

Making Reparative Historical Geographies: Reconnecting Cotton Textile Production Past and Present

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As part of a wider debate over reparations for former enslaved peoples (see Beckles, 2013; CARICOM, 2014) there has been a recent academic mobilization around the notion of 'reparative histories' (Bergin & Rupprecht; 2014, forthcoming 2016; Hall, 2014). While debate continues over the full scope of this approach, it is characterized by a desire to address contemporary social injustices, particularly those connected to race, through the researching and telling of new histories which make issues of race, enslavement and colonialism more visible. This paper discusses the challenges and achievements of work that might be characterized as a reparative historical geography of rural cotton textile production associated with the Derwent Valley, Derbyshire, UK. The AHRC Global Cotton Connections project on which it is based has sought to reconnect this important site of industrial innovation, now a World Heritage Site, with people and places involved in cotton textile production past and present using processes of archival investigation and community co-reflection and co-production. In particular, it has involved Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) participants, including those with enslaved ancestors, in creating new heritage objects. The paper evaluates this attempt in the context of work on cultural memory and heritage, collaborative and participatory geographies and reparative justice.