

Reparative Love: Reflections on Promoting Inclusion and Social Justice in Practice

Sunita Abraham

Abstract

In this article, I use examples from my work with asylum seekers and refugees within the British city of Lancaster, and with groups working on its Black history to reflect on the role of 'reparative' love, and how this can be used to promote inclusion and secure social justice in practice. I draw on the work of Catherine Hall in relation to 'reparative history,' and the idea of '*satyagraha*' in the work of M. K. Gandhi to formulate the concept of reparative love. I describe it as a way of repairing injustices and inequalities in the present which are linked to historical understandings of the past. It involves engaging with individuals and groups in a spirit of love characterised by submission without subordination, with a view to transforming both the present and the future in ways that can help all involved to have a richer and truer understanding of the past. In doing so, I highlight how individuals and groups that are involved can be both transformed themselves as well as becoming agents that effect such change within the community. Reparative love is characterised by inclusive participation, a respect for the equality of difference, and opportunities for dialogue and dialectic self-reflection. In drawing on the historical past, it is also connected to improving our existing understanding of race, colonial histories and related injustices and inequalities. Furthermore, it has an emphasis on agency in that it is dependent on individuals, people or institutions creating the opportunities for such engagement to happen and for others to utilise these avenues to bring about change both in the present and in the future.

Introduction

I am an immigrant in Britain. This has not meant that I am a 'stranger in a strange land'¹ as I was born and brought up in India and the colonial links and imprint of Britain has ensured that this land and its people are in many ways a familiar place. My father was in the Indian Army and I grew up living in different cities, military cantonments and hill stations associated with the Raj. I read Enid Blyton, Jane Austen and Shakespeare, studied in schools and a university where the content was delivered in English, and listened to recordings of the Beatles, Queen and Madonna. Britain was part of my everyday - from Worcester sauce to Wordsworth. It was only when I first came to the United

¹ Exodus 2: 22 from the King James Version of the Bible.

Kingdom (UK) in 1997, in my early twenties, on a scholarship to do a postgraduate degree that I realised that I had grown up with a slightly idealised view of this land. I was aware that Britain had exposed us to western systems of education, science and technology but I also knew of the excesses of the British Raj from the response to the 1857 sepoy revolt to the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh massacre to the tragedies associated with the partition of British India. However, although India's struggle for independence had been part of the school curriculum, there was less discussion about how such emancipatory struggles were also part of the histories of other people and countries associated with empire. This understanding was sharpened by the knowledge that even though the Lake District was beautiful, and the Houses of Parliament were imposing, many of these grand buildings and country houses had been built on the wealth derived from the transatlantic trade and the spoils of empire. I also saw this wealth reflected in other cities and towns in western Europe.

At the same time, I met British academics, community activists, students and ordinary citizens who welcomed me into their lives and shared their candid thoughts on what it meant to them to be associated with this difficult past. Growing up in a Syrian Christian² family in India, I also found it difficult to understand how the west appeared to appropriate an eastern religion as theirs. In my quotidian conversations, it was almost always assumed that my faith was a legacy of being converted by westerners like the British. There was little awareness of the rich history of Christianity in India and its middle eastern origins. What was more troubling was that any mention of St Thomas the apostle arriving in Kerala was often met with a retort about it being a myth and not based on solid evidence. It made me reflect on my own roots and on my return to India it gave me a fresh impetus to work at the grassroots in rural India and understand my own heritage better.

I returned to the UK to the north-western English town of Lancaster in 2003 after my marriage to a white British schoolteacher. We had met in India and our friendship was founded on mutual respect and a realistic understanding of the shared histories of our countries. My doctoral work took me back to rural India and my subsequent work in both academia and the voluntary sector in Lancaster helped to frame my understanding of the many ways that empire still impacted the lives of citizens both in postcolonial countries and in the economic, political and social fabric of the countries that formed part of colonial western Europe. This potted history of my past is meant to highlight that this understanding has been developed over a period of time, and that this process is a dialectical one. I have moved in and out of India and Britain, and in and out of various roles in life,

²The Syrian Christians of Kerala trace their history back to being converted by the apostle St Thomas who is believed to have arrived in the southern Indian state of Kerala in around 52 CE. For more on this group of Christians and their link to the middle east see Susan Thomas, "Church and Community Formation among the Syrian Christians of Kerala," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012).

and at each stage I have grown in awareness through a process of introspection and rejuvenation. I have had to interrogate my own misconceptions and biases, and reflect on how this has changed me, hopefully, for the better. These collective experiences have shaped my understanding and worldview about the role and relevance of love, and in particular the healing power of love – reparative love – one that can both repair and renew.

In this article, I will begin by explaining how I have drawn on the work of Catherine Hall and M. K. Gandhi to develop the idea of reparative love. I will then expand on how this relates to the themes of social justice and inclusion. This link will be demonstrated using two case study examples to show how this is a dialectic process which combines elements of dialogue and self-introspection - the foundations of reparative love.

Reparative Love: The influence of Hall and Gandhi

Hall and Colonial Slavery

The historian Catherine Hall has been working on various aspects of the transatlantic trade and slavery for a few decades. She and her colleagues at University College, London (UCL) have been involved in different endeavours to reinstate the story of slavery into British history. Between 2009 and 2015 she was a principal researcher of the Legacies of British Slave Ownership research project (www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs) (LBS) based at UCL. The aim of the project "... has been to shift the narrative of Britain's relation to slavery from a focus on abolition to one on the benefits associated with the business of slavery and its importance to the making of modern Britain and in the process to contribute to undoing whitewashed histories."³ Their research highlighted that when slavery was abolished in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape through the Act of 1833, over 46,000 individual claims were made to cover for loss of human property. The state ended up paying a financial 'compensation' of 20 million pounds in total (about 16 billion pounds in modern terms) to successful claimants who had put in applications to cover for the loss of their commodities – the enslaved men, women and children.⁴ Those in Britain (over 3500 individuals in Britain alone) received a significantly larger proportion of the money compared to claims made by those from other parts of the empire and the colonies themselves.⁵ No compensation was paid to the enslaved,

³ Catherine Hall, "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing 'Race' and Slavery Home," *Race & Class* 60, no. 1 (2018): 16.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more details see Catherine Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

but they were instead tied into a system of apprenticeship with their former owners to do unpaid work (for a fixed number of hours) for a further four to six years.

These research findings also built on the work of Eric Williams⁶ who had argued that the fruits of British colonial slavery had played a significant role in the “take-off of Britain’s industrialisation”.⁷ Apart from contributions to philanthropic initiatives like schools and churches, the money was also funnelled into investments relating to a variety of financial and economic enterprises including mills, canals, railways, insurance companies and banks.⁸ Ex-slave owners went on to become politicians, administrators, philanthropists and investors in both the metropole as well as in new towns and cities in the empire.⁹ Their munificence and endowments were memorialised and commemorated in plaques, statues and through the naming of buildings and institutions in their honour. As Olusoga has argued, the relevance of the debate over removing statues is minor when compared to the more significant ‘battle over the past.’¹⁰ It is a contest about which stories and ideas are recognised as constituting ‘history’ and which ones do not. For those challenging the whitewashing of history, it is a struggle to ensure that the truth behind the narratives of benevolence and success associated with these individuals and families is not forgotten, avoided, uncontested or knowingly omitted.

These hidden histories need to be shared with our young people and with the public so that they can have a better understanding of the inter-connections between past and present, local and global, and in doing so make a more measured decision about their role in helping to bring about a more equitable world. In his wide-ranging book, Santos has highlighted the importance of moving away from monocultures of knowledge to ‘ecologies’ of knowledge – multiple forms of knowledge that allow for a sharing of different viewpoints which in turn enables an enriching of perspectives and informs the development of ideas for action.¹¹ As Hall has articulated:

Bringing slavery home means tracking all these material traces, following the money and the people, making visible the legacies of slave-ownership, excavating what has been

⁶ *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁷ Cathy Bergin and Anita Rupprecht, "Reparative Histories: Tracing Narratives of Black Resistance and White Entitlement," *Race & Class* 60, no. 1 (2018): 25.

⁸ Hall, "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing 'Race' and Slavery Home," 16-17.

⁹ Hall et al., *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*.

¹⁰ David Olusoga, "Statues Are Not the Issue. These Are 'History Wars', a Battle over the Past," *The Guardian*, 27 August 2017.

¹¹ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018).

suppressed and marginalised, re-inscribing the slavery business in modern British history in an effort to reshape what is understood as the truth of what has happened.¹²

She calls this way of engaging with the past – a way which informs the present and helps to transform the future as ‘reparative history.’¹³ It is a way of repairing historical wrongs by acknowledging these legacies of the past and in doing so ushering change. Bergin and Rupprecht highlight that it can enable a healing of relations that have been damaged by various historical injustices.¹⁴ In disentangling and examining the past, there is the promise of a more transformative politics of change in the present. Drawing on the work of Torpey,¹⁵ Hall also distinguishes between the two words - reparations as a plural noun which refers to forms of compensation (often financial) whereas reparation in singular refers to repair – “People make reparation, states and corporations pay reparations.”¹⁶

I argue that this type of repair is particularly important in a climate where divisive rhetoric, authoritarian regimes, nationalism and right-wing politics appear to be on the rise¹⁷. It is only when we bring to light difficult truths about our past, truths that have often been deliberately silenced or erased that we can enable ordinary citizens to understand that systemic failings within our own governments should not be blamed on the ‘other’ – immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees and various religious and ethnic minority groups. Here, I draw on Edward Said’s work on how scholars and individuals from western Europe have used language and culture to create a stratified binary between themselves and the ‘other.’¹⁸ This binary which paints the west as morally, culturally, politically, economically and socially superior to the east has enabled the creation of the idea that the east is inferior and needs civilising, while at the same time being ripe for exploitation as it is both bountiful and undeveloped.

From Spanish and Portuguese forays into the New World in the 15th century to the subjugation of the Indian sub-continent and the ‘scramble for Africa’ in the 18th and 19th centuries by western European powers¹⁹, this construction of knowledge allowed for the colonisation of large parts of the Americas, Africa, the middle East and Asia. It used religion to promote economic

¹² Hall, "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing ‘Race’ and Slavery Home," 17.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "History, Agency and the Representation of ‘Race’ – an Introduction," *ibid.* 57, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁵ *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Hall, "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing ‘Race’ and Slavery Home," 9.

¹⁷ For a recent example of the impact of corrosive rhetoric see Ed Pilkington, "Donald Trump Is Gone but His Big Lie Is a Rallying Call for Rightwing Extremists," *The Guardian*, 24 January 2021 2021.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

¹⁹ Primarily British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Belgian and German interests.

interests by highlighting the civilising role of missionaries which in many ways provided cover for seizing land and resources, looting cultural artefacts, and the capture and sale of enslaved people.²⁰ This discourse also helped to suppress the agency of the 'other' by side-lining and omitting stories of resistance, rebellion and insurgency. As Manisha Sinha has argued, the suppression or erasure of agency and resistance has been done to serve the political and economic ends of the western world:

Only by writing people of African descent out of the history of abolition can we view it as a white, bourgeois movement designed to justify capitalism and, later, imperialism. Only by writing the non-white world out of the history of democracy and human rights can we develop narrow and ahistorical genealogies of their emergence and progress in the modern Western world, which since its conception has been interracial.²¹

In the past, authors such as C. L. R. James²² and W. E. B. Du Bois²³ have sought to correct these oversights by highlighting Black agency²⁴ and this is an element that is also part of the emerging scholarship in relation to reparative histories.²⁵

Gandhi and Satyagraha

One story that the Eurocentric discourse was not effective in side-lining was the agency and resistance championed by the politician and civil disobedience icon M. K. Gandhi and his followers as part of India's freedom struggle against the British. Although his critics²⁶ have labelled him as racist, scholars who have studied his works for a significant period of time have contested these claims.²⁷ They highlight that a deeper engagement with his writings demonstrates that though Gandhi was racist towards Black South Africans in his initial years, this was not the case towards the end of his

²⁰ For examples of this in the African and Latin American contexts see Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Black Classic Press, 1972). and Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973). respectively.

²¹ "Reviving the Black Radical Tradition," *Boston Review Forum* 1 (2017), <http://bostonreview.net/forum/remake-world-slavery-racial-capitalism-and-justice/manisha-sinha-reviving-black-radical>.

²² C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins : Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Allen and Busby, 1938).

²³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (Atheneum, 1969).

²⁴ Scholarship on agency demonstrated by the colonised and exploited from other parts of the Empire exists but is not often highlighted. See for example, Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983)..

²⁵ See for example, Bergin and Rupprecht, "Reparative Histories: Tracing Narratives of Black Resistance and White Entitlement."

²⁶ Perry Anderson, "Gandhi Centre Stage," 34, no. 13 (2012), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v34/n13/perry-anderson/gandhi-centre-stage>; Ashwin Desai and Golem Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*, vol. 9 (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015).

²⁷ Vinay Lal, "Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi," *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009); Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi : The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948* (2018).

time in that country. His remarkable ability for self-examination and self-critique enabled him to evolve in his thinking so that he was able to discard his earlier conservative opinions and embrace more progressive views during the course of his time in South Africa.²⁸ This dialectic process of reviewing his thoughts and actions and using these to renew his quest for a greater understanding of truth and equality continued throughout his life.²⁹ This is reflected in his work on developing the idea of *satyagraha* which is derived from two Sanskrit words. For Gandhi, *satyagraha* is tied to an understanding of self-surrender and religion which in turn relates to freedom and equality. As Skaria explains:

Agraha means seizure of or by (Gandhi's translation of "resistance"); while *satya* suggests not just truth, but being (Gandhi's equivalent initially of "passive"). *Satya* is conceived, moreover, here not as some shared inert substance but as an active force that is everywhere constitutive of being, as care and love for all beings; hence the translation of *satyagraha* also as "love force" or "soul force." For Gandhi, this religion that stays in all religions — *satyagraha* — is both borne and obscured by "formal religions" or "customary religions." It is borne by them since all religions are marked by the surrender, offered in faith, of the self to the sacred. It is obscured by them since these religions usually conceive the sacred in terms of a sovereign power, God; their surrender thus becomes a subordination of the self.³⁰

Here, Gandhi is not referring to a literal English translation of *satyagraha* as 'passive resistance' but as surrender without subordination:

In his writing, to be seized by *satya* — to practice *satyagraha* — is to oppose the subordination of either self or other, to strive for the absolute equality of all being. This resistance is "passive" in the sense of proceeding through *ahimsa* or nonviolence — it surrenders to the opponent in order to neither subordinate itself to nor master the opponent. But this resistance is also intensely active in the sense of springing forth from the originary (sic) care and love that marks being — it relinquishes the freedom of everyday sovereignty only in order to share with opponents another freedom and equality, one organised around surrender without subordination.³¹

²⁸ Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (Penguin, 2014).

²⁹ *Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948*; Ghanshyam Shah, "Gandhi's Reflective and Dialogical Approach to Search for the Truth," *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, no. 19 (2020).

³⁰ Ajay Skaria, "No Politics without Religion": On Gandhi's Politics of Self-Surrender," *ABC Religion & Ethics* (2020), <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/gandhis-politics-of-self-surrender/10686408>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Elsewhere, Skaria expands on this link between surrender without subordination and carrying out a peaceful non-violent protest against injustice.

To surrender is render oneself vulnerable to the other. Such vulnerability is the precondition of any meaningful participation. But also: without subordination. Much of the vulnerability that the most marginal experience is privative; it is not something that is chosen. To surrender where we have no choice is merely subordination. But to surrender *without* subordination is to oppose injustice both fiercely and peacefully. And *satyagraha* need not only be practiced against opponents, in the form of civil disobedience. It can also occur as an everyday comportment — for example, when we relate to each other as friends through a surrender without subordination.³²

In sharing the quotes above, my intention is to demonstrate the rich thinking and reflection that has framed Gandhi's understanding of his approach to *satyagraha*, civil disobedience and the larger national movement to secure independence for India. I am not arguing that it is perfect but what I am highlighting is that this mobilisation against injustice is formulated through a process of self-introspection and that it is a journey of discovery – a 'process' of change that takes time. It is a process which is reflected in his increasing activism in South Africa and then his later life and writings in India. Although he starts off with misconceptions about Black people in South Africa, he goes on to both engage with and champion their work in South Africa while also supporting and inspiring Black leaders from Howard Thurman to Mordecai Johnson to Martin Luther King (Jr).³³ As Lal argues in relation to the influence of Gandhi on Martin Luther King (Jr):

King deployed nearly the entire Gandhian arsenal - from picketing, boycotts, and strikes to marches, flooding the jails, bearing witness, and the skilful mobilisation of all forms of the media - as he transformed the African American civil rights movement into the apex struggle of its times. The entire Gandhian apparatus was centred in the idea of self-suffering, and King remained true to the ideal. He often cited Gandhi, "Rivers of blood may have to flow before we gain our freedom, but it must be our blood."³⁴

³² Ajay Skaria, "Thinking with Gandhi on Racism and Violence: A Letter to a Friend," *ABC Religion & Ethics* (2020), https://www.abc.net.au/religion/thinking-with-gandhi-on-racism-and-violence/12424422?j=1370197&sfmc_sub=265904009&l=125_HTML&u=36700754&mid=7296852&jb=28&utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_content=&utm_campaign=%5bspecialist_sfmc_09_06_20_religion%5d%3a125&user_id=8597fb163e87eef3c281f53901a156fdb474cacf487e83240286696817f3a3e7&WT.tsrc=email&WT.mc_id=Email%7c%5bspecialist_sfmc_09_06_20_religion%5d%7c125story_4_headline.

³³ Guha, *Gandhi before India; Gandhi : The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948*; Lal, "Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi."

³⁴ "Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi," 301.

Gandhi uses the idea of *satyagraha* in his campaign for mass mobilisation to indicate that peaceful non-violent protest and non-cooperation does not mean passive acceptance of injustice – it is not subordination, but it is an engagement premised on love. Gandhi hopes that this experience will transform both the colonised and the coloniser. Although he was deeply influenced by Hinduism, Gandhi was also open to other influences in relation to understanding the role and relevance of love. In particular, he was influenced by Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew Chapters 5-7), "I should not care if it was proved by someone that the man called Jesus never lived, and that what was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me."³⁵ I argue that elements from the sermon, especially the importance of loving your enemies, being salt and light and recognising the significance of the beatitudes are all visible to various degrees in the mass campaigns that Gandhi mounts to get the British to 'Quit India.'³⁶ In addition, he also uses these ideas to frame his response to 'repairing' the damage - the hurt and the mistrust amongst various caste and religious groupings in India. Forgiveness, dialogue, and inclusion of the marginalised become hallmarks of his discourse and practice.

Building on Adorno's work on peace which talks about 'participation' in the context of 'distinction without domination', Skaria develops the idea of 'equality of difference' to explain how Gandhi promotes the idea of respecting difference and inclusive participation – "participate in each other does not — should not, if we are true to the spirit of distinction — mean that we become similar to each other."³⁷ The idea is to build alliances and friendships based on mutual respect while also recognising the differences that characterise diverse groups and individuals. I argue that this understanding of participation and equality of difference coupled with dialectic introspection is important for cultivating progressive politics and developing the idea of reparative love. The idea of dialectic reflection allows for a renewal or a transformation in perceptions over a period of time and ties in with Catherine Hall's work on reparative history - a way of engaging with the past which both informs the present and helps to transform the future.

Reparative love is thus a way of repairing injustices and inequalities in the present which are linked to historical understandings of the past, and is made possible by engaging with individuals and groups in a spirit of love characterised by submission without subordination, with a view to transforming both the present and the future in ways that can help all involved to have a richer and

³⁵ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958), 54:308.

³⁶ Gandhi's clarion call in 1942 is one of key slogans associated with India's independence struggle.

³⁷ Skaria, "No Politics without Religion": On Gandhi's Politics of Self-Surrender".

truer understanding of the past while also offering everyone involved the chance to be agents of change in order to mould both the present and the future. It is characterised by inclusive participation, a respect for the equality of difference, and opportunities for dialogue and dialectic self-reflection. In drawing on the historical past, it is also connected to improving our existing understanding of race, colonial histories and related injustices and inequalities. Furthermore, it has an emphasis on agency in that it is dependent on individuals, people or institutions creating the opportunities for such engagement to happen and for others to utilise these avenues to bring about change both in the present and in the future.

The role of Reparative Love in Promoting Inclusion and Social Justice

I argue that reparative love has the ability to bring individuals and groups together who would not normally have the opportunity to meet in regular social settings or who would not normally want to or be comfortable with engaging with the ‘other.’ In doing so, reparative love helps to promote inclusion of diverse groups not just in terms of race or ethnicity (these are key identities in this context as often these groups have faced historical injustices in relation to colonialism and slavery) but also on the basis of other identities, for example - religion, gender, sexuality and age. By helping to ‘repair’ historical injustices and inequalities in the present and delineating how these changes could transform the future, reparative love also plays a role in promoting social justice – in relation to securing equal access, rights and freedoms for historically marginalised groups - by creating and building opportunities for dialogue and increased awareness and understanding.

I use two examples in the context of my current voluntary and research interests to illustrate how this works in practice. The first example relates to my voluntary work with Asylum Seekers and Refugees (AS&R), and the second shorter example relates to my research interests in regard to Lancaster’s Black history - the city’s direct and indirect links to the transatlantic slave trade. The first example is slightly lengthier as it reflects my longer engagement with issues relating to AS&R.

Engaging with Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Lancaster District

Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary³⁸ was established in September 2015 by a group of community activists in response to the exodus of people fleeing war and human rights violations in the Middle East. It is part of a network of groups within the United Kingdom called the City of Sanctuary UK that have pledged to offer their cities, towns, or villages as places of sanctuary for those escaping violence and persecution.³⁹ The 1951 United Nations (UN) Refugee convention states

³⁸ For more details, see <https://lancasterandmorecambe.cityofsanctuary.org/>

³⁹ For more details see <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>

that a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.”⁴⁰ An asylum seeker on the other hand is someone whose request for sanctuary has not yet been processed.

2015 was a year that the media in Europe and elsewhere portrayed as one associated with the migrant or refugee ‘crisis.’⁴¹ It was a crisis but not for Europe as much as for the individuals and families who often had little choice but to flee.⁴² The numbers were staggering but much higher levels of migration were not unheard of in Europe even within the last century.⁴³ On the 8th of December 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported:

As of December 7, more than 911,000 refugees and migrants had arrived on European shores since the year began and some 3,550 lives had been lost during the journey. Over 75 per cent of those arriving in Europe had fled conflict and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq.⁴⁴

Just a few years later, the UNHCR again reported on another mass migration – the Rohingyas⁴⁵ fleeing violence in Myanmar:

Over a million refugees have fled violence in Myanmar in successive waves of displacement since the early 1990s...The latest exodus began on 25 August 2017, when violence broke out in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, driving more than 742,000 to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Most arrived in the first three months of the crisis. An estimated 12,000 reached Bangladesh during the first half of 2018. The vast majority reaching Bangladesh are women and children, and more than 40 per cent are underage 12... The Kutupalong refugee settlement has grown to become the largest of its kind in the world, with more than 600,000 people living in an area of just 13 square kilometres, stretching infrastructure and services to their limits.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ UNHCR, "Convention and Protocol Relating to Status of Refugees," (United Nations, 1951), 14.

⁴¹ Nando Sigona, "The Contested Politics of Naming in Europe's "Refugee Crisis"," *Ethnic and racial studies* 41, no. 3 (2018).

⁴² Patrick Kingsley, *The New Odyssey* (Kirkus Media LLC, 2016).

⁴³ R. M. Douglas, "Europe's Refugee Crisis: The Last Time Round It Was Much, Much Worse," *The Conversation* (2015), <https://theconversation.com/europes-refugee-crisis-the-last-time-round-it-was-much-much-worse-47621>.

⁴⁴ William Spindler, "2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis," UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.

⁴⁵ They are a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, "Rohingya Emergency," <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/rohingya-emergency.html>.

I have provided the two comparisons to highlight who faces the real crisis – apart from the forcibly displaced populations – it is countries like Bangladesh, a low income country⁴⁷ that already has high levels of poverty and faces serious climate-related problems because of rising sea levels. Myanmar and Bangladesh are also both countries that have colonial links to British India. Being aware of these links to empire is important⁴⁸ as the background to some of the modern wars and socio-economic disparities in places like the Middle East and Africa can be linked to legacies of colonialism.⁴⁹ As Santos has argued, examining and including these different viewpoints also enables us to ‘know with’ those who are affected by historical injustices and oppression rather than just ‘know about’ them.⁵⁰

Volunteers with the various groups associated with Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary have a sense of these historical injustices albeit to varying degrees. They are also aware of the inadequate responses from states in western Europe to the refugee ‘crisis’ and related moral failings on the part of national governments. Many of the volunteers are associated with religious groups – Quakers, Anglicans, Methodists and other minority religious groups. So, there is a sense of wanting to respond and promote social justice by supporting the needs of the AS&R who have either been resettled here through various government programmes or are awaiting a decision on their asylum application.

I volunteer with a women’s community group called East meets West (EmW) that caters to the needs of women AS&R and their children. EmW has a mix of white and minority ethnic groups as part of its executive committee and a largely white mailing list (reflecting the population demographics of the district). It has provided a range of opportunities for mailing list members and local AS&R to engage with each other and in doing so aims to gradually break the barriers associated with race, religion, language and culture. From organising swimming and cycling sessions to supporting opportunities for AS&R to learn the violin, EmW both creates and facilitates safe spaces for engagement. Except for the time period associated with Covid-19, in general the group has offered a regular weekly drop-in for women and their young children with an opportunity to share in

⁴⁷ <https://data.worldbank.org/country/BD>

⁴⁸ For more details on how these legacies of colonialism have influenced Britain’s perspectives on issues relating to AS&R, see Lucy Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017).

⁴⁹ Ilan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East a Social and Cultural History*, 3rd ed. ed. (Taylor and Francis, 2014); Mentan Tatah, *Africa in the Colonial Ages of Empire: Slavery, Capitalism, Racism, Colonialism, Decolonization, Independence as Recolonizati* (Oxford: Langaa RPCIG, 2017).

⁵⁰ de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*.

a meal that is cooked by either a volunteer or an AS&R (all expenses are covered by EmW or the volunteers).

Apart from these weekly opportunities to meet and develop friendships, EmW also organises annual day trips to the Lake district or other local places of interest like Morecambe or Blackpool. These informal occasions have further helped to dismantle barriers of race and culture by providing occasions to bring- and-share snacks and sample traditional delicacies or try out new recreational activities together. In these spaces, having a Kurdish sweet or an English cheesecake provide both the volunteers and the AS&R a chance to learn from each other and appreciate the equality of difference. It is one of the many small ways in which reparative love is bringing about healing while also opening up new possibilities for further engagement and a greater understanding of each other's culture and related practices.

The fruits of this engagement are evident in the regular involvement of refugees, including in the executive committee while also inspiring the group to consider a new project in Lancaster. The Across the Generations Project is an attempt by a local refugee woman to reciprocate the love and hospitality she feels she has received by providing opportunities for EmW volunteers (including AS&R) to work alongside local providers to support older members of the community through a process of befriending. This project has opened up spaces for members of EmW to build alliances with other local groups, charities and government institutions. These openings in turn help to bring the discourse of AS&R to a wider audience but in a way that reflects the agency of AS&R and enables the sharing of their experiences and activities as equals.

One such way that the group has strengthened its alliances, recruited new members and publicised the work that it does with AS&R is through collaborating with other community groups within Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary (CoS) to help run an annual fundraising celebration at a local church. The Autumn Fiesta has been in operation for three years and it provides an opportunity for all the groups that are currently linked to the Lancaster and Morecambe CoS to have a stall and publicise their work. The event is supported by the local church (St Thomas') that generously provides the space, the equipment and the volunteers to amongst other things - wash up dishes, act as stewards and clean up the premises at the end of the day. The event is organised by a sub-group made up of four to five community groups associated with Lancaster and Morecambe CoS. Organising the event together provides these groups with additional chances to interact with each other while also drawing on the collective strength of these groups to support the involvement of AS&R in leadership roles.

Some of these groups include AS&R as volunteer helpers on the day while others support AS&R with their musical contributions. Some groups sell craft and Christmas products to raise funds for their work. Food (made on site on the day), refreshments and kids activities are provided free of charge (or with suggested donations) helping to draw in crowds and providing numerous other openings for both AS&R and members of the public to engage with the 'other.' With each new iteration of the Fiesta, there has been an increased foot fall. Conversations in the kitchen, at the refreshment tables and at the various stalls, coupled with the complimentary live music provided by local bands and choirs are all testament to the restorative and expansive power of reparative love.

Lancaster Black History Group's Slavery Family Trees Research Project

Another way that reparative love is made visible is through the work of Lancaster Black History (LBH) group. This is a new community group which came together in June 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter protests. It is made up of local residents – community activists, schoolteachers, academics and historians who are working to fight racism through education. LBH aims to “make Lancaster a leading example of how Black British histories can be included in all aspects of education, arts and society.⁵¹”

This is important because between 1700-1800 at least 122 ships sailed from Lancaster to the coast of Africa.⁵² Lancastrian based or born merchants were involved in the capture and selling of an estimated 30,000 people, and many more Lancaster slave ships, and crew left from Liverpool. The establishment of Brockbanks shipyards in the early 18th century saw the building of slave ships to order for slave traders in Lancaster, Liverpool and beyond. Lancaster slave traders and merchants developed extensive commercial networks in the West Indies and Americas, importing slave-produced goods such as mahogany, sugar, dyes, rice, spices, coffee, rum, and later cotton for Lancashire's mills, from plantations, and exporting back fine furniture, gunpowder, woollen and cotton garments to the colonies.⁵³

It is difficult to find a Lancaster elite from the 18th and 19th century whose wealth and power wasn't derived in part from what is often euphemistically referred to as the West-Indies trade. Young men from Lancaster slave-trading families worked as agents and factors across the West-Indies. Over generations, these families accumulated land, property, plantations, and slaves. Slave traders and their descendants dominated local political life in Lancaster 'as aldermen, mayors,

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Blackhistorylancaster/>

⁵² Melinda Elder, *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth-Century Lancaster* (Ryburn Pub., 1992).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

and councillors'. Some of these men invested their inherited fortunes in the development of local mills and businesses. What we might be able to see in Lancaster, if we trace these histories, is how the profits from slavery and the slavery business in the West Indies and the Americas, financed the industrialisation of the city and the development of its civic infrastructure, welfare estate and later universities. While some of the historical research exists, much hasn't been fully explored, like the Slavery Voyages database (<https://www.slavevoyages.org>), or is very new such as the recent research of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slave-ownership database (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>), and the Runaway Slaves in Britain Database (<https://www.runaways.gla.ac.uk>).

One way that LBH is hoping to shed light on these hidden histories is through the slavery family trees research project. The idea behind the project is to involve local community members in researching Lancaster's links to the transatlantic slave trade. It offers member of the public an opportunity to find out more about the background history of Lancaster and its surrounding areas, develop research skills and associated knowledge, while giving them the freedom to focus on elements of the family tree that spark their interest. All too often, research conducted by trained historians is locked behind publishing paywalls and is inaccessible to the public. The slavery family trees project gives members of the local community a chance to discover Lancaster's difficult and inter-connected histories for themselves, while also signposting various avenues through which they could share their research findings with local schools, community groups and other institutions like the library, museums, local government and tourist information centres.

As research coordinator of the project, I have been involved in bringing together seven different groups (community, faith and school groups, and Lancaster university students) to research seven family trees associated with key families in Lancaster that are alleged to have direct or indirect links to slavery. The aim is to produce community stories and learning that will allow local people to work together to face the past, and in doing so transform the future. The project is underway, and the researchers are gradually building their own awareness and understanding about Lancaster's involvement in the triangular slave trade as well as the bilateral trade with plantations. In addition, they are encouraged to reflect on their research findings, which is part of the process of healing and repair – especially in a charged political atmosphere that has seen the growth of right-wing politics

and divisive rhetoric both domestically and abroad. Although we have not faced any serious backlash in relation to our efforts⁵⁴, we have received a few concerned emails from members of the public.

The apprehensions almost always centre around questions about erasing the past or providing a one-sided view of the past and neglecting the impact of Arab and indigenous slave traders. Reading the comments helps us to have a sense of why there is disquiet and how important our work is in relation to both engaging with these views while also helping to build awareness in ways that can challenge biased understandings and misconceptions. As part of this work on healing and repair, some of the researchers are also in the process of finding out whether any of the direct descendants of these families still live in and around Lancaster and Lancashire. We already know that one of the researchers is associated with a family that worked for the Gillows furniture firm of Lancaster and appreciate her desire to find out more about the hidden histories and connections of the mahogany trade to slavery.

We currently have about 40 researchers as part of the project. They come from different personal backgrounds - some are secondary school and university students while others are retired schoolteachers, librarians, architects, refugees and amateur historians. Although they come with different skills-sets and experiences, they all have an equal opportunity to engage with the research literature and findings. In addition, the researchers include people from different race, age, gender and faith groupings. This has allowed for the creation of a range of openings for these community researchers to engage with new people or get to know existing acquaintances better. Although this has not been a straightforward process during the Covid-19 pandemic, they have in general embraced the online world and are developing the relevant skills to be able to conduct research online and to get to know each other better through various online research meetings. The pandemic has required researchers to be more understanding of each other especially as some are struggling with issues of isolation and mental health.

At the same time, it has afforded them a 'safe' way to engage with research and consider how they will disseminate the research findings through both online portals and in physical spaces like museums, schools, churches, and community centres. Although, the research process is still ongoing, preliminary discussions highlight that the researchers want to use a variety of technical and time-honoured mediums to disseminate their stories – from blogs and podcasts to artwork and factsheets. They feel that utilising a variety of means and methods will enable greater engagement

⁵⁴ For example, as evidenced in some of the responses to the National Trust's report on the historical links between its properties and colonialism and slavery. For more details, see Peter Mitchell, "The National Trust Is under Attack Because It Cares About History, Not Fantasy," 12 November 2020.

with the public. While there is an acknowledgement that their research work might face backlash and criticisms, they feel that this process of repair and renewal is a journey that will take time and patience. They can see how this research work has already helped to change their own perceptions and understandings about the past. In a way, this was made possible through the creation of such opportunities for independent research and self-reflection, and their own agency in terms of partaking in the openings provided by such avenues.

These different reflections demonstrate the possibilities that reparative love offers to promote inclusion and social justice by bringing about a deeper understanding of Lancaster's hidden links to slavery and the slave economies. These avenues for dialogue and self-reflection also highlight the importance of acknowledging that this is a process which will take time and an 'active' involvement on the part of all involved.

Conclusion

I began this article by reflecting on my own journey in relation to how a more informed and critical understanding of the past has enabled me to build my knowledge and skills with respect to approaching and attempting to repair the present and re-envisioning the future. In many ways, these reparative experiences over time coupled with spaces for dialogue and reflection have enabled me to appreciate the role that this heightened awareness can play in terms of both creating as well as nurturing opportunities that provide a more inclusive and socially just approach to transforming the present and the future.

In different ways, Catherine Hall's work on reparative history and Gandhi's use of *satyagraha* each highlights possibilities for renewal and transformation. While Hall's work focuses on bringing to light the legacies of colonialism and slavery in ways that help to reappraise the past in a more informed and just way; Gandhi's work focuses on securing independence for India from the British, and the inclusion of different religious and caste groupings in the broader freedom struggle in ways that promote an equality of difference and a surrender based on love and respect for the other. Reparative love brings together these differing elements into a common understanding of how present-day injustices and inequalities that are associated with the historical past can be repaired and transformed through an engagement characterised by this spirit of love and dialectic self-reflection. Examining and including the hidden histories also enables us to 'know with' those who are affected by historical injustices and oppression rather than just 'know about' them. This in turn paves the way for promoting inclusion and social justice in the present and in the future.

By using the examples of working with AS&R and the LBH slavery family trees project, I have illustrated ways in which reparative love works in practice. EmW and the Autumn Fiesta provide the opportunities for both the public and AS&R to engage with each other in a variety of forums that are characterised by love and mutual respect. Healing is enabled through dialogue and informal interactions over a period of time. The LBH research project similarly provides the space for people from different backgrounds to engage with Lancaster's difficult and uncomfortable associations with slavery and colonialism in ways that help to 'repair' the situation by clearing misconceptions and building awareness. In doing so, the EmW and LBH case studies demonstrate the importance of supporting and sustaining dialogue and critical reflection over time. Change is made possible through a dialectic process of reflection and renewed engagement. Together both examples highlight how reparative love also emphasises the role of agency – it helps to have individuals and groups who can create these opportunities for engagement and it also requires others to utilise these avenues to bring about change both in the present and in the future.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Imogen Tyler for introducing me to Catherine Hall's work on reparative history, to Sujata Gupta for encouraging me to stay in *Sevagram* (Wardha), to Hilary Hopwood for being open to working on issues relating to AS&R within the EmW group, to colleagues and friends in the EmW, St Thomas' church and LBH groups for providing me with the many examples to demonstrate reparative love in practice, to my parents for enabling me to understand and respect my own heritage, and to my husband and children who have demonstrated that West can meet East as equals.

Bibliography

- Anderson, Perry. "Gandhi Centre Stage." 34, no. 13 (2012). Published electronically 5 July 2012. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v34/n13/perry-anderson/gandhi-centre-stage>.
- Bergin, Cathy, and Anita Rupprecht. "History, Agency and the Representation of 'Race' – an Introduction." *Race & Class* 57, no. 3 (2016): 3-17.
- . "Reparative Histories: Tracing Narratives of Black Resistance and White Entitlement." *Race & Class* 60, no. 1 (2018): 22-37.
- de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018. doi:10.2307/j.ctv125jqvn.
- Desai, Ashwin, and Goolem Vahed. *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*. Vol. 9: Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015.

- Douglas, R. M. "Europe's Refugee Crisis: The Last Time Round It Was Much, Much Worse." *The Conversation* (2015). <https://theconversation.com/europes-refugee-crisis-the-last-time-round-it-was-much-much-worse-47621>.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America*. Atheneum, 1969.
- Elder, Melinda. *The Slave Trade and the Economic Development of Eighteenth- Century Lancaster*. Ryburn Pub., 1992.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York: Monthly Review Pres, 1973.
- Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958.
- Guha, Ramachandra. *Gandhi : The Years That Changed the World, 1914-1948*. 2018.
- . *Gandhi before India*. Penguin, 2014.
- Hall, Catherine. "Doing Reparatory History: Bringing 'Race' and Slavery Home." *Race & Class* 60, no. 1 (2018): 3-21.
- Hall, Catherine, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington, and Rachel Lang. *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. doi:DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139626958.
- James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins : Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. London: Allen and Busby, 1938.
- Kheng, Cheah Boon. *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict During and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1946*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983.
- Kingsley, Patrick. *The New Odyssey*. Kirkus Media LLC, 2016.
- Lal, Vinay. "Gandhi's West, the West's Gandhi." *New Literary History* 40, no. 2 (2009): 281-313.
- Lelyveld, Joseph. *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*. New York: Knopf, 2011.
- Mayblin, Lucy. *Asylum after Empire : Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking*. London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2017.
- Mitchell, Peter. "The National Trust Is under Attack Because It Cares About History, Not Fantasy." 12 November 2020.
- Olusoga, David. "Statues Are Not the Issue. These Are 'History Wars', a Battle over the Past." *The Guardian*, 27 August 2017 2017.
- Pappé, Ilan. *The Modern Middle East a Social and Cultural History*. 3rd ed. ed.: Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Pilkington, Ed. "Donald Trump Is Gone but His Big Lie Is a Rallying Call for Rightwing Extremists." *The Guardian*, 24 January 2021 2021.

- Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Black Classic Press, 1972.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- . *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Shah, Ghanshyam. "Gandhi's Reflective and Dialogical Approach to Search for the Truth." *Economic and Political Weekly* 55, no. 19 (9 May 2020).
- Sigona, Nando. "The Contested Politics of Naming in Europe's "Refugee Crisis"." *Ethnic and racial studies* 41, no. 3 (2018): 456-60.
- Sinha, Manisha. "Reviving the Black Radical Tradition." *Boston Review Forum* 1(2017).
<http://bostonreview.net/forum/remake-world-slavery-racial-capitalism-and-justice/manisha-sinha-reviving-black-radical>.
- Skaria, Ajay. "No Politics without Religion": On Gandhi's Politics of Self-Surrender." *ABC Religion & Ethics* (2020). <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/gandhis-politics-of-self-surrender/10686408>.
- . "Thinking with Gandhi on Racism and Violence: A Letter to a Friend." *ABC Religion & Ethics* (2020). Published electronically 6 July 2020. https://www.abc.net.au/religion/thinking-with-gandhi-on-racism-and-violence/12424422?j=1370197&sfmc_sub=265904009&l=125_HTML&u=36700754&mid=7296852&jb=28&utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_content=&utm_campaign=%5bspecialist_sfmc_09_06_20_religion%5d%3a125&user_id=8597fb163e87eef3c281f53901a156fdb474cacf487e83240286696817f3a3e7&WT.tsrc=email&WT.mc_id=Email%7c%5bspecialist_sfmc_09_06_20_religion%5d%7c125story_4_headline.
- Spindler, William. "2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis." UNHCR,
<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.
- Tatah, Mentan. *Africa in the Colonial Ages of Empire: Slavery, Capitalism, Racism, Colonialism, Decolonization, Independence as Recolonizati*. Oxford: Langaa RPCIG, 2017.
- Thomas, Susan. "Church and Community Formation among the Syrian Christians of Kerala." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012): 1016-24.
- Torpey, John C. *Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: On Reparations Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- UNHCR. "Convention and Protocol Relating to Status of Refugees." United Nations, 1951.
- . "Rohingya Emergency." <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/rohingya-emergency.html>.
- Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.