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The white of the eye: perceiving Manchester's heritage

Marcus L Stephenson is a social researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. As a white worker looking at issues of black people's heritage in Moss Side, Manchester, he is acutely conscious that his representations may be misconceived. Although he feels in a moral dilemma, asking whether such research should be initiated by a 'true representative of the community', his analysis of the racism inherent in the heritage industry, offers an interesting angle on a subject too many of us simply take for granted.

Business travellers and pleasure tourists alike are presented with rather appeasing symbols of Manchester. The city's promotional material invites us to: 'Experience the makings of Manchester', prompting tourists to relive the proud past of this first industrial city nicknamed 'cottonopolis'. Links with 'King Cotton' are recreated in its heritage presentations: The National Museum of Labour exhibits images of working-class struggles through symbols of Lancashire cotton workers, suffragettes, trade unionists and the industrialists. Such industrialists established the Manchester City art galleries including a wealth of pre-Raphaelite collections.

Within this post-industrial milieu the visitor is enticed to wander through the 'first-industrial heritage park' of Castlefield. The Museum of Science and Industry residing here, offers a kaleidoscope of popular themes: wheels of industry (power mill), fuel (gas and electricity) and advanced technology (air and space). The mythical spirit of innovation is evoked as a catalyst, attempting to demonstrate how features of industrial urbanism such as poor health, poverty and pollution belong to the past.

Also located in Castlefield is the G-Mex centre, Manchester's International Exhibition and Events Centre uniquely built in the hall of the original central railway station. It is not only a mecca for the conference trade but attracts visitors from music enthusiasts to those with sporting interests.

Manchester's prize this year was the accolade of City of Drama 1994 enhanced by the celebrated Boddington's Festival of Arts and Television. Granada, the largest independent television company has developed a popular theme park, incorporating tours of Coronation Street and Baker Street.

Manchster in the making

Manchester's tourists are predominantly business people having the opportunity to stay in luxury listed hotels. However Manchester has now promoted the Great English City Breaks to pleasure tourists who are offered an array of products. Popular cultural attractions lay high on the visitors' agenda. The Royal Exchange once the hub of the city's commerce, hosts a modern theatre located in the famous Great Hall – an original architectural masterpiece. The Free Trade Hall once used by campaigners in opposition to the Corn Laws, is now the home of the Halle Orchestra. Together with the Opera House and the Palace Theatre they symbolise a popular pilgrimage for partisans and sympathizers of the high cultural order.

Walking through sections of the city such as St. Anne's Square, Barton Arcade and St. John's Street, one is able to envisage the splendour of the past. The Central Reference Library, hallmark of St Peter's Square, and the gothic Victorian splendour of the town hall in Albert Square both stand steadfast as monuments of prosperity.

Graham Stringer, leader of the City Council, proclaimed Manchester as '. . . the principal administrative, commercial and cultural centre of the north of England and as such is the home to go-ahead commercial, social, artistic and academic communities'. Against this masquerade of themes Bob Scott fought with John Major's patriotic backing for the hosting of the Olympic Games. Although a failure, such themes are to re-emerge in the canvassing for the Commonwealth games.

However Manchester, the tourist product, is based on a vision or view of heritage that is alien to the life and culture of a community located only one mile south of the city centre in Moss Side. Here a more daunting reality becomes apparent, an environment which has been deemed unsuitable and most importantly counteractive to the promotional theme: 'Manchester in the Making'.

A marginalised community

Throughout Moss Side symbols of deprivation reign: abandoned premises, a closed-down shopping precinct and the public baths – all standing in marked contrast to the symbols of affluence apparent in the city centre.

The tabloid press unjustifiably label Moss Side as the 'Bronx of Britain', 'Gunchester', and the 'Wild West' – an opinion which deceives not only the general public but mystifies the reality of the problem.

In the same vein Paddy Ashdown's recent book *Beyond Westminster* describes Moss Side as the 'foul tumour' close to Manchester's heart: a view which cites Moss Side as the home of the 'lawless'. These uncompromising views have caused a considerable amount of antagonism to community members dismayed at his recollections. Ashdown – like the transient and rather fickle tourist – visited Moss Side for two days and constructed a rather misplaced narrative.

Moss Side is divided across territorial lines, accommodating numerous active drug dealers. To the east of Alexandra Road lies Doddington Close meshed in what could be described as a rabbit warren, the territory of the 'Doddies', an active faction rivalling the 'Goochies' from the west side enshrined by Gooch Close.

The drug dealers are visible with all their paraphernalia of bandannas, mobile 'phones, mountain bikes and even Golf GTI's. The central issue concerning public attention is the increasing levels of crime in the past two years: murders have reached double figures and serious assaults are now approaching treble figures. A daubed wall on Gooch Close announces 'class war *not* drugs war' – a political proclamation stating that the underlying issue is not one of 'black versus black' but one which should be located on a platform of social and economic marginalisation.

The decentralisation of economic activities away from the urban centre, a diminishing urban population, and a significant investment in mass transportation has lead to the rise of suburbia. The re-creation of Manchester's unique Metrolink (tramways) has increased commuter activity. Post-war developments have been confined to the city's core where services have been en-

hanced at the expense of peripheral areas like Moss Side.

Social segregation in inner-city areas is widespread and rooted historically. Friedrich Engels' polemic *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, highlighted the social segregation inherent in Manchester during the Industrial Revolution.

Youth unemployment in Moss Side is especially significant for the black community which is experiencing rates twice that of their white counterparts. Moreover the high prevalence of single-parent families, poor housing and part-time work are all characteristic of Moss Side. A retired man from St. Vincent, in the Caribbean, told me: "poverty is not a crime you know, but it's not an honour either". Is it rather that racism is the criminal and 'black' the victim? A senior youth co-ordinator living in Moss Side for over 17 years declared that "racism is prejudice plus power", a definition which locates the dominant white institutions (labour market, education and the justice system) as the causes of disadvantage.

Distrust in Moss Side is evident when listening to young peoples' recollections of police encounters. I had the unfortunate opportunity of listening to a proud young teenager recall an embarrassing situation of how he was stopped for no reason on the streets and searched in the groin area for a 'shooter', for which the police made no apologies. The climate is explosive. There was a recent incident, known as Check Point Charlie, where predominantly Afro-Caribbean people claimed they had been unjustly set upon with police truncheons and dogs outside a city disco.

Yet the riots in 1981 heightened not only the need for better community relations but for capital investment, a key proposition in the Scarman report which has led to several million pounds being injected into Moss Side and neighbouring Hulme. A task force was set up to oversee various projects for young people and others such as local businesses. However whilst the short term benefits are not to be understated, the fact still remains that unemployment has risen by 10 per cent since the riots. One local reporter wrote 'we are constantly told that economic opportunity is there for the taking but once you put the key in the door and try to turn it doesn't open for black people'.

Manchester's ethnic groups, the Jewish, Asians and Chinese populations, all have a degree of involvement in the visitor industry through China Town, Indian Restaurants in Rusholme (neighbouring Moss Side) and the Jewish museum in north Manchester. However the Afro-Caribbean community seems to be on the very margins of cultural representation in the tourist industry's promotion of Manchester.

'Telling white lies': a distorted heritage

Displays in various museums seemingly operate a selective criteria of given information. At the Museum of Science and Industry the social history section displays a plaque entitled 'A multi-cultural society'. It declares in a rather patronising tone: 'In a period of economic problems there have been signs of racial tensions. Ethnic minorities tend to inhabit less desirable residential areas and to be employed in low status jobs'. Furthermore, 'Areas such as Moss Side and Hulme are particularly affected by social disadvantage', a rather apolitical message steering clear of providing a full explanation.

Slavery tends to be a troublesome taboo and is consequently denied in many heritage displays, especially in those places that had specific dealings with slavery. Manchester, for example, gained commercially through its dealings in the slave trade, a fact which is not mentioned in its museum presentations. Also scarcely mentioned is the active role of Manchester's Abolition Movement and its conflicts with the city's slave traders.

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One aspect of ethnographic museums and displays such as the Manchester Museum's African section, is the relatively static and rather tokenistic images which their presentations purvey. The fact that the displays in such museums are often the results of colonial pilfering is rarely admitted. This Heritage of Plunder has recently had a backlash. The governments of Antigua and Nigeria, for example, have been concerned with the legalities of retrieving these lost objects from various museums around the UK. MP Bernie Grant, who is head of the African Repatriations Movement, maintains that some of the gems in the British crown jewels were taken by colonialists from African states at the beginning of the century.

However West Indians may simply not wish to visit English heritage, or even to be represented in it. This point was brought home strongly in a conversation with a local Moss Side taxi driver who stressed that museums and heritage were of no interest as they represented a past which should be forgotten.

The co-ordinator of an inner-city education programme for young black people believes, on the other hand, that heritage displays are important for black people to learn about their culture and history. Julian Agyemar recently wrote in the Museums Journal that 'slavery can provide a focus for reconciliation between white and black British heritage, if dealt with sensitively by a multi-cultural group'.

Nevertheless displays generally are concerned with promoting the notion of Imperial England as opposed to a 'multi-cultural Britain' of the 1990s. This rather limiting view of national pride is also expressed in England's countryside heritage.

England's white pastures

For the black community who make up a quarter of Moss Side's population, the countryside tradition may uphold values that are non-communicable to outsiders from other classes. Ethnic minorities are not incorporated into what has been called the 'imagined community', which is ethnically undifferentiated under the authentic, cultural content of Englishness. Tradition is reproduced through institutions like the National Trust, concerned with stately homes and their private aristocratic meaning. It has been estimated that residents from affluent suburbia are nearly three times more likely to participate in countryside activities than residents from multi-racial areas. Over 70 per cent of households in Moss Side for example, don't own cars, and thus their lack of mobility leads ostensibly to non-representation.

Anticipated hostility could, however, be a significant barrier to such representation. The same Vincentian told me: "I remember back home there was this neighbour who had a lot of dogs, and on the side of his house was a notice which said 'the best cure for a dog's bite is to stay away from the dog'. I have carried that in the back of my head all these years that I have been in England. I don't go to places where I know I will not be welcome".

A token gesture

A multi-cultural argument stresses that more Afro-Caribbean role models in the presentation and delivery of the tourist product will undoubtedly have a significant role in limiting misrepresentation and non-representation of Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Such a multi-cultural perspective on heritage, however, seeks to address the problems of access and representation without understanding the crucial nature of cultural distinctiveness. Cultural priorities may differ. Speaking to various members of the Afro-Caribbean community (predominantly Jamaican) in Moss Side, there is an overwhelming desire to engage in a familiar heritage: one which extends beyond the confines of English rural and urban heritage to aspirations of being closer to their roots in "Back-a-Yard" (Jamaica). Locally organised pleasure activities such as the annual carnival and the Nia Centre for African and Caribbean Culture, are significant arenas for reaffirming identity. Heritage is a powerful device which instils a sense of belonging. Thus the tourist product of Manchester (and the UK) can be seen to exacerbate the alienation and disadvantage experienced by the West Indian community, already marginalized by institutionalised structures. ■

format in favour of a more attractive and readable prose style. It could also have included more powerful images and photographs to illustrate statements. As an academic piece of work, even as a summary, it proves interesting reading but disappointing on the whole. It abounds with general statements and facts (presumably trying to be brief), unsupported by statistics, which to a large extent an interested and informed non-academic repeat visitor to the region may already be aware of. As such it surely fails to do justice to the original research which must be brimming with worthwhile statistics, collected over the four year period. For example under Environmental Impacts it is mentioned that 'between 1993 and 1996 lodges halved their consumption of fuel wood (as a result of the introduction of electricity) while households reported reducing consumption by over two-thirds'. It does not mention any figures. The words 'several and many' are often used but figures are not available. On page 75, under Economic Impacts it states that a 'great deal (how much?) of labour continues to be utilised for little financial reward (how much?), while substantial profits (how much?) are enjoyed by far smaller numbers' (how many?). For someone who would wish to make a watertight argument that tourism, even ecotourism, does not address the issue of poverty and equality of distribution, there is little hard evidence to use as back-up. Questions such as what does 'poor' or 'wealthy' in the context of Nepal mean, or whether it might have anything to do with the ethnic dynamics in the region, pose themselves and remain largely unanswered.

The most helpful aspect of this work is the last chapter on Review and Reflections and the conclusion that the tourism that has developed in the Solu-Khumbu region cannot be described as 'a model form of ecotourism'. In the light of the debate on whether ecotourism is a 'threat or a blessing' or whether any tourism in remote eco-systems per se could be described as 'ecotourism', it is important to have recourse to evidence in the field which shows the dangers of using an ill-defined concept of ecotourism as a way of implementing sustainable tourism.

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Anthropological Perspectives on Local Development: Knowledge and Sentiments in Conflict

Edited by Simone Abram and Jacqueline Waldren, 1998
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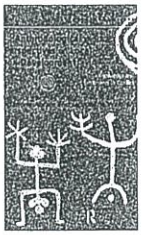

This book assesses local development conflicts by highlighting the contemporary problems associated with local participation, planning and governance. The edited papers are stimulating, timely and fairly comprehensive. The chapters, representing case studies drawn from developing and developed countries, are very topical.

The early chapters consider issues of development, social change and cultural identity. The later chapters analyse the problematic role of tourism development. One of the key themes is implied in Abram's introduction: 'If we recognise that development is one manifestation of particular ideologies which are enacted through forms of governance, we can begin to question the ideologies themselves'.

Drawing on ethnographic interpretations, the authors suggest that the significance and implications of various forms of international development should be assessed through politically differentiated notions of governance, democracy and citizenship, held by different participants (or non-participants) in the development process.

In chapter two, Anne Kathrine Larsen examines the way rural Malaysians see 'development': as a sign of progress characterised by improvements in the country's infrastructure. The physical clearing of the jungle – the spirit of which was generally seen as 'dangerous' and 'menacing' – was seen as desirable modernisation. However, Larsen did admit that locals were more sceptical of specific projects, seeing them as over-optimistic and a threat to local land prices. Her study suggests that locals can simultaneously hold both particular and universal views of development.

Aud Talle's research on female bar workers in Tanzania offers an alternative perspective to the study of hospitality workers within a development context. Talle's observations lead her to claim that many workers 'have been socialised into appreciating their bodies in terms of material value'. She argues that the bar workers do not see themselves as 'prostitutes' as they have a high degree of personal autonomy within sexual encounters. Talle discovered that workers can contest male authority in a number of ways: by refusing transactions, being 'selective' about their clients, or inciting acts of revenge (such as humiliating men for particularly 'immoral' sexual requests). Importantly, the female workers strive for individualism. They are adventure seekers, with the social and economic capital to participate within a leisure society, exemplified through the pursuit and consumption of a wide range of Western-oriented products. The conclusion is that specific social groups can embrace particular aspects of development (eg 'expressive consumption') for their own purposes.

Duska Knezevic's chapter on the construction of the new Slovene-Croat border offers a conflictual paradigm of development which explores the differences between local and national identity. Gaspar Buil and Jose Bergua's paper on development around the River Esera (Spain) also acknowledges a conflicting model, illustrating the confrontation between notions of 'economism' and 'culturalism'.

Jeremy Boissevain and Nadia Theuma's paper defines the concept of development as not just economic growth, but also the quality of life. The authors argue that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Malta have a significant role in promoting civil forms of development, especially to do with the environment and local heritage. However, NGOs are often in direct conflict with tourism developers and frequently displaced from the planning process by planners and bureaucrats. Nonetheless, Boissevain and Theuma argue that NGOs can encourage public awareness and appreciation of the environment.

Jacqueline Waldren's study on Mallorca, and Christian Lindknud's work on the rural village of Gassin in Southern France, explore how tourism development stimulates local protests and controversy. Lindknud argues that:

'We should avoid premature conclusions about development always signifying a change imposed by one group of people on another group. We should consider the various contextual forms of development in order to avoid a too simplified analysis and interpretation'.

While this approach can be criticised for not developing a materialist approach based on broader dependency issues, the book encourages new ways of thinking about local discourses of development. By rejecting traditional analysis (i.e.: by not rejecting or advancing established theories on socio-economic change and culture) it declares an affinity with anthropological tradition and rhetoric.

Many of the studies could have benefited from more anecdotal evidence from the 'local voices', and too often exclude the ethnographers' role in the dialogue. Nevertheless, this work is written in a generally dynamic and authoritative manner and makes enlightened reading for anyone interested in development issues relating to tourism.

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