EUROPEAN COLONIAL HERITAGE MODALITIES IN ENTANGLED CITIES

Artists and Citizens: Sub-Reports on the three cities

Deliverable 5.8 Month 18

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Report on Bristol, Marine Schütz

This report, like the one on Marseille, consists in the presentation of the art projects recently made in the realm of colonial heritage by contemporary artists engaged in the memory-based practices. The analysis presented here are based on interviews that I had with six artists based in Bristol – Michele Curtis, Valda Jackson, Stacy Olika, thanks to Dr Shawn Sobers, in July 2018, and in Marseille – Badr El Hammami, Dalila Mahdjoub and Toufik Medjamia – between October 2018 and July 2019. This will be completed by other case studies based on interviews already produced and interviews with other artists in Bristol especially, as well as with association leaders.

While contextualizing the projects within presentations that recall the debates on heritage in Britain or France, the report broaches the case studies in providing a raw archival material.

The oral archives result from interview methods that are both semi-open and follow a recurring pattern where the contexts, motivations, perspectives on colonial history are each time recollected. Such a pattern allows to recompose more broadly the artists' responses to colonial heritage. The quotes are chosen in function of their capacity to elucidate how the works enter in heritage debate and the motivations that the artists have when confronting with aesthetics, colonial history. The parts of interviews made with the artists reproduced here provide the means to undertake a comparative analysis of decolonial aesthetics in postcolonial Britain and France. To bear witness of the unprecedented status of such oral archives, the approach is purposefully factual and does not engage with conceptualization as this task will be specifically addressed in the end of the program with the production of essays and articles coming from this material.

When the quotes come from books and other interviews, they are referenced. When they are quoted from the interviews we made with the artists the reference is not precised.

The report also relies, when possible, on the press coverage, press releases and catalogues.

Michele Curtis, 14/06/2019, Bristol, The Canteen

Michele in Stoke's Croft district (picture made during the trip)

In our discussion, Michele started to introduce herself:

> I am a Bristol based artist. I am all self-taught. I have been drawing since I was a child I went to college and studied an A-level art and then I had my first child and I did not

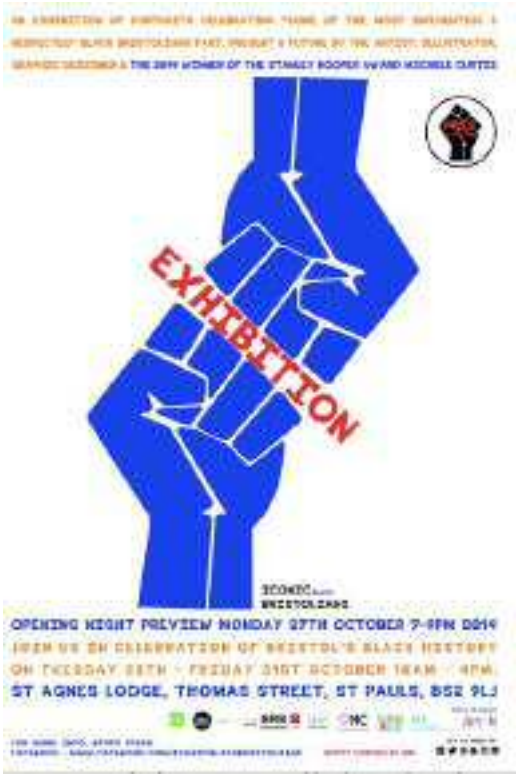
> draw for seventeen years. And then in 2012, I decided I was going to go back to university and to study graphic design.

Commenting on what sparked the topics defining her engagement in visual arts – that is, mapping Bristol's black histories and taking in charge the absence – she explained:

> I was kind of reluctant, but a couple of people encouraged me to have an exhibition for Black history month.

In October 2014, she had her first exhibition the *Iconic Black Bristolians*. This was a first portraits exhibition in Saint Agnes Lodge (during the Bristol *Black History Month)*. While this event's aim is to "celebrate the culture, history and achievement of Britain's African and Caribbean communities", Michele's project deeply resonated with this agenda:

> And I was kind of the opinion I did not really want to do it, because everybody knows about Malcom X, Martin Luther King, all the time (…). I cannot do an exhibition on something I am not really particularly passionate about. (…) And I thought, well, why do I not paint Bristol people, people that have made, that contribution to the city, in many different ways, that are part of the black community.



Involved in actions of resistance or cultural expressions, the Bristolians she then began painting were Carmen Beckford, Roy Hackett, Paul Stephenson, Dolores Campbell and Lawrence Hoo. By selecting some of these icons, the artist wanted to celebrate the involvement of citizens in the 1960s Bristol Bus Boycott (Paul Stephenson) but also the contribution of more recent black artists to poetry and filmmaking (such as Lawrence Hoo). While indebted to the traditional form of representation, her project is also socially based and engaged in the challenge of the representing the past as she envisions her project as "creat(ing) a legacy for the city, and for the community".

The *Iconic Black Bristolians* exhibition.

Signaling her claim for coining Bristol's city legacy, she performs the work of a revisionist heritage practice by reinserting African diasporic narratives of creativity, radicalism and activism in the iconic sites of memory:

> I just feel that maybe by making this project, it was a start, in terms of Bristol, I definitely see a difference in terms of the way of the schools are now looking at education, and what they are teaching, because to not discuss, to not be teaching the Bristol Bus Boycott, to not be teaching about the history of carnival, which is massive part of our history in Bristol, this does not make sense that they are not included in the curriculum of the city. So yes, that is why I say I can produce an exhibition, and all this kind of things, so that people could learn and that could be accessible.

Exploring the transformative impact of migration and transculturation, Michele understands these changes as the new perspectives on notions of identity and belonging.

Convinced by the fact that contemporary art and education can provide community change, she believes that art can provide values more suited to British multicultural identity model. Indeed, her description of the extent to which history is still conceived so as to narrate Britain as a nation for whites manifests that as long as a real education about diaspora migration histories will neither be integrated in the historical narration nor Bristol's reckon its own past, social damage and trauma will pursue to morally spoil young black people:

> So then if you are wondering why the issues are in the street, and they feel they don't belong anywhere, they don't feel actually British even though they were born here and are from two or three generations of family members, who we are British citizens and they don't belong here. So, there is something wrong.

By the kind of historical narrative it features, *Iconic Black Bristolians* project attempts to constitute a radical intervention in Bristol commemoration: the old, painful and official commemorations of Edward Colston are replaced by a stark memorial bearing witness to the subsequent untold histories of emancipation and the contribution of the West Indian in Britain.

Colston statue (picture made during the research trip)

The process of recollecting untold histories stands for an aim for all the exhibitions unfolded within the *Black Iconic Bristolian* process. The *Seven Saints* project also relies on this need:

> Yes, because up until the point of the *Seven Saints,* nobody knew who has done the St Paul's Carnival, why they have done the Saint Paul's Carnival, and that it was the same organization that did the Bristol bus Boycott, and also many other things we take for grants in the city, it was them.
> So it was all about this information I had that was not available online, nor in the books…

This has important a methodological impact. As recalled by Michele, investigating untold stories requires doing "research, speaking to the individuals themselves, to their family members".

A second opus belonging to the wider *Iconic Black Bristolian* project took place at the Island Gallery in Bristol. *Iconic Black Bristolians*: *Bristol and beats and bass* pursued the process of an art making practice informed by the need of remembrance. The 2018 exhibition featured over 20 portraits and biographies of sound system influencers and pioneers of the 1980s and 1990s, including faces from Smith & Mighty, Wild Bunch and City Rock as among others.

The artist (left) and *Dj Style* (right)

As explained on the artist's website, it was about probing the "ways the St Pauls' Carnival shaped the Bristol music scene and how the Jamaican-inspired sound system culture influenced genres like Trip Hop and Drum & Bass[1]".

It is significant that the exhibition *Iconic Black Bristolians*: *Bristol and beats and bass* Michele expressed the need to question Bristol's heritage in promoting popular and musical forms, made by the city's black citizens. Her combining of ancient and new forms of telling the past concern music.
Exhibited to a soundtrack of original sound system mixes, the project sets out to "celebrate Bristol's Afro-Caribbean sound-system pioneers", "to educate and inspire the public about Bristol's Afro-Caribbean community, remembering and capturing the legacy of key contributors in the multicultural arena[2]". It states the bonds between music in the city and colonial/slave history : " it is an exhibition of portraits of creative musical forces from the second generation of diaspora who have entertained music lovers through the St Paul's Carnival sound system culture[3]". Her words establish a frame for addressing memory practices in terms that reconnect the city to the diasporic journey between Caribbean and England.

The idea of making music cities has become a well-established way of approaching British heritage. As noted by Michelle Henning and Rehan Hyder,"in the UK the idea that particular sounds and genres belong to specific geographical contexts has enabled the construction of a music heritage in cities such as Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. In stating Bristol's musical legacy, Michele's project around the sound system culture strategically draws upon a traditional way to make heritage", (Henning and Hyder, 2014, p. 97).
While indebted to this notion of urban musical identities, Michele's understanding contests the mythological idea on the Bristol Sound[4]. The latter is based on a conception thriving a unified Bristol sound. Michele does not only reclaim the diversity of the sounds in Bristol - from trip hop, to electronica or break beat – but manifests the idea that the very musical trends in the city bear a transient flow. Destabilizing the relationship between local British space and music, which is traditionally defining heritage, Michele's underlines the Caribbean roots of Bristol music. Her comments insist on the multi-geographical realities of Bristol and music, problematizing the Bristol sound, as the sound system culture cannot anymore be assigned to a specific British place.

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[1] https://www.iconicblackbritons.com/bristol-beats-bass
[2] https://www.headfirstbristol.co.uk/#date=2016-07-23&event_id=32778
[3] https://theislandbristol.com/event/bristol-beats-and-bass/

[4] See the project The Bristol Live Independent Music Archive (BLIMA) project, developed in response to the recognition of Bristol as a music city and the problematic of the Bristol Sound. It sets out to map Bristol's live independent music scene, from 1950 to the present. The project investigates elements of popular culture, music and everyday life within the city, supporting research in this area, consulting with music networks and cultural heritage organization in the region. Sara Cohen, Robert Knifton, Marion Leonard, Les Roberts, *Sites of Popular Music Heritage: Memories, Histories, Places,* Routledge, London, 2014.

Highlighting the geographical complexities of Bristol's black musical cultural production, especially in mapping the role of dissemination in the genesis of this sound, reflects a new perspective on British heritage, where this nomadic music is coining a nomadic sense of place, what can hardly adequate to existing British spatial imaginary.

The title that the artist found out, *Iconic Black Bristolians*, bears similar tensions. Reminding how the title came out, and revealing her own disposition towards her Black British identity, Michele explains the genesis of the name:

> I was on summer holiday in London, in 2014, at my brother's house. We sat at brainstorming. And I was just like, there is so much controversy about what is politically correct to call people of color. BAME, I don't like the term BAME, I can't stand it. I don't see myself as a minority, really I don't. Bristolians… Black Bristolians and I came to Iconic Black Bristolians. And I was thinking Black Iconic Bristolians, Iconic Black Bristolians… And I thought IBB had a better ring to it. But we actually just rebranded it as it became a community interest company. And it became Iconic Black Britain.

This quote reveals something like a baseline for Michele's understanding of British postcolonial history.
Oscillating between the necessity to claim black music as a British heritage and the will to problematize old hierarchies between Britishness and place, the title thus demonstrates the artist's reflection on multidirectional identities.

While making a shift from invisibility to iconicity, the project renegociates notions of otherness and Britishness in emphasizing British heritage as a site of nomadic expressions. Her reshaping of heritage seems from this point of view to translate her broader conception of British identity. As the artist explains: "Our identity as British citizens is a shared identity and a melting pot of many different cultures[5]."
Presented as a hybridized demonym, the title responds to ancient and new forms of telling British identity, bearing witness to the dynamic processes of cross-cultural exchanges embedded within centuries long African diasporic art histories.

The artist, as we have seen, described her project as documenting the "legacy of key contributors in the multicultural arena as well as ethnicity". (*Headfirst Website*) While changing the terms of what is commemorated, which is major concern as we shall see with *The Seven Saints*, her project also addresses the issue of the colonial memory unleashed by Abolition 200.

[5] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/seven-saints-of-st-pauls-murals-completed/

Not only, it creates forms of representation of the cultural achievements of Caribbean communities but it includes an audience traditionally marginalized by the civic commemoration: that of the descendants from enslaved African. Her contribution to the change of the public history of Bristol's black people has gone through the making of other topics dealing with the West Indian community's present and future.

The Seven Saints of St Paul's

In 2015, Michele Curtis embarked on *The Seven Saints of St Pauls,* a two-year project celebrating the first-generation of Caribbean cultural and political figureheads via larger-than-life murals on prominent exterior walls of St Paul's, depicting the founders of the carnival.

Formal description of the project

The project featured prominent and large depictions in St Paul's walls of "colourful and poignant murals of the founders of the annual event[6]". Including symbols and quotes representing their tireless work in the community, the images depicted are that of Carmen Beckford, Dolores Campbell, Barbara Dettering, Clifford Drummond, Audley Evans, Roy Hackett and Owen Henry.

[6] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/seven-saints-of-st-pauls-murals-completed/

Owen Henry

Owen Henry helped set up The Bristol West Indian Parents' and Friends' Association in May 1970. This association helped people from the Caribbean with education, housing, welfare and health problems. From there emerged United Housing Association to meet the housing needs of BAME community in St Paul's and surrounding areas. In 1990 they opened their first scheme Owen Henry House, in St Pauls.

Owen Henry's mural on City Road was the first to be completed. He also bore a special place in the genesis of the project.

While the project was sparked by a general desire to address aesthetics so as to unveil untold stories, the artist' will to focus on the carnival was determined by the forthcoming anniversary and the role of discussions the artist had with Roy Hackett.

> It started because after I had the first exhibition, Roy Hackett said to me, you know what you should do, Owen Henry. I was like, 'Okay, how do I find his family etc. etc.?' And then during that time, I realized, speaking to Roy and a few others, the fiftieth anniversary of the St Paul's Carnival was approaching.

Roy Hackett portrayed with symbols of the Bristol Bus Boycott on Byron Street

The fact that Roy Hackett is painted with symbols of the Bristol Bus Boycott highlights his fight for civil rights. While Owen Henry was one of the founders of the *Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee* in order "to highlight the problem". One of the group's most famous achievement was its support to the boycott of Bristol buses. Alongside with Paul Stephenson, Guy Reid-Bailey, Prince Brown, Roy Hackett was an active member in the Boycott. The Bristol Bus Boycott took place in 1963 in response to Bristol Omnibus Company refusing to employ members of the black and Asian communities. This discrimination is representative of the urban cultural climate during this time, where racism was embedded in all social systems.
The group became well known and within six months, they were victorious and the Bristol Omnibus Company had to lift their ban on employing Black people[7].

The second moment of the Saints's activism was the foundation, in 1968, the Committee also formed the St. Paul's Festival Committee.

[7] https://www.unitedcommunities.org.uk/notice/7-saints-of-st-pauls-murals/

Carmen Beckford's mural on Morgan Street

Carmen Beckford MBE was a nurse who arrived in the UK from Jamaica at the age of 17. Her legacy is immortalized in a giant mural on Morgan street. She was a black woman pioneer in the Black rights struggles of the 60s, 70s and 80s. She fought against racial discrimination and inequality.

At her death in 2016, Peter Courtier, former director of Bristol Racial Equality Council, said Beckford "courageously fought against racial discrimination and inequality" in a city which "owes her so much[8]".

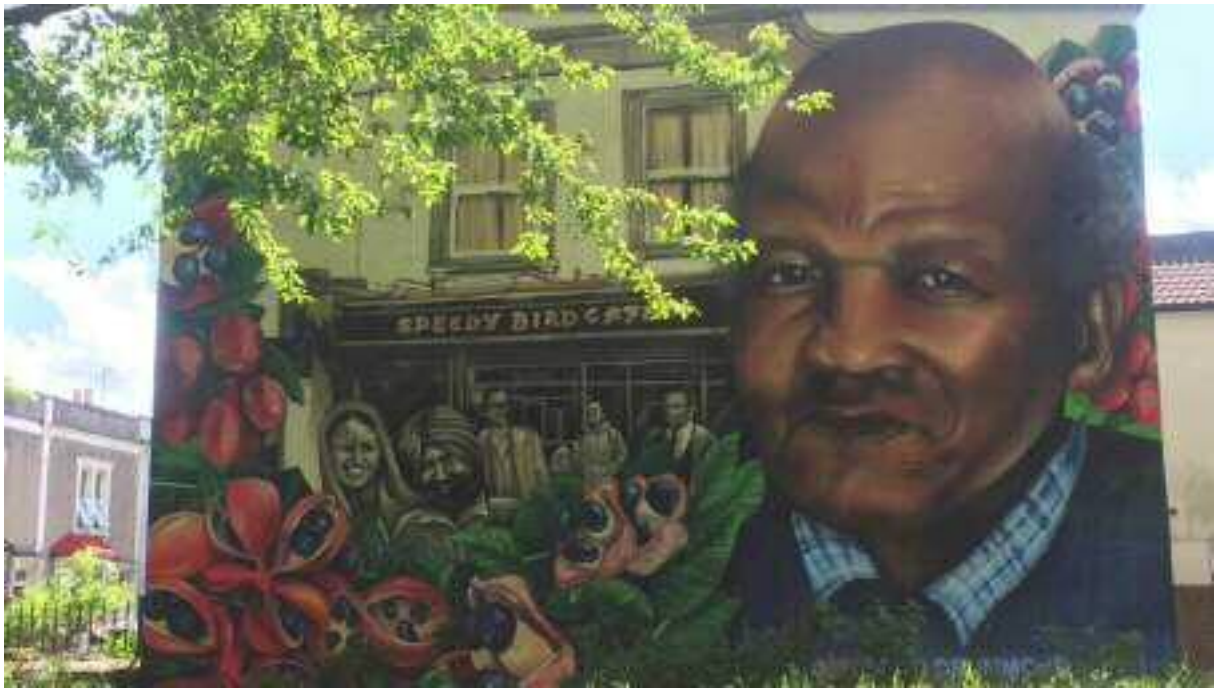
One of the reasons why her legacy is so critical, is, as recalled by BS24.7, that she had been instrumental in setting up St Paul's Carnival[9]. With the help of St Paul's and Environs Consultative Committee and the West Indian Development Association, she had been aided by the vicar of St Agnes Church.

A lover of music and dance, she was put in charge of entertainment at the carnival which grew to host more than 100,000 people. She had established the West Indian Dance Team in Bristol, a club that performed at Colston Hall and traveled as far as Germany. Beckford said of the team later: "When you have self-respect and pride no one can mess with you. I was involved in all of their lives, I would tell my girls when you are walking on the street

[8] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/carnival-founder-carmen-beckford-dies-age-87/
[9] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/carnival-founder-carmen-beckford-dies-age-87/

keep your head high and no loud talking as you are members of The West Indian Dance Team[10].” Her work in the community was officially recognized by the queen in 1982 when Beckford was awarded an MBE, becoming the first black recipient in the South West[11].

Asher Craig, councillor for St George West and close friend of Beckford’s told *Bristol24/7* summed up: “The legacy of Carmen Beckford’s contribution towards helping to create a more equal and integrated city must never be forgotten and I will ensure that it lives on[12]”.



Clifford Drummond

Clifford Drummond owned a business called the *Speedy Bird Cafe* on Grosvenor Road. Drummond worked a lot with the Asian community as well, especially with the changes in regulations with regards to British citizenship and passports.

It is on Grosvenor Road, where the St Paul’s Learning Centre stands today, that Clifford Drummond is portrayed with his cafe. According to Mary J. Mann, the cafe “was at the heart of the community in multiple ways[13]”. She explains indeed that “the carnival founders would

[10] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/carnival-founder-carmen-beckford-dies-age-87/
[11] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/carnival-founder-carmen-beckford-dies-age-87/
[12] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/carnival-founder-carmen-beckford-dies-age-87/
[13] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/seven-saints-of-st-pauls-murals-completed/

meet at the Speedy Bird, and it was where they held the initial meetings about the Commonwealth Coordinator Committee[14]".

Audley Evans' mural on Norrisville Road

As the artist explains

> Audley Evans, he is in the corner of the building where he used to live. I wanted to put his house into the overall trail. Owen Henry, his first house, where his first child was born. And he also used to live in City Road, he used to have a blues party there, play music, and dominos there.
>
> Carmen Beckford she is in Morgan street, that was a beautiful wall for her, she used to involve a lot for the community. She worked in the heart of St Paul's so that was perfect for her. Clifford Drummond, he is in Saint Agnes Park and that is not far from where he used to run his own shipping company with Owen Henry and where he used to have a café so his café is not far from, the building is not even here anymore.

[14] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/seven-saints-of-st-pauls-murals-completed/

Barbara Goodwin, she was a social worker she has always worked with the elderly and the young people, so she is overlooking Saint Agnes Park as well, at the playground, Roy Hackett is at the junction between St Paul's and Easton, he spent a lot of time in St Paul's and in the community in Easton, he used to connect the areas where the African Caribbean communities dominantly kind of live. So that can be extended in the story telling aspect of why they were there.

Barbara Dettering's mural on Ferne Street facing St Agnes Park

Barbara Dettering, the subject of the third mural to be painted, worked as a teacher in the city and spent most of her life influencing young children to overcome prejudices and strive to achieve their dreams. She helped hundreds of families during her time as a social worker and describes herself as one of the "silent diggers", who worked away in the background to get her point across and change the lives of future generations.

Dolores Campbell

BS 24/7's report about Dolores Campbell states that she was the "surrogate mother of black British culture". It reads that

Over the course of 18 years, Dolores was a foster career to more than 30 children. She was also the first woman member of the Commonwealth Coordinated Committee (CCC) set up to highlight open racial discrimination in Bristol in the 1960s and one of the founders of St Paul's Carnival[15].

Such a location highlights Michele's principle of setting the murals organically in the physical spaces where the saints have lived:

> Dolores Campbell is on Campbell street because her family used to live there. And her name is Campbell.

[15] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/new-mural-celebrates-surrogate-mother-of-black-british-culture/

Emergence of the bonds between carnival and Bristol black civil rights activists

Michele's project constitutes a form of engagement with a Caribbean cultural history and a staging of the cultural memory that has been repressed and which is deeply embedded in music and dance: that of carnival.
Hence, Caribbean memory has a privileged place in the history of the Windrush generation, primarily because it was a means for negotiating their arrival in Bristol.

Like for other West Indian artists, in Michele's work there is no theme more persistent and compelling than that of memory. Her project is indeed about how "to educate people about the city's African-Caribbean history[16]". But her approach of education throughout history is however never solely directed towards the past.
Endorsing heritage-based arguments, the ways she tells history and the narrative she selects are clearly aimed at responding to contemporary needs such as equality and fighting discrimination.
For her, it seems that commemorating black history is never disconnected from the present and that historical resources become a way to act upon social discrimination, by fostering new modes of representation in historical and civic realms. Indeed, Michele clearly states that she hopes that the project will have a "wider influence on the subject of cultural diversity in Bristol[17]".

While seemingly not related to slavery memory, her project does in fact reveal the several bonds between carnival and slavery memory. Firstly, it ought to be remembered that contemporary carnival in Bristol materializes the links with colonial history and also its status of resistance towards the plantation system. Before emancipation, carnival contributed to the political struggle over Empire (see Jackson, 1988, p. 213–227).

The symbolism of carnival as a process of resistance against the colonial power, and not only as a history is defining her project. In many respects, calling to the legacy of carnival like to other forms of memories in the diasporic space is a way to somehow recuperate some fragments of that which was been threatened by loss but existed culturally in the Middle Passage.
Like Glissant's work has made clear, memory is most closely linked "to slavery and to the need to dredge up repressed images from the past" (Glissant 1997, p. 14) Accordingly,

[16] https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2018-10-24/i-was-one-of-the-silent-diggers-lady-who-fought-for-racial-equality-in-bristol-to-be-celebrated-in-new-mural/
[17] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/seven-saints-of-st-pauls-murals-completed/

Michele has described the extent to which the postcolonial and colonial history of Bristol was obliterated.

However, Caribbean cultural memory is a means to "dredge up" colonial images from the present, still informed by old patterns of coloniality. As she has underlined, the perception on its contemporary forms, such as carnival was bad and very far to be considered worth of being turned into a piece of culture and heritage for the city.
Making Caribbean memory visible was all the more urgent, as Michele has recalled that, at the moment when she was about to begin "there was a lot of controversy around the St Paul's Carnival because it had lost its founding, a lot of people were saying, 'who cares? Who cares? It is just a big street party' etc. etc".

The need to use the power of images in order to change representations was directly aimed at countering such damaging dominant representations on black youth. As she explains, "I am using art, history, art, culture, to kind of educate people. You know, it is to let them to know that we are not criminals and drug dealers".

While the reluctancy to grant the carnival the significance it had was indicative of the racial bias still prevailing in the realms of commemoration and representation, it was also an expression that had been, itself, instrumental to the media in the damaging representation of black youth as criminalized and subcultural" by the press in the 1970s and the 1980s (Donnell, 2013).

Recollecting the memory of carnival, initially connected to remote lands of colonial and postcolonial spaces, decisively brought the artist to discover its significance for British history. Thanks to her research, were unveiled the deep connections that existed between carnival manifestation and Bristol political racial struggles. And this had deep impact, since the emancipatory status of carnival as a culture symbolically contesting old colonial order in the plantation, would be remapped in Bristol as a force of real political agency.

Reaching back in time to reclaim the seven saints as new icons for Bristol's history, she selected figures to be commemorated whose deeds renewed the idealisms and values that were so far commemorated. As rarely before, the project manifested forms of commemorations including those who descended from enslaved Africans, where they could be endorsed in civic discourse. The artist' s impetus on the figures to build a civic discourse around historical figures, may be read, in this context, as a direct attempt to counter Bristol' existing narratives on colonial heritage, for as against the highly divisive forms of Colston commemoration usually defining as the icon of a city, are invoked new symbols to tell the Bristol slavery history.

Michele's comments on the *Seven saints* manifest that, while featuring an underlying critique of the epistemological approaches that sustain painful commemorations, the project functions above all as a rewriting of the streets as a record of important experiences of inclusion.

Indeed, in the 1960s, the history of the seven saints is that of practitioners that have engaged in a more visible and definable notion of black British culture in the city as well as in the quest for social equality as embodied by the Bristol Omnibus Boycott.
Set into a broader context of politization of consciousness, in the 1960s, their undertakes occurred at the time when there "was clearly a reaction and opposition to state racism and offered a vital if limited, platform for self-representation" (Donnell, 2013, p. 11). There was a sense for the militants of Black Britain that commitment to achieving cultural recognition, voice and visibility did necessitate changing the attitude towards representation and culture, starting conceiving representation as « a new vocabulary and syntax of rebellion » (Hall 1978).

This approach seems to have had a considerable impact on Michele's conception, reclaiming the agency of the pioneers for transforming the existing legacy of racialized repression into stories of inspiration and equality struggles. As the artist explains, "Collectively, and as individuals, these vanguards of the Windrush generation were social and political change agents[18]". By revealing that its inhabitants, usually considered as criminals or victims of exclusion, feature here as actors of a longstanding tradition operating within symbolical rebellion against the fixed and damaging representation of blackness, the stigma on St Pauls is submitted to a deep reversal of representations. As the artist explains, the project aims to provide British descendants of slavery with emotions such as "self-esteem, empowerment, and belonging".

Representation thus emerges as a realm to be invested in order to operate changes. During our conversation, she has made clear some perspectives on the images invested with the ability to technically "capture the people". Images can constellate traces that allow getting at her models' feelings:

> For instance, when someone has passed away, I contact their family and try to find photographs that I can use for that portrait. (…) I take photographs or they give me photographs (…). I did not realize initially that the process I was to do, to do with interviews and then doing interview was kind of process of capturing the person who they are, the portraits were about 'this person did this', but somehow, they could feel connected to the person in the portrait, like know them, I try to capture the spirit, that thing inside them, that made who they are, and want them to the work that they did.

[18] https://visitbristol.co.uk/destinationbristol/information/news/2019/7/3/new-bristol-based-app-released-by-cactus-apps-the-seven-saints-of-st-pauls-r-art-and-heritage-trail-a5132

Street politics

As we have seen, educating Bristolians about black history and bringing to light Caribbean cultural memory traces in the city are two aspects that are crucial to Michele's motivations. But on teaching future generations about Bristol's diverse history she says, "an exhibition here and there, going and doing talks in schools, wasn't enough[19]". The necessity to change mentalities has brought the artist to reassess her own means and deeply impacted the choice of the medium. *The Seven saints* murals renewed Michele's previous conceptions as the traditional display of exhibition were replaced by public forms in the streets.

The walls of Saint Paul (picture made during the research trip)

Firstly, displaying the murals in the city was a means to bring the attention on the cultural significance of this the area. Another stated aim was the idea according to which without

[19] https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2018-10-24/i-was-one-of-the-silent-diggers-lady-who-fought-for-racial-equality-in-bristol-to-be-celebrated-in-new-mural/

having been commissioned but citizen-led[20], Michele's project intends to bring a narrative about Bristol:

> It aims "to encourage people to visit St Paul's and come into St Pauls because up into this point there was not anything that kind of promoted the history in terms of the history of the African Caribbean". (2019)

This willingness aimed at turning the city's postcolonial sites of migration into location of popular and attractive heritage seems all the more likely to be achieved when one considers the strategic choice of using the medium of street art. Owing to Banksy's international reputation, street art does not only surpass other forms of commemoration in the city, but has taken up old statuary support in the making of the civic discourse. (For a discussion on the weight of the different mediums in the process of commemorating the city, see Sobers 2018, p.97) As well in using the language of street art painting, that has been central in the recent writing narratives on the city, the artist reveals her take on redefining the content of heritage and civic content.

A street painting made by Banksy in Stokes Croft road, near at some meters from Saint Paul's. (Picture made during the trip)

20 She got a £69,712 Funding from the National Lottery Project Grants.

Considering the intellectual conditions and the social contexts that enabled Michele's project to occur, it is important to mention that its stake on the civic memory practices might resonate with the increasing longing of remaking of memory that unfolded in 2007 in the wake of Bristol after Abolition 200. The discussions around the slavery trade colonial heritage functioned as a fuel for artists to generate a dialogue in the city around the past. Since this exhibition, the Bristol slave trade action group, which includes city councillors, museums workers, academic and representatives of the Black community have been working to make more visible the history of the slave trade in relation to merchants of Bristol. Their projects include a Slavery Trail, a historical walk which takes in the docks and an exhibition on slavery which will open next year. They also included is a visit of Edward Colston's tomb. As a local benefactor, Colston was a leading member in the slave trade, a local benefactor. He is honored by the city but his role in the slave is usually ignored.

Engaging with Bristol's city space to deal with the slavery trade heritage has become for artists and citizens a central strategy, aimed to "construct and challenge the civic narrative" (Sobers 2019, p.98). Contesting the remnants of slavery past, through processes of vandalizing or reframing the Colston statue as artists began to do in the 2000s in order to question Colston's legacy manifests itself as a recurrent approach in the remaking of the city's civic discourse.

In a similar manner to works like Tony Forbes's painting *Sold Down By the River,* the *Seven saints* belongs to a category of projects that contests the narration of Bristol's colonial past marked. As argued by Shawn Sobers, there is a "disparity" between Forbes' work and "how the city continues to tell the story about itself" (Sobers 2019, p.97). It manifests the artists' need to engage with the British city as a site of residual memory of trauma. However, compared to the seminal undertakes of Hew Locke and Tony Forbes, *Iconic Black People,* Michele's approach towards the links between the physical sites and the handling of colonial history seems to be apart. Indeed, Michele's view on St Pauls addresses the relations between the descendants of slaves and the city space, by addressing the repressed memories as consequences of colonial history. In selecting a topic linked to the post-emancipation time, what she probes in the city's past is not anymore made of the traumatic remembrance of the trade but is held as a source of experiences of empowerment.

Turning the carnival culture and St Pauls walls into heritage stands for a decentered way to envision the sites of colonial and postcolonial histories in the city as it deeply transforms the perspective on the presence of Caribbean in Bristol's Saint Paul's. It honors a population who is traditionally marginalized.

St Paul's Carnival

If Michele wishes to see the narrative about St Paul's shifted, it is not only because her personal and affective links to this area where she has been in high school, but due to the historical significance of the seven saints to British culture. Reactions in the press covering the project were indicative of the problem of the misrepresentation of the St Paul's people:

> The press pictured out it straight away. And they were like why is it important? And I said, it is important because the seven created St Paul's carnival because of the support that they received from the city of Bristol, during the Bus Boycott, and wanted to continue to promote inclusion, that and share African Caribbean culture with the rest of the city so that there would be less misunderstandings and more cultural understandings.

It is significant that Michele's research of a "positive representation" of blackness and the sense of heritage she intends to dig up are closely aimed at contesting the damaging descriptions of St Paul's district. Plagued by the negative stereotypes in the press and always known as "a no-go-area", the dominant perceptions on St Paul stands allow the artist to address an essential aspect in the understanding of postcolonial life in Bristol, that of the misrepresentation of black people in the media:

> From what I see, coming back from London, my focus is… I just want to focus on the positive, I don't see there is enough positive representation of the African Caribbean community. What I see in the media is knife crime, knife crime, knife crime.

The project is embedded in a process of contestation of the representation of St Pauls. The demography in the area is formed almost exclusively by people who have working-class Jamaican roots. They arrived in Britain thanks to chain migration as in 1952 McCarren-Walter Act banned the migration of West Indians to America and deflected them to the UK. In the post WWII period UK needed extra labor for expanded (transport, manufacturing, public services).

Initially a shelter for the West Indian migrants of the Windrush generation, Saint Paul's saw in the 1970s a marked deterioration of the relations between the institutions and its black residents. Characterized as a ghetto, the area has known social economic inequality, often in racialized ways (Chivallon 2007, p. 352), what has become a factor in acute social conflicts. The raiding of black cultural institutions such as youth clubs and its violence has ended in the riots, making it the first of the urban districts in Britain to experience rioting in response to the discriminatory policing of the Thatcher era. On 2 April 1980 the police raided the Black and White Café, a long-time meeting point for black residents in St Pauls and seized hundreds of crates of illegal beer. Accounts have revealed that the police behave appallingly during the raid (Gilroy 1987; Reicher 1984), what resulted in their van carrying the seized beer being overturned.

It is against such narratives as well as against the repressive one that responds Michele's "eruption of memory" (Chivallon 1999).

While one of the reasons why the whole black histories have to fully reemerge, starting with the slave trade to come to terms with social and psychological problems, telling the story of slavery without thinking about its consequences on British culture is not sufficient:

> And my thing is well, if you educate people to understand difference in cultures, understanding the different practices, understand different necessarily mean bad, then you'll have children out of the school system that have no fear about what they are, what we contributed in terms of African Caribbean diaspora, and the young children are left with basically no guidance. All that is taught is that you were slaves, and you were brought from African to the Caribbean and now you are here. This is the basic education about black history education in Britain.

Street politics

While Michele's project aims at bringing the Seven saints' history to commemoration equally important is, for her, that this counter-narrative of the city might develop through public devices. As we have explained earlier, when it pertains to representation, the project established a dialogue with 1960 black culture, especially with their concerns for the struggles including that occurring in the realm of representation. Likewise, it seems that the shift she has made, from the uniqueness of small drawings during her first exhibitions to the monumental scale and public reach of the Seven Saints project, deeply resonates with the solutions black cultural activists had envisioned to change representation.

The choice of the public unhousing was made an integral part of the process of popularizing black history.

> What I was doing within the exhibition was promoting the idea to have an outdoor exhibition, of all seven as prominent murals around the area, mobile art, so people can run around tour, like an art trail, guided tours.

The artist's choice is thus one that historicizes the carnival as a central cultural expression of Caribbean culture in public and popular forms, echoing the initial intents of the founders of the carnival: that of displacing to England the Jamaican street culture but also to reclaim public space. It was about recovering it both for cultural expression, for ensuring its transmission of Caribbean culture in forms resonating with that rooted in West Indies and opening to Black presence in the public jobs. That was the sense of the Bristol Bus Boycott. The sense of their struggles was in a way to regain their place in the public space. It is certainly in this way that Jackson mentions a street politics, when analyzing Notting Hill carnival (Jackson 1988).

In that sense, the fact these murals frame the Caribbean heritage into public forms for civic narratives engaging in a concrete street politics illuminates more broadly the legacy of the founders as a resource to promote inclusion.
Using the public forms to document this history, the artist strategically incorporates herself as contributor potentially continuing this lineage, bearing the trace of social movement's dynamics. As for Leigh Raiford for "social movements, memory is never an end itself but rather to make sense of history, declare lineages, clarify allegiances, and mobilize constituents" (Raiford 2009, p. 12).

Michele's project raises the issue of the unhousing of history. She came up with the idea to display the murals along the carnival procession route. Being a painting-based project, the *Seven Saints murals* simultaneously features as a trail organized so as to communicate about this district' history in meaningful and embodied forms:

> Initially I had in my head that the murals should be following the procession route for the carnival. But St Pauls has changed so much since the sixties.

Moving from the library to the street, the idea of the trail set the Caribbean culture into motion. For Blevins, such a movement comes to reset the divides between enclosure and opening, individuality and collectivity. It is a process helping bind people together, as surely as its institutional enclosure helps keeping them apart (Blevins 2017).

Beyond the murals, the idea of the project was to include them in "an outdoor art and heritage trail of the seven large-scale murals with an accompanying mobile app[21]". Testifying of her aspiration to "create projects that provide resources for cultural socialization[22]" in order to "fill the gap of multicultural representation within British society", The Seven Saints has recently known an afterlife. The Seven Saints of St Pauls® Art & Heritage Trail app was launched in July 2019 with the function to « guide users around seven large-scale murals of individuals who made significant contributions to the social and cultural richness of Bristol and the UK[23]".
Also, it includes articles about The Bamboo Club, The Black & White Café, the St Pauls' Uprising, and The Bristol West Indian Parents & Friends' Association whose members established the St Pauls Carnival in 1968.

The implications of such mobile ways enhancing collective based approaches to uncover history are manifold. But the artist's choice was certainly determined by the awareness of the Slavery Trail realized by the city. Firstly, the movement the audience is involved in echoes at best the idea that migrations and settlement in Bristol were themselves belonging to the motion of history and have impacted on the ways to think art itself. The process communicates the viewers the experience of the founders, that of mobility. This resonates with Ann Ring Petersen perspective about the new contents for art that emerged with the globalization, such as representation of migrants but also like migrancy, the two having become common in contemporary art while the art world's modes of production, distribution and institutionalization have themselves been transformed by the increased mobility of people, goods, information, images and art. (Petersen 2018).

The semantic choices the artist has made, starting with ornamenting each portrait with floral specimen, appear likely to reinforce her attempt to encode this diasporic sense of experience that has defined the saints' lives. Each fresco a vegetal part, made of flowers and trees, some natural elements recollecting his or her homeland.

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[21] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/five-questions-%E2%80%A6-michele-curtis-iconic-black-britons-cic
[22] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/five-questions-%E2%80%A6-michele-curtis-iconic-black-britons-cic
[23] https://visitbristol.co.uk/destinationbristol/information/news/2019/7/3/new-bristol-based-app-released-by-cactus-apps-the-seven-saints-of-st-pauls-r-art-and-heritage-trail-a5132

With this choice, the artist purposefully depicts the roots "with the colors, the words, the flowers etc." As she recalls:

> One of the things I noticed is that when it comes to the African Caribbean diaspora, if you are from Caribbean, everyone assumes that you are from Jamaica. And if you are from Africa, everyone assumes you are from Nigeria. And actually, no. (…) I mean genetically yes, but culturally, not so much. Because that is not where my parents come from. And because of the whole slave trade, there is void between Nigerian culture and Caribbean culture, and British culture. It's complex. I wanted to make sure that identity shares those differences, slight or not, we are all Caribbean, we all identify as Caribbean, but people from Barbados do things slightly different from people from Jamaica or Trinidad. And I want to make sure that that aspect of the culture was also taught, because all those elements are from the Caribbean and from Africa, but they feed on what can considered as contemporary British culture today. These people walking around and doing things don't even realize that the phrases they are sing come from specific parts of the world, something that we cherish.

While the term *Iconic Black Britons* was in its coining an attempt to develop a demonym taking account of the Black population of her city, envisioning a form of heritage suited to this hyphenated identity reveals Michele's understanding of the fundamental connection between memory and nation. However though if the incorporation of blackness into British heritage and identity was made in response to the fact that definition of nation and collective memory was necessarily impacted by globalization, Michele's approach also reclaims differences within a shared black experience. This stands for a thread running through her entire project. It is indeed not only about addressed this issue from the point of view of the black experience in Britain, but also from the point of view of Caribbean culture. In this sense, the vegetal metaphor puts forth a meditation on identity as an experience formed simultaneously by the dispersal and bonding, here with the roots. This dialectic movement has all the more to be kept in mind when it comes to narrate Caribbean experience in Bristol. As recalled by Michele about Caribbean space: "There is more than a story to tell" adding that "in Jamaica, they do this, this is the national flower, this is the national fruit, or this is the national tree".

If the Black presence in Britain necessitates to reimagine the issue of roots in more pluralistic perspectives, her comments on the multiple sources in the making of identity seem suited, surprisingly, with British and Caribbean conceptions of culture where assimilationism is recused. While remote and concurrent, the both have a commonality revolving around the idea of national or cultural construction. One the one hand, as explained by Kowaleski Wallace, there is "the idea of Britain is a construction that simultaneously refers to a national orientation and a distinct local identity" (Kowaleski Wallace 2006, p. 11). She quotes the presence of communities defined by the geographical

dispersal as – not only the English, the Scots, and the Welsh, but also the Liverpuldian, the Mancunians, and the Glaswegians" (Kowaleski Wallace 2006, p. 11).

Valda Jackson, 17/06/2019
at the artist's studio in Spike Island

Valda at her studio

Valda Jackson studied BA Fine Art in Bristol and post-graduate studies in Cardiff. Painter, she also writes short story - "An Age of Reason" is included in Closure: An Anthology of Contemporary Black British Fiction, soon to be published by Peepal Tree Press. Though involved in a variety of styles and mediums – as she explains "I write, I paint, I sculpt, but there all the same thing", her many productions dovetail as they start with the desire "to communicate something".

While the artist argues to "use many different ways to say different things", the issue of the relationship between heritage and art practice could also be considered as a recurrent one in her work.

During our meeting at her studio in Spike Island Art center, she started in noting the tensions that emerged when a gallerist saw her work, several years ago and said to her « well, they are just paintings of black people ».

As witnessed by her words, recalling the kind of color bar a black painter can confront in Britain, she manifests how art consumption is still embedded in its colonial legacy.

The possibilities and the difficulties of experiencing being a black Caribbean female painter within a white society and art world stand for one of the possible entrances to address Valda's work. Besides, how a more inclusive sense of plural cultures in Britain can be constructed within painting constitutes another key element that emerged from our meeting. Many more questionings were raised, dealing more broadly with the senses of the British culture.

"Growing up in a culture which is Jamaica", the point of reference in the artist's biography

All these questionings seem to have resulted from what the artist calls the point of reference in her biography, "growing up in a culture which is Jamaica". Valda Jackson was born circa 1959 in Blue Mountains[24], Jamaica and came to England at the age of five to join her parents and settle in Birmingham.

The tensions that unfold when one is traversing the center itself from the margins seem to result from this state of being simultaneously a part of two cultures, one diasporic and the other imperial. She recalls having

> growing up in a culture which is Jamaica inside another culture which is the Britain and it oppressive, imperial culture" and adds "When our parents came here and found themselves excluded and not welcomed, they had to find their much inclusive, places, like different churches etc.

As pointed out in her work and in her words, childhood seems to be the moment when she herself discovered this dual relationship between two cultures. She would have to negotiate that formative moment. This prompted a situation where tensions were bringing her to feel that her seminal culture was constantly threatened to be erased. Childhood symbolizes then the moment of an awareness of the cultural formation, in two main groups of actors, between those based in the former colonial periphery, who settled in Britain, and the majority population, associated with imperial culture.

[24] http://www.myfuturemychoice.co.uk/assets/file/Valda%20Jackson.pdf

In this sense, depicting childhood becomes a way to come to terms with the traumatic experience of cultural conflict as a consequence of the diasporic experience.

While not having painted herself as a child, she has used many photographic images that depict young girls and boys, turning thereby painting into a practice of archiving the traces of the 1960s and the Windrush generation.

Hide and Seek oil on paper 58 x 40 cm

Exploring the bonds with the community

Her paintings manifest the need to express oneself in order to negotiate the image associated to this traumatic time that was the discovery of a differentiated self. But while this can be true, Valda adds that in her paintings there is "more than the individual".

This sets the stage for an understanding of her practice that goes beyond the strict limits of the psychological restitution traditionally involved in the practice of the portrait. Based on the picturing of young black children, her painting relates to the wider and collective history of the Windrush generation. As she states, the child represents in her paintings a "group of young people" and a specific one, the one " who came who to Jamaica, for England, or some being born elsewhere".

Woman and child, oil on canvas, 65 x 98 cm

She met the boy she has painted in the church. For her, such context reflects the resources the community can provide and echo the importance it had for her parents' generation in the process of homing.

Depicting the Windrush generation

Still Holding On (exhibited on Dreamland's large outdoor billboard) addresses this topic in a large format. She has constructed the work from charcoal drawings and painting of photographs of children of the Windrush generation created over decades, taken 50-60 years ago.

Still Holding On, Mural By The Sea, Dreamland, Margate (in situ)

The figures embody the young generation of people whose parents came to Britain from Caribbean between 1948 and the 1970s. The way they are positioned and treated in pastel hues against a background of English oak induces itself an allegorical register that defines her approach, the painting becoming here an allegory of the settlement.

Valda Jackson would have invested this specific aspect by way of the materials and the gestures she uses, the oak and the cut and paste approach, so as to explore what was the experience of migration.

The *Windrush mural* in the area of Saint Paul (picture made during the research trip)

Compared to another public murals, such as the Windrush, with the ship and the word Migration written on it, this one describes the moment of settlement that came after the travel. She addressed this issue with the resources, such as the oak, which, as she comments, is "symbolic of tradition, permanence and home".

Through these words, the artist also engages us to think about the material but also immaterial means, such as art, that can be used in coping with the difficult process of physically and culturally homing England. The act of painting as assembling images might itself, as an important gesture of her work, can be seen to encode in the very form of work this "precarious nature of those who are part of this generation's status in this country."

How the image is able to reconnect the viewers to the feelings and experience of the artists is an aspect that Valda has broached in her words. As she has pointed, her images deal with: "The image, pose uncomfortable questions around identity, belonging, responsibility, innocence and vulnerability". This implies that artworks have a capacity to reproduce at their own visual, semiotic and affective scales, the power to talk about identity.

Besides, in revolving around the symbols of permanence and roots in which community could gather around – some types of reconnections all the more important due to the precariousness of the experience of settling for the Caribbean – the artist recollects the capital function of past and remote symbols and culture, in England, as well as their function in diasporic experience. Valda's very conception of heritage illustrates well

> where you are from, what you bring, what you add, had to be reclaimed in the host culture.

It can be argued then that the painter portrays more than her individual feelings and memories, but collective memory. May it be past, that of the Windrush, she feels she has to pay homage to, or future, as she intends to work in developing a new legacy for the "future" one, the notion of generation recurrently comes in her work and words.

The resurgence of British postcolonial archives in her practice leads to revise the position of painting in what pertains to its function. To a historical discourse built on a conception based on personal expression or contemplation, it substitutes a narrative function aimed at debunking asymmetrical power relations between Jamaican culture and Imperial culture. Giving historical matter an emotional intensity nurtured by present experiences seems to define the lines around which Valda Jackson proceeds, giving thereby her project the tenure of a memory work. As she explains, she uses painting as a realm where to

> explore contemporary issues around Britain's role in Europe, the Commonwealth and the world, and highlights the neglected and vulnerable victims of prejudice, nationalism and ignorance.

This has impacted on the subject as the people she paints are stemmed from the West Indian community and she meets them in the street, like her first black model, in the 1980s. "I ask young women I met in the train, in the bus", she recalls. Or the little boy (she shows on a picture), "I knew you him, he used to go to Church". All these models are somehow connected the issue of heritage.

Moreover, during our interview, she explained that the black model in French history painting stands as a kind of foil:

> The thing is that sometimes there were paintings of great beauties that are still painful in what they resent. Sometimes you have images of black in the background, holding flowers, Olympia, I found it offensive (…) It's like gone with the wind, quintessential, lovely beautiful dresses, but look at the way they are represented, they are enslaved.

Such a scrutiny towards the extent to which art historical images might be painful is but never so true when it relates to slavery. And that is why painting is especially challenging as the artist recognizes that "what is the past continue to harm us and continue in the future".

A remaking of the black archetypes in painting

While reading the presence of black models in art history as "beautiful but painful", this observation has instigated the problem of identification for black viewers. As she asks "who wants to identify with that?" Out of that question, she has established some principles to address painting, as it is for her a practice that is interacting with the audience's feelings. Establishing a deep connection between feelings and paintings, she "thinks that visual images stay with you in your heart and in head", and thus "as she notices, this is potentially very dangerous for young generations". "When you see bad things when you are re young, even if you think it forgotten, its damages and you might not remember why, when you are". Seen from this angle, an artist should think representation in order to bring out a legacy for the future "future generation".

This seems to have ingrained Valda's reflection on her role as a painter, positioning against such past pictorial legacies and endorsing a social function for her practice, embedded in social relations. Important for her is the idea of a remaking of black archetypes, of making a painting able to endorse the codes of classical painting in providing models of identification, or images that do no harm. It is in this sense the depiction of beautiful and calm women, treated in a melancholic tonality, can be read.

Jamaican heritage

While changing the archetypes is crucial to her, she also thinks she can do it in using her heritage as a Jamaican painter. She discussed heritage as a practice based on "what you bring", "a sort of mixing, or not". The artist's position towards this possibility to mix or not to mix, is eloquent: her description of painting, and especially when it comes to the relation to the model, draws painting as an experience of taking advantage of West Indian history: "what individuals bring is very important, but we have to share, something":

> The person does come as individual, they bring selves, but they need to bring that thing to bring us together.

Painting with the community has provided the artist important resources thinking the pictorial subject, especially the meetings at the church. But it features also a horizon that prompted her practice to develop beyond the relationship between one single viewer and

the canvas and impacted, in return, the sense of the works, among which some can be identified at some point as ways to overlap with public history processes:

> I have works that are almost abstraction. Having grown up in England and having seen very few images of images of myself on tv on boards, it has always been for me important to make these images.

However, the artist refuses the binaries and conceives her painting as a possible site where to reconcile. Since the 1980s, she has created a pictorial language, she describes as a British language, as the British/continental visual language – "that is fine art/classical painting, which is what the artist has received as a British legacy. "I am also speaking English, European is my language. That area that I speak. It is what it is".

An important gesture in her path was to posit herself as a painter who builds a project largely based on the figuration of black people, she depicts in this very fine art language, transforming then painting itself in a site of entanglement.

This sense of a non-exclusive Britishness, but which is still defining her identity in joint with her Jamaican roots, is never so lively than when she travels.

> When I go abroad, and then as a student and a tutor, in places in Germany and in France and I see these black skinned people. These people I could not speak to them. And that is quite hard. Now. Essentially, we are made, where we are. This is what I am made of. In one sense since I don't have the verbal, how can I speak a visual in a way I mean. When you take something and you don't know what it means. What does it mean, things has meaning. When I am constructed a figure, a lay of clay, it's meaning, I put clay on it, it has meaning, and I put clay on purpose. And it is the same for art from Africa. It is the same thing, imitating the sound of those Africans that I met in Paris, and could not speak.

Literary Archaeology': Exploring the Lived Environment of the Slave

The problem of identification the artist explored in assessing the lack of black positive models in painting found a prolongation in a recent collective project, the artist probing this time questions like how we represent those who cannot be written about?

In 2016, she joined the Bristol project called '*Literary Archaeology': Exploring the Lived Environment of the Slave*, led by Dr. Josie Gill from Bristol University. Experimenting with highly emotional resources for commemoration and creation, human bones, the project imagined a device where artists were brought to difficult encounters with human remains.

Dr Josie Gill

The stated questions brought by the project were

> How might archaeological methods, data and physical remains inspire and enhance literary attempts to reconstruct past slave environments and literary critical ways of thinking about slavery and the relationship between archaeology and literature?
> Can a synthesis of literary and archaeological perspectives enhance public understanding of the experiences of enslaved Africans?[25]

This interdisciplinary research project, which was a collaboration between a literary scholar and two archaeological scientists sets out, as explained by its leader "to examine the relationship between literary and archaeological approaches to slavery, and to investigate where and how the methods and priorities of each discipline might inform each other in understanding what it was like to be enslaved".
Another stated aim was "to explore how contemporary fiction and archaeological data might be brought together to create a literary archaeology that is more than metaphorical; a method where writers begin with physical remains, and imagination, memory and living bodies become ways of making sense of the archaeological information revealed by the bones of long-dead slaves".

[25] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

The project engaged in a reflection on the memory of slavery. Josie Gill's project opened a reflection on slavery memory as it established a link between slavery and its effects on the present. This concerns the repression of the memory of slavery by the city. The need to reconstruct the past slave environments and to question the ways of thinking about slavery was understood so as to contribute to "the ongoing public debate about how the transatlantic slave trade should be acknowledged and remembered[26]". As suggested by Josie Gill, the city is full of "orthodox or hegemonic historical narratives" oriented towards repression. The means at stake in the project, starting would archaeology, would precisely have "the power to challenge (them) by grounding history in the remains of the past, the unedited evidence for past lives[27]".
As she sums up, thinking and commemorating the lives of slaves is never easy "but bringing art and science together to do so can enhance the ways in which we remember and commemorate those lives[28]".

As noted by the Josie Gill,

> We live in an era in which the meaning and significance of transatlantic slavery is perhaps more contested than ever[29]". She identifies the extent to which Bristol politics of memory have developed in dialogue with "global protest movements call for the removal of colonial statues and iconography which commemorate those involved in the slave trade, and call upon institutions built on the profits of the trade to publicly recognize the fact[30].

She mentions the project of activists Countering Colston that made international headlines when Bristol's Colston Hall announced it would be changing its name, removing that of the infamous slave trader who bequeathed tremendous wealth to the city with a strong argument in favor of repair. As she adds, they wished

> to acknowledge and repair, as far as possible, the negative effects in the present day of historical slavery' and in so doing recognize the continuing impact of how slaves lived on black lives and identities in the present[31].

Josie Gill seems however more irresolute when it comes to the degree to which the lives of enslaved people can or should "be linked to experiences in our contemporary moment".

[26] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[27] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[28] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/
[29] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[30] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[31] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

There exists a risk, as pointed by some researchers in literary studies, resulting from such approaches:

> many scholars have staked their own critical agency on a recovery of the political agency of the enslaved, making the slaves' "hidden history" a vital dimension of the effort to define black political goals[32].

She quotes Stephen Best:

> Through what process has it become possible to claim the lives and efforts of history's defeated as ours either to redeem or to redress? [33]

Aware of this risk, Josie Gill conceives the project as "aiming at ways of opening up, rather than claiming, the past[34]". In order not to claim the past, she argued, it is important - she explains - to highlight the multiplicity of "relationships between things; relationships amongst enslaved people, relationships between the living and the dead, relationships between scientist, writer and literary scholar, the relationship between the public and academia[35]", and not only the past and the present. Endorsing two specific relational dynamics – conversation and caring – would be the way through which history would not be redressed or redeemed but opened up, in way highlighting[36]".

In order to bring the reemergence of "the long-dead slaves" in taking into account the debate about slavery trade memory without restricting it to an exercise of claiming the past for specific political goals, she called upon the local communities in Bristol. With them, the team of researchers began a dialogue which focused on a core idea : "how writing might not only communicate a history primarily understood through archaeological evidence, but could itself inform approaches to that evidence[5]".

[32] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[33] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[34] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[35] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[36] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

Writes from the Bristol group Our Stories Make Waves collaborated to reimagine the live of the enslaved people

Like six other local black writers from across the city, Valda engaged in the process of re-imagining the lives of enslaved people based on physical evidence of how they lived from their skeletons. Exchange between artists and scientists was however capital as notes Josie Gill:

> The writers would produce new creative works in response to the science, while the archaeologists would be inspired to consider new perspectives which could inform what they do and look for in the laboratory[37].

Two workshops were led by the academics, in which Josie Gill gave an overview of transatlantic slavery and of some of the ways black creative writers have approached writing about slavery. McKenzie and Lightfoot, the two other members presented informations on archaeological approaches to slavery using two case studies; slave burial grounds at the Newton Plantation in Barbados and Finca Clavijo in Gran Canaria, where the remains of individual slaves have been subject to osteoarchaeological and chemical analysis[38].

As stated in the project,

[37] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[38]https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

> The writers were commissioned to produce new creative works in response to the case studies and we held a second workshop three months later, led by the writers, who talked about their feelings about the project and presented first drafts of their writing. Gill, Lightfoot and McKenzie shared their reflections on the process, and discussed the answers to questions that the writers had posted on an online forum which had been set up to facilitate communication between workshops.
>
> (…) The completed creative pieces were published on the project website and were read at public events in two museums in Bristol in October 2016. The workshops and public events were filmed and a short documentary was produced about the project and the public response to it.

Valda produced the short film *Handle with care* (*How I Feel),* based on the succession of different steps of a painting of a female slave along with the soundtrack of her voice. Both media brought the viewers to the access of the fictive life of an enslaved woman. The artist broaches the problem of the difficult identification of subjects almost forgotten by the recreation of fictitious figures by using all the resources she has at hand. Using the parallel between incarnation and painting, her film documents the progress of the making of portraits of the slave. Her own voice telling the fictitious story of women channels emotions, as well what she narrates besides her "visual narrative", in focusing on the family relations seems to give voice to an individual "who was born and who loved,and was loved[39]". Narrating the slave as being emotionally, someone living and sensing, testifies of the poet/artist's care for their humanity. As Josie Gill suggests in her analysis of Valda's poem, while "the scientists present the bones in boxes marked 'handle with care' (which all involved in the process do)", Valda's poem investigates the concept of caring alternatively, as if a "real care for these bones involves something more – a care for subjectivity[40]".
The notion of caring is, for the artist/poet, also present trough her evocation of the relationships between enslaved people.

[39] https://vimeo.com/186143785
[40] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913

Video Still from *Handle with care* (2016)

Video *Still from Handle with care* (2016)

Video Still from *Handle with care* (2016)

Working with human remains inspired the artist the poem *How I Feel* - shared in the second workshop in which she addressed "the issue of the scientific reduction of the human body to bone directly":

We pass around human remains.
I hold a person's skull in my hand.
Feel its roundness,
toughness, It's weight
and texture, small pits and dents.
Like a thing hand-made.
Modeled in clay.
Sculpted ivory.
The scientific stuff of facts and supposition float in the air.
While I, cupping my hand atop the crown, marvel at its size, its density.
Compact.
Handled.
And so, so small.
I compare its scale to those of the living-breathing people around me.
There is much mass in flesh and fluids, skin and hair.
Weight and substance.
There is volume in breath …
In life.

The poem channels contradictory feelings, inspired by the handling of human remains among which a human skull. As Valda Jackson recalls it induced a connection, an "emotional" one, between herself and the slave, as she felt she was "holding the earthly remains of an ancestor[41]". The poem broaches this identification in using analogies, bonding sculpture and bones, and contrasts, between the life and death. As noted by Josie Gill, "the poet's care for the bones" becomes "an analogue for the healing touch of her ancestor[42]".
Using metaphors stemmed from art language, she appropriates the image of sculpture ("modeled' or 'sculpted', its 'pits and dents') to express the slaves' reifications, their "reduction from a 'human' to a material object[43]".

Multiplying the point of views, she recollects the experiences of suffering:

The whipped slave 'cannot bear a touch. / I cannot stand another hand / laid on me' but she watches her career 'take my feet in your two hands / gently.'
A same experience is told by the perspectives of two slaves. One verse writes: 'I will not let you be un-held. Cannot[44].'

The willingness to promote the identification between today's subjects and the man and women behind the slaves was a major concern:

> I want to think that this work enables people today to identify with a living breathing human individual whose skeletal remains centuries later retains the evidence of hardship the distress, the endurance. And I want to suggest the unseen; love, grief, lost hope and also joy.
> And to remember the absented, missing with all the potential that was theirs[45].

Moreover, the artist associates the death of the ancestor to the loss of history, making thereby creation a site for the reemergence of "certain truths and evidence of the hardship and distress endured". Her objective is not however to access to fulfill a state of remembrance by the ways of history but by fiction. She explains that she has not decided to espouse the project of "only to add flesh to bone", what the device would have commanded her to do, but she responded in a more universal way, calling to archetypes and longing "to recall her humanity[46]."

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[41] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/
[42] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[43] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[44] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[45] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/
[46] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/

The encounter with slave bones unleashed emotions that were instrumental to a process of endorsing the genre of fiction. As recalled by Josie Gill in the article she wrote about the project, quoting the Black British novelist Andrea Levy, for writers concerned with the era of transatlantic slaver, fiction has been a recurrent means "to understand the life of an enslaved person from their own perspective[47]".

"'The only way you can go any further is through fiction[48]", wrote Levy. African American writer and Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison addressed this lacuna in knowledge in similar terms. As Josie Gill writes: "Morrison contends that historical narratives, including autobiographical narratives written by slaves, are limited in their ability to convey the inner lives of enslaved people because they often had their purpose and style determined by a popular taste which 'discouraged writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience[49]'

Embracing imagination over historical knowledge intersects Vanessa Kisuule's comment on the fact that the artists in the project were working in confronting themselves to the realm of the unknown "all the things we will never know about, what it was like to be a slave[50]". Recreating imagined lives of enslaved people by fiction would then humanize them. But as Vanessa Kisuule explains, a part on the project, working to rehumanize the slave necessarily results from the collective process as the writers encounters the remains:

> seeing the pictures of the remains makes you realize that they were made up of flesh and guts and hearts and thoughts and feelings just like us[51].

[47] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[48] 1987Morrison, Toni. (1987) 2008. "The Site of Memory" quoted inhttps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[49] 1987Morrison, Toni. (1987) 2008. "The Site of Memory" quoted inhttps://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03080188.2018.1543913
[50] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/
[51] https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/features/a-slaves-life-reimagined-bristol/

Stacey Olika, 12/06/1019**,** Pinkmans, Bristol

Picture of the artist

Stacey Olika is a graphic designer and creative director. She describes her work as mainly consisting of digital illustrations from the perspective of black people. She currently works as the program support assistant for the UWE Graphic Design course at UWE Bristol. She is a Rising Arts Agency featured artist co-curates for Test Space at Spike Island.

During my conversation with Stacey, she began to introduce our talk in explaining how racial issues gave the impulse to her process, starting with the lack of diversity in representation:

> I studied graphic design at UWE and a lot of my work has to do with black men and black women and the focus of my art piece because I never got to see a lot people of African heritage treated in a good way.

The identification of her own African heritage occurred especially after she entered university UWE in Bristol:

> In university, I started to think about my identity and I realized I was a black woman living in Bristol.

She interprets this reconnecting to her own blackness as a difficult process as she has

> always been in the Western world", adding "I am from Nigeria originally but I've never lived in Nigeria. I have been there for holidays etc. I never really had the chance to appreciate it.

As she explained in an interview for newspaper *B2/7,* the confrontational experience of being a "black female in different cultural environment" has brought her to work on "learning to love the color of (her) skin, despite the media's excluding portrayal of those with African heritage[52]".

I am Melanin exhibition

In spite of Britain's multicultural ideal, the image constructed by the medias of people of African heritage was itself, as recalled by the artist, quite bad. She remembers the image of Africa "growing up, in the tv things telling like, they are poor, they don't have the money…".

Between the problem of misrepresentation and that of the lack of representation, the necessity to identify as African finally gained over. She explains "when growing up I started to identify as being African (…)". This personal re-identification as British citizen to African culture she has achieved may be considered as a critical axis on which relies her process. As she explains "I realized how much I needed to see people like myself onscreen individuals". This has prompted her to engage with visual means and resources. From the start, artistic engagement develops in a questioning of social change. Considering the lack of diversity, she recalls having asked herself:

> So I was like 'how is it gonna happen. How to make it happen?'. So I do it through graphic design, through photography, filming. And then I curate events in Bristol and young creators.

She adds

> I understood design. I understood how much visual and representation played a role in my life.

[52] https://www.bristol247.com/culture/art/spike-island-open-studios-meet-the-artists-stacey-olika/

> "Asking what is considered as beauty and what is considered the norm": such is the axis around which revolved her first artistic project, *I am Melanin* in Bath's Fairfield house, at the invitation of Shawn Sobers, artist and professor at the UWE.

As the artist recalls about her personal show,

> *I am Melanin* started in February 2017 and it started as a project in my degree. In my last year. When we had to create something from any topic, whatever we wanted and I realized that I've never really seen black women on display. (…) I also wanted to be a journey for myself, about identification, from what I could learn a lot from my color at the same time. So initially it started for my degree show but I wanted to continue the project. And then I had an exhibition on October 2017 and then, from October to January 2018, I was asked to display in Bristol. Just down Park Street, there is restaurant bar. (she shows the video of exhibition, on vimeo).

I am Melanin Campaign, photography, 2017-2018

« I am Melanin, art curated by Stacey Olika for her final year project at University of the West England has certainly changed the narrative in Bristol » wrote a journalist after the exhibition. The campaign the artist set up on social medias like Facebook arguably pushed the debate about the norms. In what measure does the artist have changed Bristol's narrative can however be a question to raise.

Answers may be considered from a double point of view. Firstly, the extent to which she has changed the representation of blackness relates to the black faces and bodies, as well as to the work's title, linked to the physical constituency of black skin. Along with another physical signifier namely hair, skin color has come to symbolize the boundaries along which young Black women define Blackness.

The representation of blackness that the artist has imagined seems to be defined by an attempt to develop itself against assimilation and denigration in the mediatic space. As she writes "I AM MELANIN is a project that appreciates the beauty in darker skinned woman. Mainstream media has created its own illustrious club of beauty and excludes these women[53]".

I am melanin campaign

Countering this practice that has made black skin color a recurrent nexus in the systemic processes of self-denigration, the artist makes pigmentation a site for empowerment as her project is necessarily and self-consciously interrupting centuries of assault upon psyche than one colonial power, the UK has manifested through its forms of inferiorized subjugation such as the bleaching syndrom (Hall, R. 2013).

[53] http://www.typenowhere.com/portfolio/i-am-melanin/

Indeed, as the artist sums up: "This project focuses on embracement, power and fighting stereotypes[54]". While *I am melanin*'s point is to fight the stereotypes, empowerment plays a significant role in the ways Stacey envisions how the restrictive definitions of being black can be overwhelmed. As she has noticed, the type of feelings and expression a black model is able to raise defines part of her concerns.

The photoshoot we did, she explains, the main criteria was "to be powerful, have a look then, authority and power".

Afropyramids: visualizing the Egyptian roots of diasporic subjects

A part of the images she produced were digitally reworked. In the series *Afropyramids*, she treated the pictures with gem shapes, distorting the soft organic figures and turning them into geometrical and angular structures. Considering the whole set of portraits, different identities emerged. As she artist argues "There are different gem-shapes." The form reflects thus the idea – that lays ground for her project – according to the color of the skin must be read as a site of multiple colors and identities:

> I am melanin. We have all pigmentation in our skin. And that makes different shapes that make up our skins.

As she suggests, the point is not to assert one homogeneous perception of black skin but its diversity, debunking thereby a discussion on racial identity in essentialist ways – that is made of fixed, natural, immutable characteristics. In that, she endorses definitions of black identity such as those we encounter in academy and certain forms of popular culture, that "move away from fixed and unitary concept of blackness, towards conceptualizing it as fragmented.

Stacey has also demonstrated a willingness to engage in the process of a visualization of the African roots of black English young people. Working with Amaka Designs, she has curated a part dedicated to drawing in *I Am Melanin*. The studio has worked in expressing an underpinning geometrical triangular structure, digitally handled the connections between contemporary bodies in Britain and mythical Egyptian past. This transnational linkage springing from myths of Egypt as a cradle of blackness is recovered and underlines the diasporic dimension of black people's experience. As the artist insists, in calling her portraits *Afropyramids*:

> And also, I use triangles and pyramids because when we are thinking about our history, we could be originally from Egypt. African roots and culture.

[54] http://www.typenowhere.com/portfolio/i-am-melanin/

> *Afropyramids* is the story behind our original being. It encompasses the history of Ancient Egypt articulated through the geometric shapes that make up the pyramids in Egypt. The concept of this derived from wanting to make aware that despite the differences we have as humans and the many different cultures and ethnicities we encompass our original origin remains the same. Bringing topics like these through designs, allows individuals to address cultural topics visually[55].

This demonstrates how the artist provides people with means to cope with the fragmentary realities born out the colonial experience, moving from dissemination to gathering, *Afropyramids* using then historical roots and melanin as a way to re-construct the self in its relations with others.

The echoes her own diasporic journey. The artist mentions the "connections" between her several identities and reframes her approach in the context of the multiple journeys and migrations that have paved her early life. As recollected in her own words about her biography, her words emphasize the journeys and the multiples cultures she has evolved in:

> My sister was born in Switzerland. My dad went to university in Switzerland. My mum went to university in Switzerland. And I went to university in England. I have been to a French nursery. And Swiss German highschool".

This has prompted a sense of identy, not only defined by the status quo between Britishness and blackness.

> All my identities might have impacted my work. When my Nigerian identity reflects my skin color, reflects what you see when you look at me, and it is so strong (…). I have been raised in Switzerland. I was born in America, I am a part of the diaspora. One, two, three, four, all these identities reflect the kind of work I do. Doing something here, doing something there etc. I also believe they all connect somehow. How I approach my work in different disciplines.

[55] https://hubvoice.co.uk/2017/11/23/i-am-melanin/

Stacey Olika with Amaka designs*, Afropyramids*

Materializing the signs within the skin that naturalize their past and present diasporic condition, *Afropyramids* reconnect the black bodies to a precolonial longstanding and genealogy, that rewrites the discourse on the black skin on different basis as those ruling colonial order.
Color has been a question through which biologic discourse and even aesthetics have been colonized, coining an apprehension of black subject based on the visual appearance and the epistemological regime of the eye.
Reclaiming melanin and thinking about the skin color to think about what is shared, and what helps making bonds, seems in this regard to resignify the relations between color and social relations.

> Despite our culture or color we are born in, we all contain a shade of melanin. Some more than others and some less than others. If you contain Melanin, so do I. So if you are melanin, then I AM MELANIN also[56].

[56] http://ojijipurple.org.uk/events/i-am-melanin-premier-night

Engaging with skin color as a way debunking the visual legacies of slavery?

While the issue of the civic representation often goes hand in hand with the rewriting of the past, it appears that the ways *I am melanin* takes place in discussion about what kind of past we select to narrate are twofold. First, it does so in engaging with the question of the *colourism*. Though not looking from the start to how one narrates the past, asking about the norms of representation and beauty through can be read as part of a wider process of engaging with the legacies of slavery.

According to Deborah Gabriel, the legacies of enslavement and colonization that mostly manifest themselves in terms of the institutional racism that people of African descent experience everywhere in the diaspora and in the economic exploitation of the African continent connect to colourism. These legacies do produce hierarchies based on skin color "that maintain an invisible presence in our psyches" (Gabriel 2007, p. 6).

Social Medias

Besides, in her work, the discussions around the reconstructive impulse can be framed within the disciplinary responses she envisions, as she uses digital based techniques and invests her topics in dealing with new medias. Historically, medias and technology have been used in diasporic situations to obtain a sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that make up a diaspora and their everyday lives. Even through most diasporic members will not encounter one another, the sense of identity, belonging, and self is reconciled through media, technology and cultural texts. (Retis 2019)

As he recollected from an interview he made with her, for Bristol Photography Research Group, Shawn Sobers described how social media helped Stacey Olika to "gain confidence in her sense of self as a young Black woman, which led her towards producing the 'I Am Melanin' project to help inspire others[57]".
Social medias are indeed critical in her project as they help disseminate the campaign as well as to meet the models. She proceeded in shooting different black young models and exhibited on digital photographs, illustrations, in a whole campaign completed by t-shirts, a book etc. All the girls and the boys that she shot were people she knew or met on Instagram, living in Bristol and sometimes in London.

[57] https://bristolphotographyresearchgroup.com/stacey-olika-interview/

Moreover, the result was largely disseminated on Facebook. However, it is worth noting that the ingrained "confidence" mentioned by Shawn Sobers strongly contributes to the redefinition of identity in terms that are ever more fluid. Social medias thereby become critical components to making and remaking black British identity. In the pictures Stacey has supervised, the whole is defined by the visual staging of glamour outfits, the achievement of self-fashionings appropriating the language of mainstream white Instagram icons.

With her pictures, she attempts to capture "what we see and what we don't see", that is, " people of colour, on screen having power, a power . What I wanted to create is not to create my own narratives. A power I. What I wanted to be seen."

Strongly engaged in the attempt for redefining identity politics, she calls for changes: "we are living in the year 2017, in which the identity of an individual isn't determined by where they were born, who raised them etc." The discourse about the necessity to think identity with means that go beyond birthplace and geography is framed especially in the wake of race debate. This narrative has become inoperative especially as the diasporas have put this under pressure and this still enduring presence not only seems not fitting to People of color but offensive. "People of color are continually reminded, that they do not belong".

To sum up, the ways she reframes black experiences within a longer and positive histories, calling to Egypt and or feelings of empowerment can be considered as an attempt to change the narrative about Bristol as the reappraisal of blackness in positive terms is at stake.

Why are we not here?

While thinking with *Afropyramids* and *I am melanin* about the Egyptian roots of blackness, fighting stereotypes and promoting empowering images were central points to contest representation of blackness at the scale of medias, the artist has explored the relationship between two key terms: marginalization and representation. These have been questioned by the artist in another project: *Why are we not here*. This exhibition explored the topic at an institutional level, investigation "issues of institutional racism and marginalized representation in arts institutions by diaspora artists".

It was curated by Rising artists, Stacey Olika and Anika Deb, in response to an invitation from Test Space, Bristol. This exhibition – launched over Spike Island's busy Open Studios weekend – showcased the work of eight artists who work with sound, installation, print, poetry and painting mediums, including a programme of talks and workshops that further questioned the complacency of arts institutions. It featured artists: Courtenay Welcome,

Donnell Asare, Kiara Corales, Nadia Lloyd, Nick Ogri, Fatima Murtala, Leeza Awojobi, and Jasmine Thompson.

As written on the website:

> At last year's artist-run *Multiverse Summit* held at Eastside Projects, Birmingham, The White Pube delivered a hard hitting provocation to all artist-led spaces within the UK, challenging their complacency and unacknowledged racial bias. Urging artist led spaces to tackle institutional racism and the lack of presence of people of colour within the arts at all levels, it triggered a direct response from Test Space at Spike Island who, as a first step, have initiated the project, '*Why Are We Not Here?*'[58]

It has known an important impact in the city, as it took place during the busiest event in Spike Island's year, where upwards of seven thousand people visited the space over the early May Bank Holiday Weekend. Working with sound, installation, print, poetry and painting mediums, including a programme of talks and workshops *Why Are We Not Here?* broached further the questions of the complacency of art institutions and of the institutional racism in art spaces.

[58] https://www.spikeisland.org.uk/programme/test-space/why-are-we-not-here/

In an interview she has given to Bristol newspaper B24/7, Stacey explicits the objectives of Rising art agency and of the exhibition.
The exhibition revolves around the hiatus between the strong number of People of color in art and their lack of representation:
"people of colour had always been involved in art and that "the lack of visible black and ethnic minority work does not reflect how many artists or individuals of colour are working in the industry".
While the exhibition "is about being given a chance to be seen", it bears a an attempt to "affect social change[59]".

"Traditionally, art has been made by a white male with a white male audience in mind, but there's not just one type of art", explains Stacey. On the eight artists gathered, one identifies female artists of colour, two males. In that sense, it stands for a new model of representation in art whose status, will be able, as wished by Stacy, to entail the give the impulse to the young creators. The point is "encouraging young people into the arts" (*B24/7*) Her words do also call out institutions: but what we want is accountability and a way to move forward.

When asked by *B24/7* Stacey Olika gave a steady and confident answer about the hopes for the exhibition:

> This exhibition means representation and taking up space that we are due. To encourage communities that the art is accessible to them as well as young creatives. It may call out institutions[60].

While the status and the discourse of the young artists exhibited emphasize genders and ethnicities that find difficultly find their path in the art scene, coping with institutional racism takes militant tone for Stacey. The poet and storyteller based in Bristol Leeza Awojobi, who featured in the exhibition, broached the topic of institutional racism in making sense of her experience of institutional racism. Turning this social issue into a questioning about human nature, she wrote:

Can a place that speaks

[59] https://www.bristol247.com/culture/art/spike-island-open-studios-meet-the-artists-stacey-olika/.
[60] This exhibition means representation and taking up space that we are due. To encourage communities that the art is accessible to them as well as young creatives. It may call out institutions.

Of symphony,
Sing with such a name?
Discordant and noisy
And attached to so much pain.

As they tickle the ivories.
The souls of the lost do cry.
Haunted and hollow.
Is a place lost in pride.

This place wears a title
That spells unwelcome.
A place branded in the unfair.

Yet we still wonder.

Why are we neither here,
Nor there?

Following her poetic principles, she states in her website a use of poetry "to delve deep into fundamental human nature" and "exploring ideas and issues which often go unnoticed". Her process leads her to writing lines that highlight "brokenness in human nature", to pick up her own terms. Taking as a starting the topic of the exhibition she delivers a poetic translation of the psychological decay of what it is not "to be here". Her refusal to address the subject in localizing the places of institutional racism gives her poem an allegorical dimension that speaks for every situation of racism. References to race seem however implied in the line "as they tickle the ivories". This image allows her to encode the reality of the color bar, referring in the same to symbols of whiteness and blackness, and to the ivory tower denoting elites.

Uncomfortable truths

> We are just ending a project with Bristol Museum, about how are making our past, around six or seven uncomfortable objects, that have colonial history, that have a history of slavery. And such things we don't really want to know about.

In February 2019, Stacey Olika has been a part of project *Decolonizing the museum, The Uncomfortable Truths project*, in the Bristol Museum in collaboration with Claire Simmons, the Engagement Officer for young people, for which she was hired as project

assistant/curator. The use of the world "decolonizing" seems, as we shall see, all the more suited to this project, as it cuts across three major components of the definitions of decolonization the museum: its self-reflexive and critical dimensions and collaborations with citizens stemmed from or engaged in social struggles around the communities that have been marginalized and deprived of words during imperial history.

As the *Washington post* recently summed up, with the trends around decolonizing the museum comes the "process that institutions undergo to expand the perspectives they portray beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers[61]."

When Stacey presented the project, she said that "this project has always been about revealing the truth and not muting voices. This has happened too much in history."

Stacey Olika has commented on her own engagement in emphasizing two aspects, first in acknowledging the importance of such initiative, as silence constitutes in Bristol one modality towards the colonial past:

> I think that there is lack of accountability, on what has happened to us. A lot of things have to be still named and are strongly linked to slavery (…) There are a lot of young people, and people colour, who involve themselves to make these changes.

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery decided to confront these consequences in fighting repression within its own narration of its colonial past. Claire Simmons explain that the project was about

> looking to face up to the legacy of dominant cultural and colonial practices and perspectives inherited from the past. We need to address the histories of objects that were collected in a different context and position them in the present for contemporary audiences[62].

This impulse relies on a critical gaze, and the fact that the institution: "does not tell the full story"[63]. The full story would signify mainly recollecting the process through which the pieces were collected. While recent approaches of decolonizing have reflected on the coloniality of museum, in looking at its displays, or ways to expose the violence, the kind of critique of Eurocentrism and white supremacy, that *the Uncomfortable truths* project is developing, pertains to the content of paratexts in the museum. The team has come with the

[61] https://www.aam-us.org/wire/museumnext/what-does-it-mean-to-decolonize-a-museum/
[62] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/
[63] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/

idea that the museum was hiding the truths about its colonial past and its hegemonic role. For instance, the text about *The Delhi Durbar of 1903*, one the works re-read by the museum team, which is online on artuk.com (presented as the online home for every public art collection in the UK64), manifests an obliteration of the hierarchical relations between Indian and British people. It reads, neutrally:

> This painting shows the Delhi Durbar of 1903 – a ceremonial procession to mark the occasion when King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra were declared Emperor and Empress of India. On a grand scale the image captures the procession of British officials and Indian Maharajas as they enter the Durbar grounds on elephants, passing the Jami Masjid or Friday Mosque. The artist has depicted the huge crowds attending the event, the animals and architecture in great detail, drawing the viewer into the spectacle[65].

A short insight on research and historic writing about Roderick MacKenzie's painting, on the blog of Dr Daniel Haines, Lecturer in History[66] allows to seize, however the impact this painting has on the city's representations.

In his 2015 post, Daniel Haines examines the composition: the top being by Duke and Duchess of Connaught, brother and sister-in-law to the British King-Emperor Edward VII, and the head of the colonial government, and the bottom by uniformed Indians march along a parade route lined by soldiers is for him. Its context is that of the 1903 Delhi Durbar, "a spectacular festival held to mark Edward VII's ascent to the throne" marked by "celebrations continued for another fortnight afterwards[67]". Looking at the painting, Haines argues that it reveals the "semi-autonomous Indian Princes who collaborated closely with the British[68]".

The immense size of this enormous oil painting that dominates the entrance hall at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, its density, its richness brings the viewers to feel, as Haines suggests, "virtually life-size when you're in front of it[69]". This has as an effect to reconstruct a part of the colonial life in India. The viewers seize "how the work of the viceroy and his staff in the planning of every detail of the day's ceremonies", conveying thereby "the might and power of the Raj[70]".

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64 https://artuk.org/about/about
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Another aspect to take into account when it comes to assessing what kind of truths the museum attempts to become aware of is linked to the display of the work. *The Delhi Durbar* dominates the entrance hall at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and faces a work which it today reclaimed as iconic for the city's identity, the *Devolved Parliament* by Banksy. It thus becomes a vehicle for a situation where the city would be defined, by two grand narratives of equal importance, informing its past and its present.
In this respect, the museum is the site of uncomfortable truths in the sense it constructs an image for its city where the colonial past appears central. However, becoming more and more aware of the problematic type of memory brought up by the such a display, the museum organized a day-long workshop to discuss it in March, *How to interpret Art and the British Empire for 21st-Century Audiences: Roderick MacKenzie's Delhi Durbar of 1903*.

The Delhi Durbar painting in the entrance of the Bristol city Museum

In March 2015, with the advent of the seminal workshop, *How to interpret Art and the British Empire for 21st-Century Audiences: Roderick MacKenzie's Delhi Durbar of 1903,* was manifested the will to shift from art history to history. Acknowledging the limits of art historical discourse facing such a piece, the panel asked questions like "should we appreciate it as a magnificent aesthetic accomplishment?", "Is it art or history? [71]".

The political propagandist agency of the work revealed the new critical dimension that was envisioned for interpretation. The reflections were dealing with the historical significance it had in the past. It is at this occasion that occurred a shift for discussing the work from history

[71] https://historiansatbristol.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/archives/136

to memory as participants asked, as Daniel Haines recalls "why we today can make sense of an artwork that borders on the monumental?[72]".

It seems that after such discussions, the cartel in the city museum was rewritten in much more critical terms. It describes the composition and choices made by MacKenzie and the function of painting as a tool for empire, suggesting the kind of subjugation at stake as the painter plays with "harmonious" and "exotic" renderings. What is more, the sense of the painting for today's viewers is assessed as the cartel explains that "the painting can be used to focus debate on the rights and wrongs of colonial rule and on the legacy of Empire". (see below).

[72] https://historiansatbristol.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/archives/136

This critical process around MacKenzie's painting seems to have paved the ways for The *Uncomfortable Truths* project, that critically addresses beyond this work seven objects stemmed from Britain's colonial history. The point is was to design a new trail in the collection around objects including: the Delhi Durbar (Roderick MacKenzie' painting), one Benin Bronze, Nesi-Khonsu, the Egyptian Mummy, Jackson the rhino, the painting by Pocock, Battle Of The Saints (Pocock's painting) and The museum building.

What does it mean to decolonize Bristol Museum?

Decolonizing the museum, the Uncomfortable Truths project consists concretely in designing a trail with new interpreters for the collection. The project marked a change in the perception the museum had of its own position an acknowledging of its responsibility in difficult heritage such as colonialism and slavery trade, as well as new ethical positions, condemning more promptly these heritages. The representations of empire and the colonial circumstances under which the works were collected constituted the two main sites where the uncomfortable truths proliferated and which were, as result, in the heart of the team's investigations.

The museum's staff interpreted its willingness to achieve its self-reflexive work in meaningful ways, in replacing its own voice by those of the young representatives from community groups. Protagonists for the new interpretation of the colonial past were gathered by Stacey among young representatives from community groups as well as the University of the West of England (UWE).

The team supervised by Stacey was formed of Pierre Niyongira, Puteri 'Elle' Megat Firdouz, Samuel Zubair, Will Taylor, Yasmin Warsame, Vanessa Wilson, Ade Sowemimo, Donnell Asare, Nosipho Ledwaba-Chapman and Caine Tayo Lewin-Turner. Many of them stand for "prominent figures in BME student societies" as explains Claire Simmons[73]. As recollected in the podcast they produced in duo, their perspectives about the objects selected in the collections were eager to engage with a critique of the dominant cultural and colonial practices. This shift in the representation of the colonial past seems to be based on the conversational mode as a condition for ensuring the diversity of voices.

This critical framing was staged in terms that were sensed to entail specific forms of participation. The modes of approach available on MP3 players at the front desk relied on the podcasts, of two minutes or 15 minutes, produced by the young curators, that could be accessed via the visitor's own device.

[73] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/

Some decolonial questions addressed by the podcasts

-The question of the controversial relations between Britain and its colonies

Most of the podcasts address the objects sites of controversial relations between Britain and its colonies. The podcast about the Nesi-Khonsu made by Yasmin and Sipho addresses "the British colonial relationship with Egypt through questioning the ethics of keeping, a human remain, on display at a British museum[74]".

Nesi-Khonsu, Egyptian Mummy, Bristol

Endorsing a point of view on British heritage informed by contemporary issues such as 'Black Lives Matter', they read the presence of the Nesi-Khonsu, as one of the controversies in the relations between Africa and Europe[75]." *An Uncomfortable Truth: Benin Bronze* conversation researched and produced by Will and Sam focuses "on the violent and painful stories of colonial rule in Africa haunting this object[76]".

[74] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar
[75] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar
[76] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

The Benin bronze of the ethnographic collection, Bristol

*An Uncomfortable truth: Jackson the r*hino researched and produced by Elle and Pierre highlighted the often traumatic relationships between colonizer and colonized when it intersects that of the humans and the natural world[77]".

[77] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

Jackson the Rhino

The issue of the traumatic relations is accompanied by investigations and records of how a new museum handling of colonial heritage can bring to a bettering of the relation between Britain and its former colonies. An Uncomfortable truth: Benin bronze records a rare case of repairing by restitution of the objects. It asks however: "Would returning the head be a positive move to undo the injustices of the past? [78]".

[78] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

Roderick Mackenzie, Delhi Durbar, 1907, oil on canvas

Another means to change the relation between countries is explored in the *Uncomfortable truth: India Durbar podcast*. Ade explains: "I think when we have paintings like this in the museum it is important that we have other sources that five light to that story[79]".

-The critique of imperial representation

Podcasts dovetail in their investigation of the weight of imperial and Eurocentric narratives. In *An Uncomfortable Truth: Battle Of The Saints* podcast, one can hear,
"This painting celebrates the British military victory over the French invasion of their Caribbean islands. Pocock takes pride in his nation's ability to protect their slave islands and continue to exploit persons racialized as Black".

[79] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

Nicholas Pocock, *The Close of the Battle of the Saints*,1782, oil on canvas, 107 x 168,6 cm.

-The effects of the Uncomfortable truths on affects and feelings

The affective effects of the *Uncomfortable Truths* are an important concern common to several podcasts. Concerning *An Uncomfortable Truth: Battle Of The Saints* podcast, one can hear:

"In my opinion his nation's ability to protect their slave islands and continue to exploit persons racialized as Black this is just as important, if not more, than the details and the strategies of the battle in the painting that have received so much more attention[80]".

[80] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

As Ade suggests about *An Uncomfortable truth: Delhi Durbar* what is not shown, the "experience by local people on the Indian subcontinent[81]", or more broadly what is produced by the fact that the both sides are not represented, thus "creating a narrative that is very false[82]", generates awkward emotions. He explains: "I feel it doesn't show the rebellions and discomforts[83]".
Likewise, *An Uncomfortable truth: the museum building* unfolds the question of affects in raising the problem of the relation between histories and emotions. It is recollected that the building was paid by the tobacco money, making the museum a sign of the wealth created by enslaved labor in the Caribbean. The podcast asks "How do the stories we are told about history affect how we feel about people today? [84]"

The Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery

An Uncomfortable Truth: The museum building, in relation with the conversation, historian Richard Stone, addresses the role of affects, starting with empowering affects such

[81] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar
[82] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar
[83] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar
[84] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/stories/uncomfortable-truths/#an-uncomfortable-truth-delhi-durbar

as empathy as the possible resource for reparation, to be delivered in combination with education.

Beyond changing the contents of the comments, thinking about the accessibility

What is more, while for the museum's staff the issue of the legacy of the "dominant colonial practices[85]" was mainly understood in terms of what the collections depict and how they have built it, for Stacey it seems that the hope of reparation was not limited to the change of gaze on history. She diagnosed that, to pick up decolonial perspectives, the reversal of the gazes would not be sufficient.

For her it appears that the hidden truths concern the coloniality of the museum as well. In sum, the museum won't be decolonized as long as it would not have engaged in a questioning about its own relation to its diverse audience. It seems that the podcasts, accessible on the museum's website as well as in the museum site were able to make a shift in the politics of museum accessibility. As she commented upon the relation between the museum and its people of color audience, coming in the museum is experiencing the limits of collective memory. The museum is a site of "institutional racism and a lack of representation[86]". These two elements "have been huge obstacles to feeling a sense of belonging in spaces like a museum[87]".

Decolonizing the museum or "telling the truth" is a continuing process in which the podcasts represent just one of the several dimensions and "this conversation continues at the museum[88]". The comments highlight the variety of means under which a "shift" in "the institutions" was made. While this agency echoes a fundamental aspect of decolonial struggles, the effects revolve around important points such as that of restitution. As Stacey notes:

> We have also discovered that some objects have already been sent back to their country of origin, which we did not know before[89].

[85] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/
[86] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/young-people/uncomfortable-truths-project-interview-with-stacey-olika/
[87] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/young-people/uncomfortable-truths-project-interview-with-stacey-olika/
[88] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/
[89] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/

This was a consequence, as she explains, of revealing hidden truths in specifically "regarding ownership, accountability[90]".

This "challenging" and "rewarding" project[91] sent new signals to the community. As the artist explained on July 2019 to BBC, on the one hand, this message concerns the institution: "It sends a message that the museum wants to be more inclusive and transparent – which is especially important in its role of informing us about history (…)[92]."

On the other hand, the artist's comments make clear that, in making a shift in the institution, the hidden truths revealed were not only affecting the fate of culture but that of community, in promoting feelings of empowerment for the young people of color. A part of the project's sense lies in its capacity to foster a site for collective actions, bearing a strong reparation potential: as she explained in our interview about *I am melanin* "as a collective of women of color in Bristol, we are strong, we are solid". From this point of view, the artist's words echo and target the project's aims, she also defined as screaming "accountability, fear and, perhaps, a slight chance of reparation".

Conversations about race

Our conversation with the artist ended on Stacey's last project, the book *Conversations about race* edited at 2000 copies by UWE's graphic design faculty. The ways she described seem to frame a close topic, that extending decolonizing processes to education, media and aesthetics:

> We have just finished *Conversations about race*. As my role at the UWE, I have been leading the final years publication. Which can be about any sort of topic, any social issue. But the students who designed it – and made the content – (…) I realized, looking at the majority of students, 95 percent of white dudes, every year, and I was like, it is not going to happen again. Let's talk not about racial issues, let's talk about race, or blackness, or identity. I took it for myself, to it. I had to get a team together for the course. The publication documents, this is what you have to do to change the world. You want to change the world but have a conservation first. The book documents the conservations we had for five months. During that time, each stage is

[90] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/
[91] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/
[92] https://www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/blog/the-uncomfortable-truths-project/

how to have a conservation and then during the conversation, to have somebody to write it down etc. Talk to founders of organization, talk to vice chancellor etc.

The book produced by Stacey's student in BA Graphic Design UWE

Produced by the final-year-students BA hons Graphic Design University of the West England. Editorial team published by Typenowhere.

Students at British universities are increasingly calling for their reading lists to include more black and minority ethnic (BAME) writers. It echoes, four years after, the first Rhodes Must Fall protest in South Africa, the campaign for decolonizing the curriculum. In this project, colonial heritage is engaged from the point of view of the social relations that the black students encounter and how graphic design resource can allow assessing this issue. Scrutiny to institutional racism – especially in the charts that the students have draught and the texts informed by social sciences that they have displayed in a book - constitutes one important premise on upon which the project of the publication relies. Such a willing to question the white privilege and institutional racism could be considered in a broader field of decolonizing the curriculum which - though meaning different things, especially when it spans at distance from South Africa - includes a fundamental reconsideration of who is teaching, what the subject matter is and how it's being taught.

As the authors write: “the conversation surrounding race requires careful consideration of white privilege and institutional racism. These systems are built on the concept that in society, white is the norm. This is what includes us all, being members of society (Conversation about race, 2019, p.14). When it developed in South Africa, around 2015 and 2016 (connected disciplinary responses to the call to decolonize curricula in South African higher education (Quinn and Vorster 2018, p. 131) one issue underpinning the protests was students’ anger with how little higher education has transformed since the official demise in apartheid in 1994. It argued that it was time for universities to reflect the iniquitous influences of colonization and to decolonize curricula so that what and how they learn is more clearly connected to their lived experienced and ways of being of their communities of origin (Mbembe 2015).

Seen in this context, the decolonizing impulse in UWE’s graphic design section is less about moving away from the contents that comes predominantly from the global North (are colloquially “eliminating white men from the curriculum”) than about challenging “longstanding biases and omissions that limit how we understand politics and society”.

In that, the objectives listed on the website of the graphic design section seem especially suited as the medium intends to “make a powerful contribution to the cultural life of contemporary society” and to exist “in the public domain” (UWE graphic design website). The annual work of the section monitored by Stacey Olika reclaims to act “as an indicator of current cultural thinking and is a catalyst for social, cultural and political change” (website) in communicating about the experience of BAME experience (BAME standing for black,

Asian, minority ethnicities), can self-reflexively comment on the university as an institutional site and turns the degree production into a site of resistance against the coloniality and discrimination of BAME.
As summed up by the students and authors of the *Conversations about race*: "As designers, our mission is to communicate ideas that inspire, inform, and captivate the world (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.3). The formation to graphic design is here understood as formation to citizenship.

Moreover, as stated by the authors of *Conversations about race*

"finding the true facts can be more difficult than facing them. Grasping the idea of what is true or false and what shouldn't be listening to becomes harder as we advance further into a technological age. Race is a conversation that entails stories told. But understand the gravity of experience we must understand the scale of experience" (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.20).

Providing information

The project can be considered as a decolonizing initiative as it deals with the issue of the outnumbering of black people in the UK. To put things in perspective, just a couple of months before the publication of the essay, in early summer of 2019, a report from the University and College Union This followed another report (2016-17 academic year) that stated that just 25 black women were recorded as working as professors compared to 14,000 white men.
The authors of the book explain their use of statistics as part of a broader process, in which the recognition of the facts prompts an awareness whose sense is to start "asking questions that can change the fabric of society" (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.10).
The project, the graphic designers add, "is about not being angry when informing people about race", but about engaging with the social change. The students engage in a process of recognizing some demographic facts of "race" in British higher education.

We can distinguish between two levels of results when it pertains to the effects of the facts gathered in the book. Firstly, the recollection of data, mainly, definitions, aim at providing the reader of this largely disseminated book to get the words suited to their experience of being BAME. Basing themselves on the hypothesis of structural racism expressions in the daily life, the authors spot the manifestations such of "microaggression" – as "brief commonplace daily verbal, behavorial, or environmental, indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group" (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.20). Commonplace experiences such as "being told that you're not unrecognizable for wearing a different colour wig".

(*Conversation about race*, 2019, p. 14) are given so as to crystallize the awareness structural racism.

Secondly, the section "Here are the facts" broaches "recognizing and minding the gap", that is considering how structural racism is becoming applied in the university. The facts, here, remind the students, are of importance, as conversing about race "entails stories told". Statistic are being charted here to move the argument from the private experience and subjectivity and give the sense of the gravity of the discrimination in materializing the "scale of experience". (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.20).

The charts give four examples of faculty. FAC 1 is an example of creative faculty, whose BME attainment gap is 12,7%, and the three other colleges' areas are not specified. Their BME attainment gas in faculty population are of 21%, 20,9% and 26,2%. The harsh contrast between the few orange dots standing for BAME and the white ones, standing for the white population, highlights that there is a complete lack of diversity.

Writing on this field has concentrated on the on the importance of the interaction between graphic design and social issues, in the handling of the challenging of race relations.

“if conversations about race do no start from a young age and a positive light is shared when discussing this, it becomes inherently harder as humans grow up” (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.14).
It develops assumptions such as forging new ways to talk about race, starting with the fact that talking about race refutes “differentiation towards BAME and prevent from acting differently” (*Conversation about race*, 2019, p.14).

Like the work made on Liberating the Curriculum at UCL in Cape Town, underpinned by the idea of ‘making connections’ part of the larger research-based education enhancement initiative known as Connected Curriculum (Bren Carnell, p. 134), conversation and connection become two key principles emanating from *Conversations about race*.

The very notion of “connection” has been very much in question in decolonial debate. In *The Call the decolonize curricula in South African higher education*, dealing with UCL, Cape Town, Brent Carnell and Dilly Fung describe the connections between knowledges. This would allow to bring education beyond the traditional canon (1). They also consider the connections that enable students to navigate in a super complex world (2) and the one that make range of place bonds between and people and society including to student’s local community (3).

> There has always been room for the topic of race so now let’s fill the space and take advantage of the platforms that have become available. We have the freedom to talk more openly than ever before. Society’s norms have changed as technology has created a globally connected platform where the reach of what is said makes a journey further than ever before (Brenn Carnell, p. 11).

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