colonial history may seem ‘out of date’ but it exposes issues central to development education. We cannot undo the actions or the effects of colonial history, but understanding it is important if we hope to find solutions of the continuing legacies of colonialism that are capable of having any success. Open-market policies that killed millions in Indian famines were not a panacea for economic growth and prosperity; however the construct of racism grew with slavery and colonialism. The question of whether historical mythologising still determines official actions at home and abroad must be asked together with a questioning of the role of the history of the developed world in creating violence and racism on our streets.

It is obvious that with the rise of migration and diversity in the United Kingdom and Ireland, racism has also increased. Despite calls for social justice,

poverty eradication, etc., from the development and DE sectors, it is still rare to find development organisations engaged in ‘partnerships’ with Southern perspectives (apart from occasional references to Freire and subaltern literature). Southern views or perspectives are infrequently reflected, and Southern or ‘minority’ people rarely attend or present at workshops and conferences held in the sector. There are limited references to *development* debates, development writers and development theory; even the language used is unintentionally paternalistic and burdened with hierarchy. The issues raised here should be kept in mind by DE practitioners when working with and in the development sector. This means acting from a point of responsibility, not guilt. It means that we must be willing to engage with *difference*. ‘Experts’ belong in a rarified world. Praxis requires that we need to be in the field. We need to engage with peoples’ experiences, and be critical of any and all information with which we are presented.

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