

Speaker's Notes for "Echoes of Empire"

Event: First Friday (Marine Studios)

Date: 6th September 2024

Presented by: Michi Masumi

Introduction: Exploring British Colonialism Through Poetry

- Welcome to "Echoes of Empire."
 - **Aim:** To explore the global legacy of British colonialism and imperialism through the lens of poets from India, Africa, the Caribbean, and contemporary Black British voices.
 - These poems articulate the profound effects of empire, covering themes of sacrifice, loss, identity, displacement, and resistance.
 - Each poem reflects on specific aspects of British colonial rule and invites us to explore how these historical dynamics continue to shape contemporary identities and struggles.
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1. "The Gift of India" by Sarojini Naidu

- **Overview:** Sarojini Naidu personifies India as a grieving mother who sacrificed her sons to fight for the British Empire in World War I.
 - **Historical Context:** India's involvement in World War I was significant, yet often overlooked.
 - **Themes:** Sacrifice, grief, exploitation, and remembrance.
 - **Key Takeaway:** This poem underscores the heavy price paid by colonised peoples and the necessity of remembering their contributions to imperial causes.
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2. "Where the Mind is Without Fear" by Rabindranath Tagore

- **Overview:** A visionary poem that articulates Tagore's dream of a free India, liberated from British rule.
 - **Historical Context:** Written during British rule, it reflects India's struggle for freedom and intellectual liberation.
 - **Themes:** Freedom, intellectual emancipation, resistance, and unity.
 - **Key Takeaway:** Tagore dreams of a future where India awakens to truth and freedom, free from the shackles of colonial oppression.
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3. "Pagri Sambhal Jatta" by Banka Dayal

- **Overview:** A protest anthem that emerged from the Punjab Peasant Movement, symbolising resistance to British exploitation.
 - **Historical Context:** During the 1907 Punjab Peasant Movement, British colonial policies imposed heavy taxes and exploitation on farmers.
 - **Themes:** Resistance, cultural pride, and dignity.
 - **Key Takeaway:** This poem became a rallying cry for peasants, calling for the preservation of dignity and resistance to British colonial oppression.
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4. "Africa" by David Diop

- **Overview:** A reflection on Africa's suffering under colonial rule, slavery, and exploitation, while celebrating its resilience and hope for freedom.
- **Historical Context:** Written during the mid-20th century, Diop addresses shared struggles across colonised African nations under European rule.
- **Themes:** Slavery, exploitation, resilience, and hope.
- **Key Takeaway:** "Africa" mourns the suffering caused by colonialism while celebrating the continent's inevitable rise to freedom.

5. "A Far Cry from Africa" by Derek Walcott

- **Overview:** Walcott grapples with his divided identity as a person of African and European descent, reflecting on the Mau Mau Uprising and colonial violence.
- **Historical Context:** The poem responds to the brutal repression of the Mau Mau Uprising in 1950s Kenya.
- **Themes:** Colonial violence, identity conflict, and betrayal.
- **Key Takeaway:** Walcott highlights the inner turmoil of being torn between the oppressor and the oppressed, reflecting the complexities of post-colonial identity.

6. "Making Sense" by Malika Booker

- **Overview:** A contemporary Black British poem that explores cultural hybridity and the challenges of navigating British society while reconciling African heritage.
- **Historical Context:** Set in modern-day Britain, it explores the continuing impact of colonialism on Black British identity.
- **Themes:** Cultural hybridity, displacement, and racial tension.
- **Key Takeaway:** Booker highlights the difficulties of living in a post-colonial world where individuals must reconcile colonial legacies with their cultural identity.

7. "Home" by Sarah Howe

- **Overview:** Howe reflects on identity in Hong Kong, particularly regarding its colonial past and the handover to China in 1997.
- **Historical Context:** Hong Kong was a British colony from 1841 until its handover to China.
- **Themes:** Identity, displacement, and the legacy of colonialism.

- **Key Takeaway:** Howe's poem reflects the complexities of belonging in a post-colonial world, particularly in a region with a dual colonial legacy.
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Conclusion: Echoes of Empire

- These poems offer profound reflections on British colonialism's global impact.
- They highlight not only the loss and suffering endured by colonised peoples but also their resilience and resistance.
- These voices give us a deeper understanding of how the legacy of empire continues to shape identities long after the formal end of colonial rule.

Prompts for Each Theme (To Guide Group Discussions):

1. Identity

- “How does colonialism shape the identities of colonised people? Think about the poets who explore this theme, such as Derek Walcott.”
- “How are issues of identity, especially for those of mixed heritage, still relevant in the post-colonial world?”

2. Resistance

- “Consider the ways in which colonised peoples resisted British rule. Poems like 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta' celebrate resistance. How is this resistance reflected in art and culture today?”
- “What modern forms of resistance can we relate to?”

3. Racism

- “How was racism institutionalised during the colonial period? How does it persist in modern institutions, particularly in the UK?”
- “Think about how poets like David Diop and Malika Booker address the ongoing effects of racism.”

4. Freedom

- “What did freedom mean for colonised nations and individuals under British rule? Consider Tagore’s ‘Where the Mind is Without Fear.’”
- “How do we continue to fight for different types of freedom today—whether intellectual, political, or social?”

5. Displacement

- “How does displacement manifest in colonial history? How did British rule displace people geographically, culturally, and emotionally?”
- “Think about how poets like Sarah Howe explore displacement in contemporary contexts.”

6. Exploitation

- “What forms of exploitation were central to colonialism—land, labour, resources? How does ‘The Gift of India’ reflect this exploitation?”
- “Do we still see echoes of exploitation today, perhaps in economic systems or global power dynamics?”

7. Colonial Legacy

- “What is the lasting legacy of the British Empire on former colonies? How do poets from Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia reflect on this legacy?”
- “How does the colonial legacy affect modern society, particularly in migration and identity?”

8. Cultural Hybridity

- “Consider the mixing of cultures under colonial rule. How do poets like Derek Walcott and Malika Booker express the complexities of hybrid identities?”
- “In a multicultural world, how does cultural hybridity continue to shape personal and national identities?”

9. Sacrifice

- “What sacrifices were made by colonised peoples, as explored in poems like ‘The Gift of India’? How are these sacrifices remembered or forgotten?”
- “How does the idea of sacrifice manifest today, especially in discussions of immigration and labour?”

10. Resilience

- “How do colonised nations and individuals show resilience, as reflected in David Diop’s ‘Africa’?”
- “In modern times, where do we see the resilience of communities affected by colonialism?”

11. Memory

- “What role does memory play in dealing with colonial history? How do poets and artists keep the memory of colonial trauma alive?”

- “How should we balance memory and progress when dealing with difficult histories?”

12. Post-Colonialism

- “What does it mean to live in a post-colonial world? How do artists like Malika Booker reflect on the ongoing effects of colonialism?”
- “What challenges and opportunities arise from navigating a post-colonial identity?”

Conclusion:

- After group discussions, invite each group to share their thoughts:
 - "Let's come together and share your thoughts. What did your group discuss regarding your theme? How do you see it reflected in the poems and in today's world?"
- **Summary:**
 - “Each of these themes—identity, freedom, resistance—reminds us of the lasting impact of colonialism and the way it continues to shape societies today.”
 - “Our reflections on these poems and themes help us to better understand the complexities of colonial legacies and the importance of addressing them in modern contexts.”
- **Final Thoughts:**
 - “Thank you for engaging so thoughtfully with the prompt cards. I hope today's discussion has deepened your understanding of British colonialism's influence on art, literature, and modern identity.”

Note for Facilitator:

- Ensure participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Avoid rushing through the discussions; give everyone a chance to contribute.

- Wrap up by connecting their reflections to the broader themes of colonialism and imperialism, and the power of art and poetry in addressing these legacies.

Speaker's Notes for Timeline, Digital and Photographic Art, and Discussion on Imperialism, Colonialism, and the Slave Trade

Introduction:

- “Today, we will explore the historical timeline of British colonialism, its connection to digital and photographic art, and the important distinctions between imperialism, colonialism, and the enslavement of African peoples.”
 - **Note:** “Before we begin, I want to highlight an important distinction in language. In this discussion, we will use the term *enslaved* rather than *slave*. The word *slave* implies a static identity, as though the person had a choice. *Enslaved* acknowledges the brutal reality that these individuals were forcibly placed in bondage and denied freedom.”
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1. Timeline of Colonialism

- “We’ll start by reflecting on the timeline of British colonialism. It spans from the 16th century with early exploration, through the height of the British Empire in the 19th century, and into the 20th century’s movements for independence.”
- **Key Events:**
 - **1607:** The establishment of Jamestown, marking the beginning of British colonial expansion.
 - **1757:** The Battle of Plassey, initiating British control over India.
 - **1807:** Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, though exploitation and enslavement persisted.
 - **1947:** India’s independence, marking a significant decline in British imperial dominance.
 - **1960s–1970s:** Decolonisation in Africa and the Caribbean, including the independence of Jamaica and Ghana.
- **Discussion Prompt:**

- “This timeline isn’t just a collection of dates—it’s the story of how millions of lives were shaped by British imperialism, colonial rule, and exploitation. It’s also a story of resistance, resilience, and the fight for independence.”
 - **Reflection:**
 - “When looking at this timeline, think about how colonised people from Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia responded to the realities of British rule. Their resistance and the eventual fall of the British Empire are crucial parts of this story.”
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2. Digital and Photographic Art on Colonialism

- “Now, let’s explore the role of **digital and photographic art** in capturing the colonial legacy. Both mediums offer powerful ways to reflect on the past while connecting it to the present.”

Photography:

- **Overview:** Black-and-white street portraits capturing the stories of those affected by British colonialism, especially immigrant communities from the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia.
- **Themes:**
 - **Migration:** Many of these individuals or their families migrated to the UK due to the effects of British colonial policies. From the Windrush generation to African immigrants seeking better opportunities, the colonial legacy is embedded in their stories.
 - **Cultural Identity:** The photos show how people have navigated dual identities—both their heritage and their British experiences—while facing systemic racism.
- **Discussion Prompt:**
 - “These portraits remind us that the legacy of British colonialism isn’t just historical—it’s personal and ongoing. How do these images of identity, migration, and resilience challenge our understanding of colonial history?”

Digital Art:

- **Overview:** Digital art in this exhibit reimagines colonial histories through a modern lens, juxtaposing grand narratives of empire with the lived experiences of the colonised.
 - **Themes:**
 - **Fragmentation of History:** Digital pieces challenge the glorification of the British Empire by presenting history as incomplete and fragmented, reflecting the perspectives of those who were oppressed.
 - **Cultural Resilience:** Bright colours and abstract forms represent the strength and resilience of African, Caribbean, and Asian communities in the face of colonial oppression.
 - **Discussion Prompt:**
 - “Digital art allows us to rethink how we understand history, particularly in how we reclaim narratives for those who were marginalised by colonialism. How do these digital representations bring new insights into the colonial past?”
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3. Imperialism, Colonialism, and the Slave Trade

- “Now, let’s turn to the important distinctions between **imperialism**, **colonialism**, and the **enslavement of African peoples**. Each of these terms refers to different mechanisms of control and exploitation, but they are deeply interconnected in British history.”

Imperialism:

- **Definition:** The ideology or policy of extending a country’s power and influence through diplomacy or military force. It includes both direct and indirect forms of control over other nations.
- **British Context:** The British Empire exemplified imperialism by expanding its political and economic dominance globally—both through formal colonies and economic control over territories.
- **Example:** The **Opium Wars** in China, where Britain imposed its will through military might without formally colonising the country.

Colonialism:

- **Definition:** The practice of acquiring and maintaining colonies where one country takes direct control over another, typically for economic exploitation and territorial expansion.
- **British Context:** Britain colonised large parts of the world, including **India**, the **Caribbean**, **Africa**, and **North America**. Colonialism involved direct political control and exploitation of local resources.
- **Example: India under British rule**, where Britain extracted resources and controlled political and economic structures.

Enslavement (not Slave Trade):

- **Definition:** The practice of forcibly capturing and transporting African peoples to be used as labour, particularly in the Americas and the Caribbean, under brutal conditions. Importantly, these individuals were *enslaved*—they were not inherently slaves, as the term might suggest they had a choice.
- **British Context:** Britain played a key role in the **transatlantic enslavement system**, transporting millions of Africans to the Americas to work on plantations, particularly in the Caribbean.
- **Example:** The **enslavement of Africans in Jamaica and Barbados**, who were forced to work on sugar plantations that fuelled the British economy.

Key Differences:

- **Imperialism** refers to the broad policy or ideology of domination.
- **Colonialism** involves direct control and administration of foreign lands.
- **Enslavement** refers specifically to the system of capturing and using African peoples as forced labour in British colonies.
- **Discussion Prompt:**
 - “Understanding these distinctions helps us see the different layers of exploitation under British rule. Imperialism was the driving ideology, colonialism was the practical method of control, and the enslavement of African peoples was one of the

most brutal economic systems that supported both imperialism and colonialism.”

- **Note:** “Remember, when we talk about the enslavement of Africans, we are talking about a system of brutal and inhumane control over people who had no choice. The term *enslaved* honours their humanity and recognises the conditions imposed upon them.”

Conclusion:

- “Through our exploration of this timeline, art, and the distinctions between imperialism, colonialism, and enslavement, we can see how deeply intertwined these systems were in shaping the British Empire and the lives of those it oppressed.”
- **Closing Thought:**
 - “It’s important to continue reflecting on these histories and their legacies today. The resilience, resistance, and voices of colonised peoples, whether through poetry, art, or activism, are essential in understanding the full scope of British colonialism.”

Symbols representing the British Empire and colonialism include:

1. Union Jack (Flag of the United Kingdom): The Union Jack is perhaps the most recognisable symbol of the British Empire. It was flown over many colonies and represented British authority and sovereignty.
2. British Crown: The Crown symbolizes the authority and power of the British monarchy, which was central to the governance and identity of the British Empire.
3. Royal Coat of Arms: The Royal Coat of Arms represents the monarchy and the authority of the British government. It was often displayed in colonial administrations and on official documents.
4. Red Ensign (Merchant Navy flag): The Red Ensign was widely used by British merchant ships and is closely associated with the British Empire's naval dominance and global trade during the colonial period.
5. British East India Company Flag: The flag of the British East India Company, a major agent of British colonial expansion, especially in India, represents the economic aspect of British colonialism.
6. Victoria Cross: The Victoria Cross, a military decoration awarded for valor, symbolizes British military power, often exercised in the expansion and maintenance of the Empire.
7. Colonial Architecture: Buildings such as government offices, railway stations, and courthouses built in British colonial style symbolise the physical and cultural imposition of British rule in colonised territories.
8. Statues of British Monarchs and Figures: Statues of Queen Victoria, King George, and other British figures erected in colonial territories symbolise British authority and the imperial ideology.

9. Colonial Seals and Emblems: Many colonies had their own seals or emblems that incorporated symbols of British power, such as lions, crowns, or the Union Jack.

10. Imperial Service Order: An award given to colonial civil servants, symbolising the administrative machinery of the British Empire.

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The terms colonialism, imperialism, and the slave trade are closely related in British history, but they refer to different aspects of Britain and expansion, control, and exploitation. Here's a breakdown of their differences, particularly

in the British context:

1. Colonialism:

- Definition: Colonialism refers to the practice of acquiring and maintaining colonies, where one country exercises direct political control over another, typically for economic exploitation and territorial expansion.

- British Context: Britain established colonies across the world, especially in the Americas, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Colonial rule involved direct administration of these territories, where the British government or companies controlled local resources, economies, and political structures.

- Examples:

- India (Bharat): Britain directly controlled India from 1858 to 1947, during what was known as the British Raj.

- The Caribbean: Islands like Jamaica and Barbados were colonised by Britain for sugar plantations.

- Goal: To exploit resources such as land, minerals, and agricultural products while setting up settlements.

2. Imperialism:

- Definition: Imperialism is the broader policy or ideology of extending a Country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force. It can include colonialism but also refers to indirect control and influence.

- British Context: The British Empire was one of the most expansive examples of imperialism. Britain extended its influence not just through formal colonies, but also through spheres of influence and economic dominance in areas where it didn't exercise direct political control.

- Examples:

- Egypt: Britain controlled Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but Egypt was technically not a colony; it was a British protectorate.

- China: Britain imposed trade agreements through force (e.g., after the Opium Wars), gaining control over Hong Kong and significant economic influence in mainland China.

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- Goal: To expand British political, military, and economic dominance globally, both through colonisation and other forms of control.

3. Slave Trade:

- Definition: The slave trade refers specifically to the forced transportation and sale of enslaved people, particularly from Africa, to other parts of the world for labour. The transatlantic slave trade involved

millions of Africans being enslaved and transported primarily to the Americas.

- **British Context:** Britain was a leading player in the transatlantic slave trade from the 16th to the early 19th century. British ships transported enslaved Africans to the Caribbean and the Americas, where they were forced to work on plantations, particularly in the production of sugar, tobacco, and cotton.

- **Examples:**

- **West Africa:** British traders took enslaved people from places like the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) and Nigeria.

- **The Caribbean:** Enslaved Africans were sent to British colonies like Jamaica, Barbados, and Saint Kitts, where they were forced to work on plantations.

- **Goal:** To provide a cheap, forced labour supply to support economic ventures in British colonies, especially in the Caribbean and the Americas, maximising profits from cash crops like sugar and cotton.

Key Differences:

- **Colonialism** involved direct control over foreign territories, often including the establishment of settlers and a government structure to control resources and land.

- **Imperialism** is a broader concept that includes colonialism but also involves indirect control and influence over other countries or regions without necessarily settling there or administering directly. It's more about extending power globally, often through economic or military means.

- The slave trade was an economic system where people were treated as property and sold into forced labour. It was a key component of Britain's colonial and imperial economies, especially in the Caribbean and the Americas, was a distinct system focused on human exploitation rather than territorial control.

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Connection Between the Three:

- Colonialism and imperialism provided the political and economic structures that allowed the slave trade to flourish. British colonies in the Caribbean and the Americas relied on enslaved labour, which was supplied through the transatlantic slave trade.

- British imperialism often used the wealth generated from colonies and the slave trade to fund its expansion and further political dominance.

Colonialism and imperialism describe the broader systems of control and exploitation, while the slave trade refers specifically to the exploitation of human labour within those systems.