



Artists and Citizens

T 5.7 Final report on best practices, key innovations, and principal challenges of dealing with artists and citizens in heritage research. The report will be consulted with all ECHOES members, experts from partner institutions and reviewed by specialists outside of the project. (M 25-33)

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Grant agreement No. 770248.

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Introduction by Elvan Zabunyan and Marine Schütz

Principal challenges of dealing with artists and citizens in heritage research

The result of the cross-research presented in this final report focuses on the three cities of the WP5: Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille. These cities, informed by the logic of circulation, migration, and mobility, have known since the 2000s, deep processes of decolonizing monuments and space. The following sections focusing on artists will highlight and contextualise the best practices and innovations, in heritage research, dealing with artists, works and processes.

In 27 and 28 May 2021, three parallel workshops concluded four years of intense field research on Artists and Citizens in Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille. Titled “ECHOES OF EMPIRE, contemporary art and colonial history”, the international symposium took place online¹. This term of “EMPIRE” that was chosen in association with “ECHOES” for our title "ECHOES OF EMPIRE" has a long history. From exchanging with the artists, it emerges that the perception of this heritage, charged with history, continue to convey the symbols of a decadent but powerful glory which motivates their productions and creations.

The three parallel workshops were the result of a long-term collective work carried out within the ECHOES program. It should be noted that in the context of current research on colonial history and

¹Day 1 : Three parallel workshops

<https://www.lairededu.fr/media/video/conference/echoes-of-empire-art-cont...>

<https://www.lairededu.fr/media/video/conference/echoes-of-empire-art-contemporain-et-histoire-coloniale-day-1-en/>

Day 2 : Discussions panels

<https://www.lairededu.fr/media/video/conference/echoes-of-empire-art-cont...>

<https://www.lairededu.fr/media/video/conference/echoes-of-empire-art-contemporain-et-histoire-coloniale-day-2-en/>

its legacy studied from the point of view of museums, diplomacy, the arts and civil society engagement, ECHOES is one of the very few research programs funded by Europe.

The responsibility of the researchers involved in WP5 was therefore great because it was necessary to think about a rhizomic ground with multiple layers allowing to conciliate the history with a big H in all its authoritative verticality to fugitive narrations, intertwined stories, ephemeral works, to performances where the bodies were the vectors of symbol of resistance and emancipation.

Several important questions arised in connection with the research that has been carried out within the framework of ECHOES and that is revealed through the work of the artists: What is the point of view that one occupies and what is the relationship to the symbol that one chooses to consider? What are the modalities of reception of an object? of an image? of a monument?

This is particularly relevant when analysing the effects of the history of domination on populations with histories of their own, often much richer and older than those of the colonisers appropriating land, property and bodies.

Interrogating colonial history and the history of slavery required confronting terminologies from the specialties of all the researchers of ECHOES project, from the history of Europe to the history of society museums, from the history of tourism to globalized history, from the history of art to the history of ideas, from social anthropology to postcolonial studies and decolonial options, it was a matter of federating our thoughts around central notions that have each provided methodological and metaphorical tools for thinking about objects and beginning the unique intellectual journey that has been ours for the past years. “Repression”, “removal”, “reframing”, “re-emergence”, “affective and creative research practice”, “modalities of heritage practice”, “multiple colonialisms” helped us to critically question the heritage and the legacies of colonial history also often consisted, and this was especially the case within the framework of WP5, in conducting research *from below*, that is to say by appropriating new, improvised, fluid, sometimes cobbled-together tools, but allowing us to go beyond all the cultural hierarchies imposed by the colonial institution, by breaking down the verticality, literally and figuratively. It is interesting that the statues celebrating colonial history and slavery were debunked after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020; it is their verticality that made their collapse possible. Within the framework of ECHOES, having the city of

Bristol in our work package, working on colonial heritage and seeing Colston's statue debunked could only confirm that the research we were engaged in was all the more topical.

The three parallel workshops were the final stage of WP5 and presented through artistic practices how artists have considered colonial history and the urban context within which colonial heritage has been embedded in their production. What narratives have been possible from their works? and how have these informed our thinking? are important questions that were discussed during the two days. Without doubt, the interpretation of the artists' works could give birth to imaginary worlds where history, aesthetics, politics and poetics touch each other and are entangled.

In March 2020, the reality of the pandemic was suddenly brought to our lives with the awareness that this reality concerned the whole world but that Europe, until then largely preserved from the ravages of epidemics suffered by other countries and in particular those of the "South", had to face with disbelief and dismay. Covid has profoundly changed the modalities of research, making fieldwork and travel impossible. Without mobility and travels, the links that we have woven with each other, have materialized by a reinvention of the forms of dialogue, by exchanges of images and texts, by artistic productions that have been at the heart of new circulations.



What we first called “Three parallel workshops” (one of the last deliverables of WP5) was to consist of three performances by artists in the three cities of Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille. These performances were to be filmed, and artists, critics and theorists were to intervene site-specifically. We had also planned to curate an exhibition based on these films and performances. We wanted to title this exhibition “Bon voyage, Welcome” as it reads on the Cape Town Cruise Terminal, words that resonate with force in a global landscape dominated by migration and the violence that this migration produces when it comes to considering the lost lives of men, women and children who seek every day to escape economic, totalitarian, military, climatic conditions that are often in a genealogy that intersects with European colonial history. This exhibition would have been organized in Paris, in the building of the Palais de la Porte Dorée, famous art déco architecture built for the colonial exhibition of 1931. This would have been perfect to make the works coexist in this imposing architecture in order to carry out a detour of meaning thanks to the critical function of the exhibited works. Because of the pandemic the project could unfortunately not succeed.

The Zoom format that we had to choose for our symposium allowed us a live meeting between artists from Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille, this simultaneity is also one of the elements that we appreciated in the context of these new forms of communication born of the pandemic.

Four and a half years later, what we have come to understand in WP5 is that the specificity of each city – Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille - exists in its connection to a colonial and slave history, and that it was the artists who best allowed us to reveal that history on which our research focused.

Of course, the field research in each of the three cities was an opportunity for unique encounters and discoveries, but since our project was to reflect on artistic productions and citizen actions, it was these that revealed a colonial heritage that we would otherwise probably not have seen with such acuity. The way in which the artists look at the heritage of a city, the monuments, the buildings, the way in which they move in the urban space, the way in which they physically experience the architecture, the hollow places and the full places, allowed us to seize the interstices of a hidden history, a history which suddenly appeared under a new angle. It was at this precise moment that we understood that the work carried out for WP5 spoke of these entanglements of memory and places, of amnesia and of the need to bring out traces of the past in order to better understand the present and the topicality of what we were engaged for. It is undoubtedly the artists who seize with the greatest vivacity what this actuality conveys and we had the proof of it since one year with the political and cultural demonstrations which followed one another since the explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement after the death of George Floyd. As art historians, anthropologists or archaeologists of contemporary culture, as artists, we, the members of WP5 have experienced firsthand the power and energy conveyed by the artists.

Each of the cities we studied is a port and the presence of the sea is very important, not only in connection with maritime trade but also because the sea provides an opening. The movement depends on several elements, the land and the water as well as a multitude of networks. At the heart of the matter, finding a way to change the way we see, discuss and explore certain elements of what is often considered as ‘traditional heritage’, specifically in terms of cultural artefacts, public art, museums, etc. Instead of holding on to long-established patterns and ways of seeing things, we tried to explore how we might reshape the traditional narratives in favor of an approach which takes into account post-colonial and decolonial understandings to foster new forms of progressive heritage practices.

While the pandemic context has forced us all to temporarily put on hold more scheduled visits to these cities, we were continuing to advance this important work via online conferences and workshops.

Findings and methodologies

The temporality of the practices, that is their contemporaneity, has mainly raised a challenge linked to intellectual implications for historical research facing the lack of archivist traces of today migrating art practices which resonate beyond these particular contexts of Bristol, Cape Town and Marseille. This difficulty has induced to settle broader methodological questions. How can we render the artistic expressions around the colonial past? To address this topic then comes to address a series of shifts: first, this concerns the relation to archive, determined by its production. The team has processed by way of an intense practice of interviews with the artists that field work had allowed to identify. This form has been multiplied and also practiced within collective contexts.

To produce this material, the team has engaged with the issue of methods, especially those concerning art and its discourse. The researchers have set conditions where the encounters with artists and members of the team were valorising the collective forms of dialogue. The conversations were open-ended and unstructured and mostly involved active listening on the part of our group to whatever the speaker felt like sharing about themselves, their work, their practice, their politics. Our questions emerged organically and opened up a space for the speaker to go deeper in certain directions or for certain ideas to be workshopped in dialog format.

The context for producing this material was that of research trips in the three cities.

This critical work on the sources for the study of the artistic segments such as the decolonial groups has been extended to the whole of the epistemological stakes, posed by the historization of the art of the margins.

In 2018, the team and the members of WP1 as well of Shawn Sobers from UWE Bristol were hosted in Marseille for the WP5 workshop (19 and 20 December). Between 25 and 29 March 2019, the Work Package 5 team met with artists, architects, curators, activists, and museum directors in various

sites around Cape Town, for a series of dialogues about heritage, the colonial past, decolonial art and activism, and the contemporary moment in South Africa and Cape Town.

And before the lockdown the team was lucky enough to be able to schedule its collective research trip in Bristol, between 1 and 5 March 2020.

In sum every year has been dedicated to going deeper in the process of encountering the artists, collectively think about their practice and produce knowledge, by recording the conversation and interviews which were later transcribed and analysed. This final report on artists documents not only the works but the conversations that took place these trips, to give the reader an immediate sense of the ideas our group was exposed during the three years of research but also of the collective means we have imagined changing the lines of the relation to historical research. Inscribed in contexts of vulnerability or militancy, the decolonial artistic knowledges produce ruptures in terms of scientific and epistemological postures. Oral methodologies question among other things the subjectivities of the researcher as well as the witness, opening up the question of the co-construction of knowledge. In return, we have integrated this type of rupture as a possibility to think - in a more horizontal way - about restitutions, meetings, symposiums etc. For instance, in link with the covid crisis, we have been challenged to invest new technologies. Within the context the symposium we have organized to reconstitute our findings, we have explored the digital format of zoom to imagine this space a channel both gathering researchers and artists from several parts of the globe and a way channeling artworks.

The fact that the team has addressed the production in the three cities by using the shared methods oral archives has implemented a comparative dimension when considering how colonial heritage functions in the imagination and interventions of prominent artists and practitioners in the cities.

The critical orientations contained in these oral archives of postcolonial/decolonial art, which engage questioning sources, particularly in terms of the ways in which the modern aesthetic heritage is reinterrogated by artists, has been contextualized in postcolonial/decolonial theoretical writings. The comparative dimension of the analysis has also been encouraged by the grid of modalities established by WP1 (repression, removal, reframing and reemergence) which is always questioned the ways addressing the artistic/cultural production around the colonial past.

Moreover, the prism that crosses national spaces rather than relying on the traditional monograph and the national prism, fosters a bias that encourage this comparative dimension of the analysis between the three cities. While this historical research makes up a geography of polycentric modern

art, the practices can also be addressed by using approaches that not only recognise that space is not an abstract category but that think about space beyond the pre-existing conceptions that prioritise hierarchies between centre and periphery and nationalise artistic narratives. It is by this methodological perspective of decentering modernist narratives about art and places that this research wishes to make sense of the particularities the artists' contribution to heritage issues.

When art history rests precisely on this assumption within which geography wants to be fixed, stable, and determines identity, how can we apprehend colonial past if it comes down to considering the loss of the principles of navigation on which art history was precisely founded? Adopting a critical tool that reflects the ways in which the artistic production around the colonial past accompanies the disruption of the order of spatial knowledge can help to get around this very problem. This has represented a challenge to consider and lend the team to directly engage central questions of historical research and methods

Key practices in Bristol, by Marine Schütz

For the past ten years, the issue of decolonizing heritage in public has emerged particularly strongly in Bristol that was historically at the heart of colonial entanglements. Located in the southwest of Great Britain, Bristol is a port that played a major role in the transatlantic trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. Its merchants financed over two thousand crossings (Dresser 2018). Yet as historian David Olusoga writes, Bristol “stands out from the competition in its ability to obscure its past and obscure its history,” “no British city is more willfully blind to its history than Bristol (Olusoga 2017)”.

To acknowledge the role of slavery's past in the city's richness, memorial policies have been put in place particularly around urban traces. For example, in 1998, The Slave Trade Trail was published by Madge Dresser, Carletta Jordan, and Doreen Taylor, who worked under the auspices of Bristol City Council. This project sought to challenge the Bristol civic narrative, which represses the history of slavery by treating the merchant figures as upholding a glorious maritime civic narrative. After 2007, several memorial groups and associations emerged in the wake of Abolition 200 - the Bicentennial of the Abolition of Slavery - to question heritage sites associated with the imperial and colonial past, including the statue of Edward Colston.

Alongside these steps, artists have also incorporated sites of slavery into the core of their strategies to “construct and challenge the civic narrative (Sobers 2018, 88)”. Whether countering celebrations of the city's maritime past or challenging the invisibilization of the black population, the multiplicity of questionings around slavery in Bristol draws a topography delineated by Pero's Bridge and the Colston statue. This statue by John Cassidy, presented on a Portland stone base, was unveiled in 1895 in the center of the city (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Edward Colston statue, Bristol. Photography by Marine Schütz, 2019.

Since the mid-2010s, a range of artists who are descendants of enslaved persons began however to address this past. Heritage sites, like the Pero Bridge, the Colston statue and the Guinea Street have become points of mobilization and protest. This shift has operated through the redefinition of colonial heritage and its relationship to modernity and national identity. In particular, Bristol's African Caribbean community's relationship to the memory politics of the city has largely been occupied by debates and operations aimed at countering the celebration of the legacy of Edward Colston, Deputy Governor of the Royal African Company from 1689 to 1690 and an African slave trader. Dealing with slave heritage by engaging with Bristol's city space has become a central strategy for artists and citizens, aiming challenge the civic narrative.

Questioning Colston's legacy through vandalizing or reframing his statue has been a way for artists to respond to a site replete with the residual memory of trauma. These artists recognize the role of memory in producing social problems in the present. Shawn Sobers has noted that the "civic endorsement and celebration of Colston upset a significant proportion of citizens, most significantly though not exclusively, members of Bristol's African Community" (Sobers 2018, 88), many of whom are descended of slaves.

The emergence of social movements around actions concerned with heritage, such as the campaign to decolonize Bristol and the Countering Colston group, originated in this feeling and in the wounds associated with personally experiencing a city marked by its slave past.

For instance, for the poet Miles Chambers, Colston's statue is "a constant reminder of his inhumanity" (Chambers, in Parkes 2018). Contesting the memory and commemoration of slavery in the city, Chambers conflates the critique of how the legacy of slavery in Bristol is narrated with that of the racialization process in Bristol:

We can look at the descendants of the slaves and economically they are still worse off; psychologically they are still worse off; mentally they still feel collectively as inferior; more African-Caribbean males are disproportionately in prison and in the judicial system; they do worse at schools; economically are paid less and are working less (Chambers, in Parkes 2018).

This process has gained new agency after the toppling of the Colston statue on 7 June 2020 (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Anti-racism protesters in Bristol have pulling down the statue of Colston.

In this final report, I propose to focus on specific in situ projects and to address the ways artistic production increasingly employs forms of envisioning colonial history that not only acknowledge the past but also seek to challenge established modes of history and representation. Performance and digital based medias seem to emerge as privileged ways to approach contemporary European heritage and build memory regimes which attempt to challenge the general civic narrative that represses the history of the slave trade in relation to the merchants of Bristol.

The report proposes a critical analysis of several projects presented in a chronological way which have been initiated by artists and citizens in Bristol who unhouse Bristol's colonial/slave archive by site-specific and performative means:

- Libita Clayton
- Michele Curtis
- Exhibition Uncomfortable Truths
- Decolonizing heritage practices after the toppling of the Colston's statue
- Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins

Libita Clayton

Libita Clayton is a British-Namibian artist based in Bristol. She graduated with a BA (Hons) in Print & Digital Media from Wimbledon College of Art, University of the Arts London in 2009. Recent presentations include: 4717, RCA/LUX, Dyson Gallery, Royal College of Art, London (2018); History Lessons: Fluid Records, South London Gallery, London; and the Diaspora Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale (all 2017). Libita Clayton develops performances, installations and discursive events, often working in partnership with DIY organisations, broadcasters and publishers. Sampling from a range of references, including science fiction, music videos and set design, she responds to sites of historical trauma and rupture through research, dialogue, and interventions, often calling into question accepted narratives and power structures (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Libita Clayton.

Official heritage—the one presented to tourists—is often grossly inadequate in its representation of slave experiences in port cities (Rice 2012). The naming and opening of Bristol’s Pero’s Bridge in 2000 paid homage to the enslaved African Pero Jones, who was brought to Bristol by the wealthy merchant John Pinney in 1784. The initiative of naming the bridge after Pero was the result of the engagement of citizen groups, including the Slave Trade Action Group, which raised issues such as “How and in what form should the city council acknowledge the Atlantic slave trade?” (Kowaleski Wallace 2006, 48). More than fifteen years later, artist Libita Clayton renewed the debate around Bristol’s civic memory by questioning the agency behind existing memorial practices. Her project mobilizes the same association between aesthetics, walking, city sites, and the colonial past.

Clayton’s configuration seeks to stimulate reflection on the legacy of slavery to generate citizens’ participation in the rewriting of contemporary public space (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Pero’s Bridge. Photography by Marine Schütz.

In 2015, Clayton showcased a performance event on Pero's Bridge entitled *Who Was Pero?* Concerning the conceptual and plastic aspects of the performance, Anthony Elliott has explained that "Clayton bombarded social media asking people 'Who was Pero?', she printed a t-shirt with the same question, and wore it on the site of the work, bringing the conversation to life" (Elliott 2016). The pictures shot during her performance show her in a black outfit composed of a t-shirt with the message "Who was Pero?" and a pair of sneakers; her look, as well as her gestures and her position within the crowd walking on the bridge, seems to align her work with the vocabulary and mood of a street protest (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Libita Clayton, *Who was Pero?* performance, Bristol, 2015.

Its subtitle, "In conversation with Fog Bridge" (2015), and genesis were determined by the media reactions to Fujiko Nakaya's in situ work on the same bridge earlier in the year, which saw the bridge periodically shrouded in fog as part of the In Between Time Festival. Nakaya's installation attracted a lot of media discussion, very little of which referred to the fact it was taking place on a bridge intended to be a memorial to an enslaved man called Pero. Shining a light on the situation of black experience in British culture, Nakaya's *Fog Bridge* installation revealed that Pero was still a missing

figure in the memorial landscape and pointed to the paradox of this memorial site: while the bridge assumed a commemorative function, and was one of the very few sites in Bristol that was supposed to recognize the fundamental role that slavery played in the city's development, Bristol remained plagued by amnesia around the actual circumstances of the slave trade.

For Clayton, this meant that the conversation about slavery was still not happening. As she recalled: "I really felt this void...I felt upset, and shocked, that a conversation wasn't happening" (Elliott 2016). This notable silence motivated Clayton to generate a performance that she conceived as a conversation with the audience.

The participatory modes of the work, which the artist describes as "sensorial and social experiences of landscape through movement, memory, rhythm and writing," were designed "to reveal what is left out (Clayton 2018)". In this way, the artist sought to provoke the crowd into an affective relationship with history that emphasizes not only the past but present-day reactions to it as well. Through this performative language, the artist dialogizes heritage and deeply renews the modalities around the handling of slavery's memorialization in the city. Working against amnesia in this way, her work can be read as one of "guerilla memorialization," a term that Alan Rice coined to describe "interventions that deserve a more engaged vocabulary than that of counter-memorialization". (Rice 2012, 16)

While dialogizing heritage through protest helps to contest repression, it equally reactivates the commemorative function within a heritage site, which itself often fails to provide adequate experiences and resources for identification. As Madge Dresser (2016, 44) writes of this site, calls were "made for the city to fund a more explicit memorial to those enslaved," even as "some white Bristolians asked why the focus was solely on those of African descent when Bristol was also built on the back of exploited white labor". As these remarks point out, as a part of the city's fabric, widely accessible, the bridge becomes an issue for memory struggles and testifies to the racialization of the debates around the representation of the subaltern groups in the public space.

In addition, through the performative means she uses, the artist not only challenges the loss of memory but also questions the limits of commemoration itself. In this sense, the artist engages in the debate around the interface between monuments and history raised by Rice, for whom "monuments alone will not in themselves stimulate a constant rethinking of the past" (Rice 2012, 13). Clayton's performance illustrates this point, making clear that the task of surpassing the limitations of existing

slavery memorials does not lie only with historians but must also be reclaimed by artists. In her work, Clayton mobilized these questions to stage an encounter that puts the viewers in motion, attesting to how the resources experimented with in *The Slave Trade Trail* have been translated from heritage practices into the aesthetic realm. In her analysis of the Bristol Slave Trade Trail (Figure 6), Kowaleski Wallace reads the work done by the walking trail as a rewriting of history, one that produces encounters and activates viewers' participation:

The physical act of being present becomes a catalyst to understanding, as walkers are made into active participants to “confront” those who were alive during the time of the slave trade. As walkers listen to the voices of the past, they “encounter” those responsible for the city’s history. (Kowaleski Wallace 2006, 54)

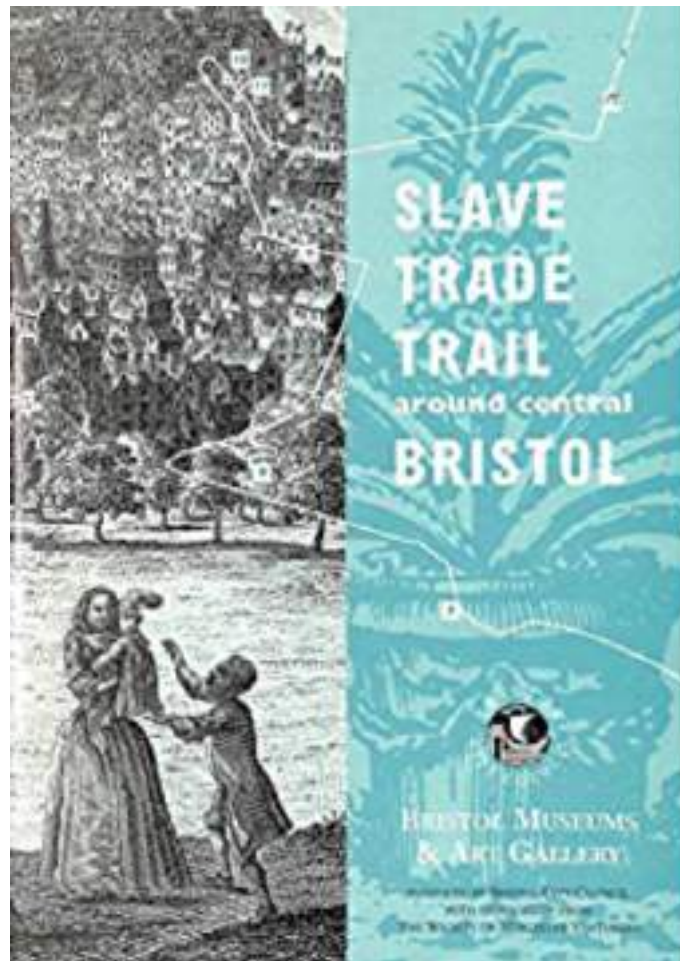


Figure 6: Booklet *The Slave Trade Trail*, 1999.

From this point of view, Clayton’s performative work on Pero’s Bridge allows for a spoken dialog with passers-by on the bridge as well as a dynamic experience that brings them to a more human

encounter with the figure of Pero Jones. Performing and locating herself in the very center of the footbridge, the artist provides the frame for a situation in which the participants in the performance are ingrained in a physical act of walking that flattens the distance between the 18th century citizens of the city and themselves. By promoting a vision of aesthetics as “a catalyst,” and of herself as “interested in the politics of space” (Clayton 2018), the artist expresses her refusal to fall into the old practices around the representation of blackness, marked by reification.

Indeed, since the Enlightenment, the image of Black female subjects in Western Art has been urged by the need to sustain a dual and racial otherness. Charmaine A. Nelson considers that this misrepresentation of the Black femaleness as a “site of abject sexual and racial difference” is the consequence of the conflation of representation with the assumption of true womanhood as always already white (Nelson 2014).

The way Libita Clayton contests reification in fact echoes a common position toward Pero’s Bridge, which for many black Bristolians has been subject to critique: “Pero’s dependent status hardly made him an inspiring role model for black Bristolians and many white working-class Bristolians reportedly refer to the distinctive construction as ‘the horned bridge’ rather than refer to Pero himself” (Dresser 2018, 44). Here Dresser sums up well the extent to which commemorating a black man in the public space both crystallises community groups rivalry when it comes to the content of what should be commemorated from the past and black community’s awareness of the misrepresentation of blackness that could entail depictions solely based on slavery narratives.

As the artist explained, performance enacts a change in representation: “I’m into this performative happening of transformation, unpacking, and measuring the life span of empowerment. Conflating and expanding—lifting and dropping it” (Clayton 2017). Thus, performance around slavery is no longer aimed at a more truthful account of the past, but rather at creating empowerment and transforming black subjectivities.

By piecing together chronologically disconnected timeframes and figures—the 18th century period and the contemporary figure of Libita Clayton, aligned with the figure of the demonstrator and reminiscent of the Black Lives Matter movement—the slavery memorial site is fully actualized. In this way, the artist exemplifies a dynamic approach to time, where past is not a fixed record. Such an approach is likely to entail new possibilities for the future, reflecting the archive’s possibilities, which are, for T.J. Demos, less about “reconstructing past events retrospectively” than they are about

provoking “new and future events prospectively” (Demos 2013, 50). The artist indeed longs for such possibilities: “There is something really interesting about the archive and the presentness of creating an archive...creating something now for the future” (Elliott 2016).

Libita Clayton’s *Who Was Pero?* highlights how personally experiencing the slave past in the city determines the creation of a new space for remembering, echoing, and evoking protests and insurgency towards racism. Both artists question this legacy in terms that promote citizens’ reflection on the absence of sites for heritage and encourage their participation in the rewriting of contemporary public space. By reworking existing heritage practices around the slavery past that unfold in frames of resistance and emancipation, these projects seem to be informed by decoloniality, echoing Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s insight on decolonizing the mind, as a “contestation around European colonial heritage and legacies” (quoted in Andersen 2018).

Michele Curtis

Bristol-based artist Michele Curtis (Figure 7) offers up a similar critique of the intersection of the effects of heritage and racism in her work *The Seven Saints of St Pauls*. The project, composed of seven murals, enacts a handling of the colonial past determined by the need to “promote inclusion” (Curtis 2019a).

While Curtis is as concerned as her predecessor by the physical and psychological marks left on Bristol by slavery, her approach stands out from other interventions in that she does not work with prevailing commemoration sites; rather, she builds a new location of memory for the descendants of enslaved Africans, who have so far been excluded from the realm of commemoration. As she states, the *Seven Saints* project is about “creat[ing] a legacy for the city, and for the community,” suggesting here the community of Bristolians descended from slaves (Curtis 2019a).



Figure 7: Michele Curtis in Stoke's Croft district. Photography by Marine Schütz

In 2015, Curtis embarked on this project, celebrating first-generation Caribbean cultural and political figureheads via larger-than-life murals on prominent exterior walls of the St Pauls suburb. These figureheads included the founders of the annual St Pauls Carnival and militants of black Britain: Carmen Beckford, Dolores Campbell, Barbara Dettering, Clifford Drummond, Audley Evans, Roy Hackett, and Owen Henry. These individuals' commitment to achieving cultural recognition, especially for cultural traditions born of the negotiation of slavery, intersected with their struggle for

racial equality in Britain. They were, for the most part, responsible of the Bristol Bus Boycott that took place in 1963 in response to the Bristol Omnibus Company's refusal to employ members of the city's black and Asian communities. Within six months, the "seven saints" were victorious, and the Bristol Omnibus Company had to lift their ban on employing people of color. Their second key moment of activism happened in 1968, when they formed the St Pauls Festival Committee, derived from the Commonwealth Coordinated Committee, which would become the cornerstone of the annual carnival (United Communities 2019) (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Michele Curtis, "Owen Henry," *The Seven Saints of St Pauls* (2018). Murals in collaboration with Paintsmith. Photograph by Marine Schütz

The project's specificity in respect to the narration of the colonial past and migration history lies in the way it seeks to frame the descendants' history as acts of resistance and part of the politics of agency. *The Seven Saints of St Pauls* can be considered a project that upsets the representation of slaves and their descendants in the city, not only because it broaches the impact of their lives on contemporary cultural practices, but also because it shifts the tone of commemoration.

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 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.

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 Pauls 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 Curtis investigating untold stories requires doing “research, speaking to the individuals themselves, to their family members” (Curtis 2020).

By framing the descendants as actors within a longstanding tradition, symbolically linked to the rebellion of slaves against the project of slavery, the artist makes a radical intervention in Bristol’s commemorative practices: the old, painful, and official commemorations of Edward Colston are replaced by a stark and fresh memorial that bears witness to the subsequent untold histories of emancipation and the contribution of the West Indian people in Britain.

In other words, *The Seven Saints* evokes the consequences of the city’s role in the transatlantic slave trade. But with its reference to carnival and political agency, it simultaneously charts messages of survival and hope (Figure 9).



Figure 9: The walls of St Pauls. Photography by Marine Schütz

The artist explained this choice by stating that she sought to develop “self-esteem, empowerment, and belonging” (Curtis 2019a). The very materiality of the murals, all the more apparent in their contrast with the monochromatic appearance of the district, communicates to viewers the changes in representation promoted by the founders of the carnival as well as by the artist, including fixed and damaging representations of St Pauls itself, whose residents are usually considered criminals or victims of exclusion.

BS 24/7’s report about Dolores Campbell states that she was the “surrogate mother of black British culture” (Figure 10). 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 Carnival².



Figure 10: Michele Curtis, “Dolores Campbell,” *The Seven Saints of St Pauls* (2018). Murals in collaboration with Paintsmith. Photograph by Marine Schütz

² <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/new-mural-celebrates-surrogate-mother-of-black-british-culture/>

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.

While the memorial functions as a reflection on the political agency of past and present cultural resources, it also engages with the task of remembering migration histories and transmitting the values of emancipation and rootedness. It seems that the carnival's past function of negotiating plantation rule reverberates in Curtis's project, which contests the legacy and weight of slavery and colonization in Bristol's current social relations. At an epistemological level, she opposes the repressive dimension that plagues the history of carnival: "Nobody knew who has done the St Pauls Carnival" (Curtis 2019a).

This failure to recognize the history of West Indians in Bristol, from the plantations to St Pauls Carnival, is part of a broader schema that consists in narrating Britain as a nation for whites and, coinciding with the racial tensions that have been apparent in the city since 1980, is a major source of social damage and trauma. Commenting on West Indian young people, Curtis observed that "they don't feel actually British even though they were born here and are from two or three generations of family members," adding that they "are British citizens and they don't belong here" (Curtis 2019a). While lamenting the exclusion of West Indian history from the curriculum of the city, the artist also imagines that restoring this history to public memory through its dissemination in the street could help generate a sense of inclusion and of belonging.

Historically, St Pauls is a district that has functioned in several capacities. As a haven for West Indian migrants of the Windrush generation, it was considered a ghetto from the 1970s onward, an area plagued with social economic inequality, often in racialized ways (Chivallon 1999, 352). Social conflict and police violence reached a climax in April 1980 with the St Pauls riot, which erupted in response to police raids on black cultural institutions, including youth clubs. St Pauls became the first urban district in Britain to experience rioting in response to the discriminatory policing of the Thatcher era (Joshua et al. 1983). By locating the pioneers and figureheads of St Pauls' activism and community, the artist deeply rewrites the district's representation as "a no-go area" (Curtis 2019a).

Curtis's project aims to popularize the "seven saints" in agentive terms—but equally important for her is that this counter-narrative of the city develops through public platforms. The shift from the striking small drawings of the artist's early exhibitions to the monumental scale and public reach of her "colorful and vibrant murals" (Mann 2019) resonates strongly with the pioneers' seminal act of reclaiming public space following the displacement of Jamaican street culture to Britain. During the Bristol Bus Boycott, regaining their place in public space was precisely what the militants were fighting for—thereby embodying what Jackson, analyzing the Notting Hill carnival, refers to as "street politics" (Jackson 1988).

Accordingly, *The Seven Saints*' status as a street art project can be read as an attempt to subvert Bristol's dominant civic discourse. Through the agency of street art, which "encourage[s] people to visit St Pauls and come into St Pauls" (Curtis 2019a), the artist inserts these counter-representations of Bristol into the touristic circulation. Owing to street artist Banksy's international reputation, Bristol's civic discourse has today capitalized on public art forms, which are an important part of the city's tourism industry. Channeling the legacy of the key contributors in the multicultural arena through the language of street art would therefore implicitly make it possible for their history to be experienced as part of a more inclusive civic identity.

What is more, the memorial to the seven founders does historicize Bristolian Caribbean culture as a popular and public form of culture. Indeed, the success of the murals was followed up by the creation of an "accompanying mobile app titled 'The Seven Saints of St Pauls® Art & Heritage Trail,' so people can run around, tour, like an art trail, [take] guided tours" (Curtis 2019a). Launched in July 2019, this app speaks to the artist's aspiration to "create projects that provide resources for cultural socialization" (Curtis 2019b). One cannot miss the resonance between the vision of this project to "fill the gap of multicultural representation within British society" (Curtis 2019a) and that of *The Slave Trade Trail*, published in 1998 by Madge Dresser, Carletta Jordan, and Doreen Taylor, who worked under the auspices of the Bristol City Council (Kowaleski Wallace 2006, 52). During the Seven Saints Trail, thanks to the app guiding "users around seven large-scale murals of individuals who made significant contributions to the social and cultural richness of Bristol and the UK" (Curtis 2019c), walkers are turned into participants, asked to make connections between the founders and the places they inhabited, each of which is marked by a mural. As the distance between the present and the past collapses through the connections activated in the walkers' bodies, a specific relation to

history emerges, one in which the colonial aftermath is rewritten, and messages of survival and the transmission of memory are channeled into their most lively forms.

The “Uncomfortable Truths” in the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery

In 2019, driven by a desire to break with “inherited hegemonic cultural and colonial perspectives (Simmons 2019),” the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery initiated an “Uncomfortable Truths” project, reflecting the city's institutions' critical gaze around its ties to the colonial past coordinated by artist Stacey Oliko (Figure 11) and led by curator Lisa Graves. On this occasion, this institution claimed an active, radical, and potentially global approach to decolonizing the museum in that it includes nearly every aspect of museum work, from repatriation to reinterpretation of colonial objects.



Figure 11: The Uncomfortable Truths.

The production of the comments was coordinated by Bristol Nigerian-Swiss born British artist and graphic designer Stacey Oliko (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Stacey Olika.

Since 2017, when she produced her first project, *I am Melanin*, Stacey Olika has been developing a body of photographic work around the representation of black women through which she seeks to foster self-esteem and self-affirmation. Engaged in a process that challenges the weight of colonialism in contemporary perceptions of so-called racialized subjects, Stacey Olika's approach meets an important ambition of the *Uncomfortable Truths* project: that of acknowledging the role of colonialism in current cultural practices. This point was at stake in the way the project sought to comprehensively trace the different aspects in which the works were collected.

She has worked as the program support assistant for the UWE Graphic Design course at UWE Bristol. She is part of the Rising Arts Agency and Diversity director at Channel 4.

By opening up the analysis of objects of museums' collections to subjects born of the histories of immigration in Great Britain, this display raises the question, widely debated in the Anglo-Saxon world and in South America, of the decolonization of the museum. Although covering plural realities, this notion (Allain Bonilla 2017) can be understood according to the idea according to which, until

then, a point of view on colonial objects inherited from colonial cultural practices would have predominated in the museum, which it would be appropriate today to question and reverse.

As Elisa Shoenberger explains, it refers to “the process that institutions engage in to broaden the perspectives they present beyond those of the dominant cultural group, particularly white colonizers” (Shoenberger 2019).

Regarding the understanding of the museum on the notion of coloniality, it appears Bristol Museum’s Uncomfortable Truths takes as its starting point the idea that the presentation of the permanent collections up to that point would not have considered the power relations that prevailed in the relations between Europe and Africa in European cities (Figure 12).

Claire Simmons, a project manager in this institution, states that the museum is dependent on “modern ideological positions” (Simmons 2010). As a result, the goal is to “reveal the uncomfortable stories behind museum objects-how they were collected, what they represent, and the difficult pasts behind their cartels that are not yet acknowledged” (Simmons 2010).

The need to break with the legacy of dominant cultural and colonial practices and perspectives inherited from the past is interpreted through a discursive work of recontextualizing objects that is part of this institution's museum policy.

Since 2012, when the collections of the former British Empire and Commonwealth Museum entered the museum, the question of the links between Great Britain and the countries that formed the British Empire has been one of the major axes of the exhibitions, displays and valorization operations proposed by the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. The museum's archivists and curators address the issue of the physical and symbolic repatriation of objects from their collections. Conceived as the guarantee of accessibility to the collections, repatriation becomes one of the main means of writing colonial history. For example, in the project Nairobi: The Building Shared Futures (2018) (Figure 13), the digital repatriation of the photographic archive of images of colonial Kenya is meant to help “communities around the world” explore “forgotten or hidden histories from their own perspective” (Sugar 2019).



Figure 13: The Nairobi project.

From a physical standpoint, the museum is considering such rewrites by repatriating a few objects from its collections, including a Cree coat. In July 2020, in a heritage news marked by the debunking of the statue of Edward Colston (a philanthropist who took part in the slave trade), which occurred at the time of the Black Lives Matter protests, the museum decided to display this process of “decolonizing the museum” as its main issue. As it states on its website, this is based on the management of the collections through an acquisition policy designed to “make its collections more representative of the different cultures in Britain” (Mensah 2020).

With *Uncomfortable Truths*, the institution addresses the decolonization of the collections by commissioning a group of prominent figures from the BME's student societies to create an audio tour of the permanent galleries around seven objects. The team supervised by Stacey Olika included 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.

The museum's productions concerned with a new commentary consisted of both imperial British works and objects made in Africa that were looted during colonization: Roderick MacKenzie's painting *The Delhi Durbar*, a bronze from Benin, an Egyptian mummy, a stuffed rhinoceros, a painting by the painter Pocock, *The Battle Of The Saints*, and the museum building itself.

In the form of cartels and podcasts available on MP3 players, interpretations offered by descendants of the former colonial subjects are placed alongside new cartels offered by curator Lisa Graves (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Display of The Uncomfortable Truths, Ancestral Head of an Oba or King, ca. 1660, Kingdom of Benin, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol. Photograph by Marine Schütz, March 2020.

As the cartel accompanying Roderick Mackenzie's painting *The Delhi Durbar* (1903) shows, the museum is critical of the functions of objects during the colonial Empire (Figure 15). It explains that the painting can offer “a useful insight into the mechanism of the Empire”, thus assigning historical

spectacle and the painter's work to the same function: that of serving imperial ideology through spectacle.



Figure 15: Roderick Dempster Mackenzie, The Delhi Durbar of 1903, The Governor's Procession or the State Entry, 1907, oil on canvas, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol. Photography Marine Schütz, 2020.

By proposing a project that puts the voice of the marginalized at the heart of its logic, the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery seems eager to activate this approach to decoloniality. Indeed, the content of the podcasts, like the commentary offered by Ade Sowemimo and Donnell Asare on the Delhi Durbar canvas, no longer replicates the old narrative on the canvas. The latter previously emphasized

the magnificence of the details by which the artist rendered the planning of the ceremonial procession to mark the entry of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra and their enthronement as Emperor and Empress of India (Haines 2015). Instead, it takes as its subject matter the experience of local people in the Indian subcontinent. In this, the work is indicative of the fact that “this project has always been about revealing the truth, not silencing voices” (Olika 2019).

Uncomfortable Truths highlights the role of decolonial ideas in reinterpreting colonial histories. Nonetheless, a gap emerges between these practical experiences and the decolonial theoretical corpus. Where these projects attempt to renew different aspects of museum work and consider the fields of representation and public engagement, the decolonial theoretical corpus, which takes aesthetics as its object, consists rather, for the most part, of a critique of aesthetic knowledge. Such a hiatus can be understood in part in relation to the type of resources that museums mobilize, drawing more from the applications of theory by decolonial groups in Bristol, such as the Countering Colston - Campaign to decolonise Bristol, than from the strictly academic research championed by the TDI+Transnational Decolonial Institute. Thus, to understand this contrast and the mediating role that civil society plays in the circulation of decolonial ideas in the museum, it is useful to trace the contours of decolonial aesthetics, as theorized by two of the members of the TDI: Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez.

Decolonial aesthetics, as defined by these two scholars, authors of the most sustained reflections on the relationship between art and decolonial thought, is presented as a challenge to “the hegemonic normativity of aesthetics in its own field” (Mignolo and Vasquez 2013). This work is understood above all as a critical research on the terms of aesthetics, aiming at its denaturalization where the shortcuts it proposes on Kantian analyses aim at denouncing its supposed universalist character. According to Mignolo and Vázquez, as the very archetype of modern rhetoric, Kantian aesthetics cannot be considered otherwise than as a claim to project a local standard of beauty, born in the West, on a planetary scale. On the one hand, this regulation of beauty would be projected “on the whole population of the planet (Mignolo and Vasquez 2013), thus giving way to a control of Europe on the world. On the other hand, Mignolo and Vázquez interpret the German philosopher's analysis as a process by which the plurality of organic senses designated in the Greek word *aisthesis* would be reduced to a single one of visual order.

Stacey Olika's approach to decolonization at the Bristol Museum applies this critical requirement to the social issues of narrow definitions of the museum, and concerns the relationship established between the museum and its audiences. She sees Uncomfortable Truths as important because it has the potential to transform the relationship between black citizens of the city and museums. For her, the museum needs to be transformed because it is a place of “institutional racism and lack of representation” (Olika 2019). She adds that these two elements “have been huge barriers to feeling like you belong in spaces like the museum” (Olika 2019). Stacey Olika, as an artist moreover interrogates the processes of exclusion faced by the black population in Britain. As she explained : “I started to think about my identity and I realized I was a black woman living in Great Britain (Olika 2019)”.

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” (Olika 2019).

It seems that the Bristol Museum's proposal to make its podcasts available on the museum's website is precisely intended, by disseminating new narratives about the collections conceived by members of Bristol's black community, to challenge its structuring as a hegemonic space of representation. The decentering of views on colonial objects is thus not limited to changing the narrative of the colonial past. Rather, it engages the question of the transformation of social relations in the present through approaches that make use of the colonial past.

Decolonizing heritage practices around the Colston plinth

The process of decolonizing monuments in Bristol intensified after the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol. On June 7, 2020, in response to the Black Lives Matter protests brought about by the death of African American George Floyd, this event was conceived as an act of revolt against past and present forms of structural racism and its violence on the black population (Figure 16). The global protests of the Black Lives Matter movement were intensified by a sense of helpless exposure and dissatisfaction with the management of the health crisis by many governments,

the effects of which were borne disproportionately by ethnic minorities and poor populations. In Bristol, the intensity of the protests was even more striking because the movement was well established there. This event was subsequently instrumental in activists' production of a heightened conversation with citizens on the periphery of dominant narratives not only of slavery but of black people's place in the public space.



Figure 16: Anti-racism protesters in England have pulling down the statue of Colston.

Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the issue of the physical spaces for civic commemoration was hotly contested in the United States and the Caribbean. In Bristol, on June 7, 2020, Colston's statue was the object of a spectacular act of civil disobedience, when it was dragged away by a procession of activists before being thrown into the Avon River. Colston's fall and drowning was highly symbolic: he was returning to the waters from which his profits had come. That the activists came to liquidate this heritage seemed hard to imagine, as a memorial approach to a more comprehensive narrative of colonial history had previously prevailed, which did not necessarily involve the destruction of the statue. The group Countering Colston - Campaign to decolonise Bristol

was formed in the mid-2010s precisely with the aim of “ending the public celebration of Edward Colston” (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Logo for the Countering Colston group - Campaign to decolonize Bristol.

This active network is made up of Bristolians, many of whom are descendants of Caribbean immigrants who arrived in Britain after the Second World War and belong to the Windrush Generation (Figure 18).



Figure 18: Mural representing the Windrush ship, St Pauls. Photography by Marine Schütz.

The emergence of the movement is rooted in the recognition of the effects of the wounds of the personal experience of the black population in a city marked by a lack of public recognition of its slave-owning past. For this reason, it wishes to renew the content of the memorial discourse, considering “both the suffering of the victims and that of the people who courageously resisted slavery and fought for abolition and emancipation” (ANONYMOUS). Transforming social relations therefore requires considering the monuments. In this, the group's approach converges with the critique conducted by decolonial thought around the structural forms of privilege produced by modern knowledge. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano describes the gap between the end of political colonizations and its persistent effects, through “the matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies at the global and local level”, which is called coloniality (Quijano 1997, 201).

As another decolonial thinker, Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo, proposes, it is through the insertion of multivocal narratives into the constitutive sites of colonality, museum, heritage, etc., that decolonization can take place (Mignolo 2011, 365).

The Bristol Countering Colston Group- Campaign to decolonize Bristol similarly posits the role of multivocality in guerrilla memorialization, to use the term Alan Rice has coined to describe “interventions that merit a more engaged vocabulary than counter-memorialization” (Rice 2012, 16). The addition of a plaque, the content of which would be written in consultation with the Black community and historians, was seized upon as a concrete way to decolonize the Colston site. Indeed, as the Bristol Post's 2014 poll on the statue's fate revealed, this was the preferred approach (56% of respondents were in favor of its retention and 44% in favor of its removal (Gallagher 2015)). Such a recontextualization of public narratives was expected to bring about, in the words of writer Ros Martin, “a change in attitudes and culture (quoted in Cooke 2015).

Considering these perspectives on Colston's protest, his debunking thus designates a shift, from the realm of epistemic disobedience to that of civil disobedience (Figure 19).



Figure 19: The Colston street. Photography by Marine Schütz.

The act of civil disobedience is presented as the possibility for activists to reclaim their own space. The fact remains that this transformation of the response to colonial heritage is primarily activated by systemic readings of black vulnerability in the deep intersection of race, class, and gender parameters reignited by the COVID-19 crisis and the death of George Floyd.

On the day of the statue's removal, a series of activists climbed onto the empty plinth and posed with their arms up “in a Black Power salute (Reid 2020) (Figure 20)”.



Figure 20. Jen Reid on the top of the Colston plinth, Sunday 7th June 2020.

These gestures were immortalized in photographs widely shared by Black Lives Matter social networks, including one by activists Jen Reid and one of Rob Mitchell (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Rob Mitchell on the top of the Colston plinth, Sunday 7th June 2020. Photography by Shawn Sobers.

Jen Reid recounts that on her way home from the June 7, 2020, protests, she felt “an overwhelming urge to climb onto the pedestal, completely driven to do so by the events that had unfolded just before. Seeing the statue of Edward Colston thrown into the river felt like a truly historic, huge moment (Reid 2020).”

The reworking of internal black community codes, such as the Black Power gesture and performance sought to materially translate the experience of bodily emancipation experienced during Colston's fall associated with “an electrical surge of power (Reid 2020)”. Her discourse also highlights the sedimentation of diasporic history at the heart of the purpose. By symbolically crystallizing the past acts of the merchants, this statue also becomes a recourse for conceiving the struggle of the present within the continuum of the past:

I immediately thought of the slaves who died at the hands of Colston and empowering them. I wanted to empower George Floyd, I wanted to empower Black people who, like me, suffered injustices and inequalities. A surge of power for them all. (Reid 2020)

As a symbolic crystallization of the merchants' past actions, Jen Reid perceived the site as bridging the suffering of past and present human lives. Once this heritage was liquidated, new possibilities could be established. Using the image of the raised fist rewrites this unification of generations and makes the site not just a place of suffering but of black resistance. The act of rebellion of the unbolting is reinscribed in its deeper roots: those of a long history of liberation struggles and marronage while its gestuality enters resistance against all other colonial acts sedimented in the Colston statue.

If Jen Reid's approach speaks to the desire to produce images of a black empowerment, it aims to ephemerally embody a place of memory for the recognition of an uprooted population. As her perception of the act of revolt, which her performance transforms into a place of memory, suggests, “It's something to be proud of, to have a sense of belonging, because we really belong here and we're not going anywhere (Reid 2020)”. The function of transmitting emancipatory values to the community thus fully participates in a desire to bring cultural practices together.

The disciplinary dimension uncovered in Jen Reid's performance can be read as an important aspect of the decolonization process of the monument. By privileging urban space and the anonymous public of the street over institutional spaces and the informed public, this embodied place of memory inscribes the technical dimension at the heart of a narrative discordant with mainstream and modern art forms. Indeed, in the history of diasporic art, performance art has historically been constituted as a process that allowed for a specific questioning of the artistic canons established by modernity. Black artists' view of the form, which emerged in the 1970s, was one of separatism from Western artistic traditions (see Zabunyan 2004). At a time when conceptualist approaches dominated, returning to the body meant asking questions of integration into the institutional system from the field of visual art.

On the night of June 15, 2020, the empty plinth of the Colston statue was adorned with a hollow resin sculpture of a photograph of Jen Reid's performance from a 3D scan. On June 17, 2020, Quinn's statue was dismantled, and Marc Quinn paid the fees to City Hall (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Marc Quinn, *A Surge of power*, sculpture in resin, 2020.

Born in 1964 in London and associated with the Young British Artists, Marc Quinn, its author, was known for his work around the representations of vulnerable bodies. In 2005, the work *Alison Lapper Pregnant* located in Trafalgar Square featured a statue of a young pregnant woman with phocomelia. Despite his interest in themes of invisibilization of bodies and vulnerability, the fact that a white, heterosexual, cisgender man was depicting a black woman raised the question of the contradiction of the interpretation of decolonial debates.

In his discussion of delinking with the hegemonic ideas of Western colonial modernity on modern epistemic heritage, Walter D. Mignolo argues that the parameters of identity must be considered in understanding epistemic decolonization. He establishes a central dichotomy between egopolitics, referring to the modern, Cartesian, masculine subject, attached, in short, to Renaissance definitions of the self, and bodypolitics, subjects occupying a position of marginality from the white subject -- whether related to geography, gender or ethnicity (Mignolo 2008). According to him, the latter would be particularly likely to realize this decolonization of art, knowledge, or monuments. From their positions as subjects, they would be able to act specifically in the geopolitics and politics of the body because the epistemic tradition in the West is based precisely on the abstraction of the modern subject's own spatial position.

Banksy, the Bristolian artist active in the field of street art, drew a picture of the monument in which he depicts Colston's sculpture being pulled by cables by four activists. The caption explains:

We pull it out of the water, put it back on the base, tie a cable around its neck and order it and suggests the erection of “life-size bronze statues of demonstrators taking down Colston.

Finally, the drawing evokes the form of memorial pacification implied by this self-referential content to the act of revolt: “Everybody's happy. A famous day commemorated. Here is an idea that speaks to both those who miss Colston's statue and those who do not (Figure 23)”.

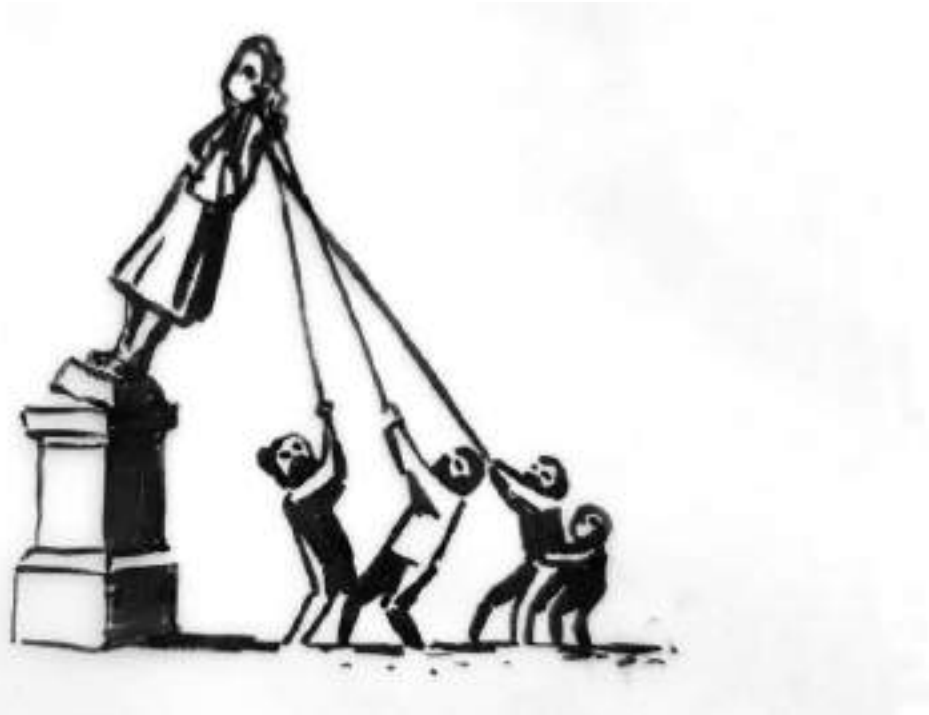


Figure 23: Drawing by Banksy, June 2020. Copyright Banksy. Source: article Tom Ravenscroft, “Banksy proposes reinstating Edward Colston statue as part of slavery memorial”, *Deezen*.

The detour through Banksy's cartoon introduces the confrontational dimension of the debates following the installation of Marc Quinn's work. As the artists' social media and the local press reveal, the critical reception of *A surge of power* constructs a decolonial critique that focuses as much on the artist, who is seen as “a clear example of white privilege in action (Price 2020),” as on the work, denounced as a productive site of coloniality. Among the artists who spoke out against the work were Larry Seinti Achiompong, Thomas J. Price, Graeme Mortimer Evelyn and Sutapa Biswas. These British artists with ties to postcolonial histories address the notion of coloniality and privilege through two arguments: the question of Quinn's relationship to black agentivity and the problematic aspect of his economic status as a star artist.

London-based artist Thomas J. Price describes the action as “guerrilla night warfare” and “sabotage” of “the process that is taking place in the city,” activating a “new colonization of space in Bristol” (Price 2020)”. Price himself is actively situated in the debate of public representation, as his latest work *Reaching Out*, erected on August 9 2020 in Stratford-upon-Avon, is one of the very few statues of black women in Britain (Figure 24).



Figure 24: Thomas J. Price, *Reaching Out*, 2020, silicone bronze, 290 x 90 x 86 cm, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Various arguments drawn from the artistic field allow Price to underline Quinn's claim to auctoriality. This, in a context of decolonial thinking, is reduced to the old forms of subjectivity of the said center. Moreover, Quinn's method rejects both the absence of the forms of consultation practiced by decolonial memory groups and the artist's demiurgic posture - Price points out that the Englishman “could have made his sculpture anonymously but chose to put himself at the center (Price 2020)” - leaving the goals of self-promotion hanging in the balance. Finally, reviewing several aspects that materially or conceptually inscribe the hegemonic dimension, Price reveals the contradictions between Jen Reid's image and the technical choices made that delegitimize the black cause, starting with the material, “the hollow resin and not the bronze of power (Price 2020).”

Similarly, Sutapa Biswas' discourse attacks Quinn from the question of the artist's ego by revealing that his status of domination dovetails with his economic capital and ethnicity: “What Quinn has

done is attempt to claim victory and credit for a moment in British history that he has not helped to sustain over the last thirty years of his lucrative career. “

She adds:

Quinn did not take the opportunity to contextualize his motivations by referring to C. L. R. James, or Stuart Hall, or Kehinde Wiley's recent statue of a black man on horseback in the United States, or a host of other public art or literature by black or visible minority writers or artists who have similarly attempted to interject our otherwise unheard voices into public and other spaces (Biswas 2020).

Thus, by reading the work as a site of economic domination and its paratexts as the site of a denial of black agency, Sutapa Biswas updates the decolonial critique of the systemic matrix of power, which Mignolo traces back to the 16th century and associates with the joint emergence of the Atlantic slave trade, capitalism, and New World colonization.

In contrast, the words of other figures in Bristol's memory groups consider that despite the obvious power relations inherent in *A Surge of Power*, the sculpture manages to renew the memorial discourse on slavery through Jen Reid's own image. Referring to “the brilliant statue of a black woman,” artist and teacher Shawn Sobers dialogues with the perspective of Jen Reid, who clarified her association with Marc Quinn a few days earlier because of her status as a black activist. She explained that she appreciates his art because he “cares about putting inclusion first”, and “using his art to make people think (Reid 2020):”

Even though Quinn is not a black artist, she said his work would still fill a need for figurative representation of black bodies in public spaces where there is undoubtedly a deficit. She adds in her statement, “The creation of this sculpture is very important because it helps to advance the path to racial justice and equity, because Black lives matter every day’ (Reid 2020).

Jen Reid's words are thus indicative of the specific potential that activists assign to the politics of representation in this debate about their role in breaking down racial inequality.

Not all proponents of the public debate on the memory of slavery conceive of the politics of representation in the same terms. The point of view of decolonial approaches is revealing, after the

second debunking, that of Quinn's work: it poses with the question of the new monument to be erected that of the need to break with the old forms of monumentality. Jonathan Jones, a journalist for the Guardian, suggested replacing the Colston statue with a “bold work of art that shows the hell of life on board a slave ship (Jones 2020),” which Shawn Sobers rejected, saying “the trauma of Africa is not entertainment,” adding:

We've already suffered enough from seeing Colston every day on that pedestal, so I don't want to trade that pain for a daily reminder of the trauma Colston inflicted. That would cause real psychological damage in the minds and bodies of black people (Sobers 2020).

The image of the new monument for the empty plinth might therefore be chosen in such a way as to produce a visual discourse that supports a memorial approach whose stake, even more than that of the representation of the black population, concerns its potential for collective reparation as a public image. It might be able to ensure a break with the forms that evoke “the visual currency of the imperial past (Otele 2019, 140).” Olivette Otele illustrates this injunction with an example found in the reappropriation of Colston's work produced in October 2018, which relies on the image of the boat. The work was proposed as an installation in which one hundred small statues had been placed at the foot of Colston's monument and presented in the pattern of a human cargo ship, chained to the stern of a boat (Figure 25).



Figure 25: Anonymous in situ installation 2018. Source: Inspiring city website.

Based on this example, which conveyed new dehumanizing images in the public space, Otele considers that a monument adequate to the challenges of the present would be one that would consider “black agentivity in the process of emancipation” and “see enslaved people as something other than a human cargo ship (Otele 2019, 140)”. In sum, the opposition to the ship motif is based on the same rejection by the black community as that expressed for Pero's bridge, named after the slave Pero Jones, who lived in the city at the end of the 19th century, which makes it a difficult model to inspire for black Bristolians.

If the question of iconography as a capital means of the fight against racial inequalities arises in these discourses on a decolonial monumentality, that of artistic technique is just as important. The reflection on the decolonization of the monument then envisages the break with the old monument in all the matrix aspects that led to the genesis and realization of the previous sculptural forms. The idea that sculpture is now a form that artists must overcome seems to be illustrated by the fact that the Colston statue is now kept in a museum (the M Shed) (Figure 26).



Figure 26: The Colston statue displayed in the M Shed, Bristol, 2021.

Thus, this attention might lead to questions about the maintenance of the delicate realm of figurative visibility, which, as Bristolian art historian Dorothy Price suggests, “is a structural framework in which inherent gender inequalities exist that are already overdetermined by the many centuries of white male bodies on display (Price 2021).” As she points out, the abandonment of figuration, “could offer a productive counterpoint to the dominant discourse on the problems of monumental figurative sculpture in the post-Colston era (Price 2021).”

Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins

If the question of iconography as a capital means of the struggle against racial inequalities arises in these discourses on a decolonial monumentality, that of artistic technique is equally important. The reflection on the decolonization of the monument then envisages the break with the old monument in all the matrix aspects that led to the genesis and realization of the previous sculptural forms.

While the debates around the Colston statue agree on the need to rethink the content of public representation of Black people in the city, the modalities mobilized by artists are not limited to in situ forms. In March 2020, Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins produced *Echoes of our ancestors*, a video (in collaboration with ECHOES), that plastically interprets the approach taken from the point of view of decolonial reflections on the narrative and visual responses to be opposed to the dominant memorial narrative of slavery in Bristol through the digital means of video. She is the Founder and Creative Director at Razana Afrika. Christelle is also a makeup artist (for fashion, film and TV), writer and performer based in Bristol. Christelle’s professional background also includes working in the education sector for over 15 years undertaking programme/project management roles with an international focus.

She is also co-director of a small theatre company called Black Women Let Loose Theatre Company (Figure 27) and they write, perform, produce, and direct their own materials.



Figure 27: Black Women Let Loose Company, *Shades of our lives*, Bristol Old Vic, Photography by Marine Schütz, 2019.

Michael Jenkins is a self-shooting, director, producer and writer of film and TV. He is extremely motivated to bring well-told and untold stories to as wide an audience as possible and believes passionately in the role of film as an engine for change and understanding. In 2015 he was the subject of a BBC Radio 4 documentary – ‘*Michael and the mummies*’ – following him as he makes one of his films. He was recently voted among the 100 most influential people in Bristol in the BME power list 2018 (Figure 28).



Figure 28: Michael Jenkins.

An award-winning filmmaker he won Best Short film for ‘Check the Label’ at The Royal Television Society Awards 2018 and won two BBC Local Radio Gillard Awards for the Diversity and Community award categories.

He launched the only black owned TV Production Company in the Southwest called *Blak Wave* in 2020. He is part of the BAFTA/BFI Network Crew 2020 and currently in post-production on a short film he has written and directed called *Pickney*, funded by the BFI.

The video proposes a journey around the urban traces of slavery, Guinea street and the empty plinth of the Colston statue, which lead to a reminder of the origins of the city's wealth. Filming the toponymy comes down to questioning the concrete topography of the reconstructed city as an inseparable site of African spaces. Plastically, the artists materialize the co-presence of African and European spaces by shooting sites that embody the entanglement of histories. Here, Guinea Street evokes “both the place where Africans were stolen in Africa but also the place where boats leave the city and return from their trade (Figure 29) (Pellecuer 2021).



Figure 29: Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins, 2020, *Echoes of our ancestors*, video HD.

Furthermore, Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins exploit the technique of montage to visualize the co-presence of stories and spaces by alternating between visual references to a metropolitan urban space and those to a traditional African dancer played by the cultural producer and artist Ade Sowemimo. The symbolism of this figure, dressed in traditional clothing, refers to the Zangbetos of Benin and to Obaluaye Babalu-Aye, the Orisha God of healing (Figure 30).



Figure 30: Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins, *Echoes of our ancestors*, 2021, video HD.

If africanizing the sites of slavery in Bristol is part of a memorial guerrilla war aimed at deconstructing a civic narrative that represses the traumatic origin of the city's wealth, the ways in which the artists visualize it testify to a politics of representation in which notions of healing and power are imposed. The rewriting of the black memory of the city in a perspective of emancipation also passes through the wandering in the city that takes place in the steps of Christelle Pellecuer, dressed as a queen. The discourse she makes on this figure leads to consider not only the traumatic dimension of slavery but the strength of African cultural traditions. For the artist, the queen “represents the spirit of the ancestors, but also the royalty, wealth and vitality of the African people before colonialism destroyed the many powerful kingdoms and rich traditions and cultures (Pellecuer 2021)”.

The discourse on emancipation that the video proposes, however, seems to be contingent on the digital strategies in *Echoes of our ancestors*. The new technologies are indeed endowed with a productive and specific meaning for the populations in diasporic situation to whom they give a sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity. They constitute plastic modalities through which feelings of identity and belonging are reconciled through media and cultural images. With the death of George Floyd, it was precisely through these technologies that the decolonial struggle was able to enter the daily lives of diasporic communities. From this point of view, *Echoes of our ancestors* addresses the decolonial memorial debate by seizing the visual tools that were the starting point of the iconoclastic wave of June 2020, making the practices of the digital visual regime an additional tool in the constitution of a political community.

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Key practices in Cape Town, by Daniela Franca Joffe

- *Thania Petersen*, visual and installation artist
- *Ilze Wolff*, artist/architect
- *Doung Anwar Jahangeer*, artist/architect
- *Bonita Bennett*, director of the District Six Museum
- *The Rev. Cedric van Dieman*, chairman of the Protea Village Communal Property Association

The different aesthetic and civic discourses and practices included in this text could all be viewed as examples of the ECHOES principle of reemergence (Knudsen, 2018), in that they are all committed to addressing the specters of the past and the colonial entanglements of the present in a way that opens to a different kind of future. A range of supplementary theoretical frameworks could no doubt also be applied to them. For the most part, however, I have allowed our Cape Town interlocutors to speak for themselves, since this felt like the most respectful way of presenting their ideas.

In addition to the individuals included in this report, our group also met with the following individuals during our week-long Cape Town workshop:

Judith Westerfeld, visual and installation artist

Calvyn Gilfellan, CEO of The Castle of Good Hope

Erica de Greef, Lesiba Mabitsela, Liesl Hartman, Tammy Langtry, Michaela Limberis, Gcotyelwa Mashiqqa, former and current members of the curatorial team at Zeitz MOCAA

Owen Martin, chief curator at the Norval Foundation

Rhoda Isaacs, project officer for the Recentring AfroAsia Project and member of the Making Music Productions team

Meghna Singh, visual artist and filmmaker

Stephen Symons, poet, and scholar

Steven Robbins, academic and author

Details of some of these discussions will be included in subsequent reports.

Thania Petersen

“We are the good, we are the bad, we are the damaged”: Close-readings of past, present, and future”

Thania Petersen is a multidisciplinary artist whose work to date has included photographic self-portraits, installations, and multisensory-based performance. We met her on the morning of Monday, 25 March, at the WHATIFTHEWORLD art gallery on Buiten Street in Cape Town’s Central Business District. It was the final day of her show *IQRA*, and she had agreed to meet with us to talk about her latest work and about her artistic practice more generally.

Thania began by emphasizing that *IQRA* marks a shift from her previous work in self-portraiture, which “directly dealt with our past and readdressing our history” (Petersen, 2019). She explained that this previous work was an extended intervention into the systematic erasure and diminishment of South Africa’s Cape Malay community:

I come from a community in Cape town called the Cape Malays. I lived in England for a very long time, and when I returned back to South Africa—you have this idea of what you expect “home” to be. But I didn’t feel at home at all. I actually felt quite ignored. People asked me in the street, Where are you from? So then I tried to understand how people saw us, as a people. We’re not taken seriously at all. If you think of “Cape Malay”, you think of Bo-Kaap and curry and colorful houses. And this is not our contribution to society. We have had an unbelievable impact on shaping the culture of this country and culture ... We are responsible for Afrikaans—the very language they claim is Dutch is actually a creolized language, created first by the Malays and written in Arabic script, not even in English script. The food that you eat. You can’t walk down the street at a certain time of the day [without hearing] the *adhan* of the mosques. We are intertwined into the very existence and culture and fabric of South Africa, but we are not given any recognition at all. (Petersen, 2019)

She framed her earlier work as a “counter-narrative”, one that necessarily had to be carried out through art, since colonial narrative- and art-making have been integral to the edifice of erasure that she is working against:

Art has been very instrumental in diminishing our importance as people, because of the way we were portrayed—especially by colonial painters, people like Irma Stern. The Malays were always kind of seen as decorative, always seen in the landscape as being quite submissive, quite pretty ... So, for me, when I came back from London, I felt the need to use art to counter that damage, in a sense. So the first lot of work that I did was based on lots of self-portraits, and the reason I put myself into my work was to create visibility for people who have become invisible in South Africa. So that was very much a counter-narrative.

The impetus for this counter-discourse was the discovery of her own royal bloodline, and the radical way in which the truth about her personal heritage departed from received ideas about Cape Malay identity. As she put it:

We’re always taught in schools and in our education system that we were slaves, we were slaves. They kind of give you this impression that you were picked up on some beach in Sumatra and thrown here and helped to build this glorious colony. But when I went into it ... when I went to the Indonesian consulate ... I discovered that we were actually royalty. We were the complete opposite of what we are taught. I am, and so is probably a lot of the community, a descendant of a man called Tuan Guru. He’s buried in Bo Kaap, and he was in fact a prince, and so were most of the men who brought here in the first lot of ... ships, because they were causing a revolt in Indonesia ... and so the only way to prevent them from creating some sort of political revolution—because they had the power, they had the money, they had the education—was to put them in exile on Robben Island ... What matters is how far removed we are from the truth. It’s the complete opposite end of the scale. (Petersen, 2019)

Thania’s *I Am Royal* series (see FIGURES 1–2) in particular allows the suppressed truth about Cape Malay heritage to reemerge (Knudsen, 2018). The artist’s directly implicated body is draped in explicit markers of Indonesian grandeur and photographed at “sites significant to issues of slavery, forced removals” (WHATIFTHEWORLD, 2015). These include Bo-Kaap (an inner-city district

where Moslem migrants settled in the 1800s), the Cape coast (the site of Dutch, slave, and political-exile arrivals at the Cape), “earlier” District Six (a mixed community of former slaves, artisans, traders, and immigrants in the century leading up to apartheid), “later” District Six (the site of apartheid-era forced removals, in the aftermath of the 1950 Group Areas Act), and Athlone (an apartheid- designated “Coloured” group area on the Cape Flats).

The decimation, devastation, and dispossession associated with many of these sites are juxtaposed in this series with the self-possessed, sovereign, stately image of the artist- as-queen. The artist inserts “herself in the geography of history and time and reinterprets the language of colonialism, the gaps between, to embrace the fullness of being human” (WHATIFTHEWORLD, 2015).

Thania’s work of “expanding and deepening the narrative to assert a victor as opposed to a victim” (WHATIFTHEWORLD, 2015) continues in *IQRA*, but now with religion— and Islam in particular— as the artist’s main focus. Broadly speaking, *IQRA*, meaning “read” in Arabic, is about the corruption of the essence of Islam by Saudi Arabia’s main cultural export: Wahabism. It features a series of hand-embroidered prayer mats in a range of different styles, whose bottom edges are marked—almost scorched—by the nullifying black that has become a stand-in for Wahabism the world over (see FIGURES 3–4).

These prayer mats, the artist explained to us, “are trying to talk about and show the infiltration of these new and hardcore extreme ideologies into our sacred spaces” (Petersen, 2019). In terms of her choice of media, she said that “embroidery and textile have always been a way of retaining or celebrating cultural history”, whether in Palestine, in Iraq, or in Afghanistan (Petersen, 2019). They represent “storytelling and recording and holding onto cultural histories and identities” (Petersen, 2019).



FIGURE 1: Thania Petersen, *Bokaap* (2015), *I Am Royal* series. Photograph by WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery



FIGURE 2: Thania Petersen, *I Am Royal* series, *Cape Coast* (2015). Photograph by WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery

In our conversation, Thania made a clear link between the rise of religious fundamentalism—not within Islam exclusively, but “across the board”—and the ongoing legacy of colonialism:

My more recent work deals with a postcolonial global narrative, and almost a modern or contemporary colonialism, which I believe feeds off and is fueled by our older colonial situations ... If you think about it, [the countries where religious nationalism arises] are all these sort of postcolonial situations, because people do not know who they are anymore. We are not who we think we are. We are not “African” and we are not “Indian” and we are not “European”. We are completely mixed. There’s no such thing as homogeny. There’s no such thing as purity. But I feel like people are trying to find a space where they can find a sense of purity, and they’re doing that within their religions. (Petersen, 2019)

Behind this cautionary narrative is, again, a deeper counter-narrative about Islam and about religion in general, one that seeks to reconnect us not only with the primordial wisdom and beauty of ancient texts and teaching, which we are invited to “reread”, as it were, but also with the decolonial and liberatory potential inherent in religions such as Islam, whose history also needs to be reread and reclaimed.

The artist brought this message home by describing what Islam has meant for communities in the colonial and apartheid South African context:

From our perspective, being a Muslim community in South Africa ... Islam has never been anything but liberating for us. It has been a liberating force. And throughout colonialism, it was a counter-narrative, it was a revolutionary narrative. It spoke against colonialism, it spoke for brotherhood, it spoke against racism. Tuan Guru opened up the very first mosque in South Africa and the very first interracial school, and it’s standing still today in Owl Street in Bo Kaap.

People from all over came, all races, all colors, whether they were from Mozambique, from Ceylon, from Madagascar ... They came out of their attraction to this counter-narrative, which

liberated them. It made them feel good, it made them feel worthwhile. It made them feel that the people who were ... enslaving them were nothing but pieces of shit, because actually that's what they were— sorry, but let's face it. Suddenly, you see these people doing these barbaric things, and you don't admire them, you think that these are inhumane, ungodly things.

And you lose your respect, and you don't love for this world anymore. You live for something else. (Petersen, 2019)

The total divergence between what the artist has always known to be true about Islam, on the one hand, and its manifestation in forms such as Wahabism and jihadism, on the other, “propelled” her to create *IQRA*, as a means of “reading into” the troubling global state of religion: “Because what is happening in the world and the Islam you see—that is not Islam,” she told us (Petersen, 2019). The exhibition seems in part to be about facilitating, through close reading, the reemergence (Knudsen, 2018) of a revolutionary, transcendental energy within Islam that has been buried and betrayed in the postcolonial moment but that the artist understands to be at the heart of the religion's legacy.

In the piece *Al Hurra* (which roughly translates as “Free Woman”), this close reading turns to Muslim womanhood, challenging the mainstream conflation of Islam and women's oppression (see FIGURE 4). The artist told us that this conflation frustrates her, because it is completely incongruent with her experience and upbringing within the Cape Malay community:



FIGURE 3: Thania Petersen, *IQRA* (2019). Photograph by WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery

There's nothing worse than being a Muslim woman and everybody says to you, Oh, shame, poor you. We don't come from a patriarchal community in any way in Cape Town. The Malay community is a matriarchal community. It's very much equal ... The women have always ruled the house, laid down the law, disciplined the kids. The women are very strong and respected within the community. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that, because of apartheid and colonialism, and because of our history, economically we were on par with the men, because we worked as well. So we don't come from a society where the men work while we sit at home ... Home industry has been a very big thing, and women have always been at the forefront of that in the community and therefore have always earned enough ... money to assist. There's

never been any economic imbalance in the house and therefore there's never been any patriarchal bullshit happening, really. As far as I know—that's my experience. So that, for me, is another thing that really irritates me. (Petersen, 2019)

Thania explained that this irritation prompted her to do research into Islamic women who chose to be Muslim of their own accord and whose remarkable life-stories are “completely forgotten ... buried away” (Petersen, 2019). These women include Sayyida al Hurra, 16th-century Andalusian pirate-queen and devoted Sufi; Razia Sultan, 13th-century Sultan(ah) of Delhi and outspoken advocate for gender equality and neutrality; Nana Asma'u, revered 19th-century Hausa-Fulani scholar, poet, and teacher of both men and women; and Sarah van de Kaap, who is the artist's favorite, “because she's our own” (Petersen, 2019). Van die Kaap was the daughter of a freed black slave who inherited and owned property in her own right in Bo-Kaap, including the building that in 1794 became the famous mosque and school that Tuan Guru would develop and that remains operational to this day:

The very first patron of education, and free education, across the board, was a woman in Cape Town, a woman of color: Sarah van die Kaap. And she's completely forgotten. There are all these incredible women in our histories who we just erase. So this is also a way of memorializing and bringing them out again. (Petersen, 2019)

Forgetting and remembering; erasing and bringing back. These processes are not neatly resolved or concluded in Thania's work, nor in her discourse about the work, where one force does not win over the other and both must instead be reckoned with.

In the prayer mats on display all around us, for example, the scorched blackness seemed at times to be creeping ominously upwards, threatening to swallow up the mats' vibrant colors, patterns, and inscriptions once and for all—while, at other times, the vibrancy and color seemed rather to have emerged, or reemerged, victorious out of the scorched blackness. Similarly, at the center of the gallery stood an imposing totem pole made entirely of thick, life-denying black thread but nonetheless still dotted with thousands of tiny *azimats* (talismans), containing “the life-affirming mantras of the world's religions” (WHATIFTHEWORLD, 2019). Here, again, the tension between dark and light, despair and hope, was striking, with no clear victor or neat resolution at our disposal.



FIGURE 4: Thania Petersen, *Al Hurra* (2019). Photography by WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery

This tension emerged strongly in the final part of our conversation, when Thania spoke openly with us on the subjects of identity and restitution in the current South African political moment. Though she had used the designation “Cape Malay” throughout her talk with us, she now qualified this usage and expressed a desire to move beyond such designations, necessary though they have been for her in the past:

You go through all these things and you realize, actually the only way forward is to just call yourself African, because you are African, because we *are* Xhosa, and we *are* Sotho, and we *are* Khoi ... If you come from a lineage that has been created in Cape Town, we are a creolized society, we have all got each other in each other ... If you really think that you are pure in any way and you don’t have a little bit of Dutch and a little bit of this and a little of that in you, you

are very sadly mistaken ... When I came back [from England], I really wanted to be one of those pure people. I wanted to be *that* Malay, who came from Indonesia, and Tuan Guru, and all these things.

Eventually, I had to work through it and realize: this is not OK. It is OK to know where you come from, but don't ... hold onto that fantasy of something that's precolonial. Because it's very attractive to be something precolonial, because it's a time that's glorious, it's a time before rape, it's a time before pillage, a time before abuse, and so we all want to be there. But that's not who we are. We are all the things: we are the good, we are the bad, we are the damaged. And we have been damaged. We're damaged. Everyone in this Cape Town is fucked ... We need to actually now work together to heal our trauma. Because we're suffering from post-traumatic stress—I really believe that ... Now we need to realize, I am the same as you, and you are the same as me. (Petersen, 2019)

Immediately, however, the artist shared her discomfort and sadness at having articulated this vision of restitution based on sameness, entanglement, and unity. As appealing as this vision might be to her ideologically, she expressed how difficult it is to commit to it fully, in the absence of any real sign of socio-economic justice or change in the country. In doing so, the extent of the damage and trauma that she had just been describing became poignant:

But even saying that now, I feel really uncomfortable saying a part of me is white. Because of what they did! But actually we have to work through these things. But I don't know ... I don't have the answers. I just know that separation is not the way, because separation perpetuates apartheid ... Even now, having this conversation makes me feel sad. You don't want to be a traitor to your people in any way. You don't just want to be like Mandela and say, Oh, look, freedom, rainbow nation, when it's not. And at the end of the day, that kind of ideology also doesn't change anything. That rainbow nation bullshit didn't change anything. It just kept the white people in their positions and kept the black people working for them and kept the Malays making the food ...

To be honest, I really do think that economics is a big part of it, and that [only when] people really just give back everything that was stolen and there is a sense of economic equality, then

people can actually have a conversation about who we are. But until that point, I don't feel like I want to stand next to someone who stole my graveyard in Constantia and say, We are the same people ... I don't want to call that man sitting in that house next door my brother, my sister. I don't want to be a part of that. I don't even want to be called a South African if he's a South African. That's the kind of trauma that I feel.

But I do feel an allegiance to my black sister and my black brother. I do feel an allegiance to my Indian sister and my Indian brother. I do feel like *we* are one, because we have a shared history, which is a bit different, because we're on the other end. But until they fix things—and I think this is the responsibility of the white people in this country—only they have the power to change things, only they have the power to say, Let's redistribute this, let's put up trauma centers in every flipping corner of every neighborhood, let's put up rehabilitation centers, let's take all this money that we're living off the interest of (because ... half of the families in this country are living off the interest of their colonial wealth) and let's put it back. And only until that happens are people of color going say, You know what, let's all be South African. But until that point we're not ready. I'm not ready. And I love people! But there's a hurt. There is a hurt that exists. (Petersen, 2019)

I think this powerful statement by the artist, in addition to encapsulating so lucidly what is at stake in the contemporary South African dilemma, raises important questions about readiness and timing. We may want to move past binary separations, embrace entanglement, and put our hope a decolonial future. We may know, theoretically, that this is the only way forward. Yet we may, quite simply, not be ready to do so, because of how much remains broken and unresolved—both materially, in the socio-economic structure of the city around us, and internally, in our own traumatized hearts. And this state of being is not only entirely valid but also sacrosanct. It should not be tidied up, theorized away, or resolved, in the same way that the prayer mats and the totem pole do not have to be one thing or another, either all darkness or all light.

Concluding our conversation with Thania, visual artist and filmmaker Meghna Singh, who had joined us for the meeting, summed up where we had arrived:

I thought it was interesting how you started off being quite progressive about identity, when you said it should be all mixed, and I'm South African above all, and then just after that you claimed, There is hurt, and I actually can't be that. I can't actually be that progressive. So that was very honest. One could relate to that when you were talking about it ... There's idealism, and in theory that's how we should move forward. But then, no, you can't do that, because there's too much hurt. (Petersen, 2019)

Nick Shepherd from our group then added, addressing Thania: "Which is maybe where we're at, as a country, right? That little crux that you're talking about" (Petersen, 2019). Through Thania's honesty and transparency, we had accessed the crux of colonial heritage in South Africa, with all its messy, heavy baggage. Welcome to Cape Town.

Ilze Wolff

"Heritage that can pay homage": Interventions in and into space

After enjoying a delicious cake that Thania had baked for us and viewing the show's film installation piece, *BAQA*, we set off on foot to Wolff Architects on Buitengracht Street, at the edge of Bo-Kaap. There we met with architect and artist Ilze Wolff in the studio she shares with her husband and partner Heinrich Wolff. Thania joined us for the conversation.

Spread out on the table where we sat in the studio were different issues of *Pumflet: Art, Architecture and Stuff*, the publication Ilze co-founded several years ago as part of a series of public engagement interventions. Before we discussed this ongoing project, Ilze gave us an overview of her architectural practice, contextualizing it within the "charged landscape" of the country:

On the one hand, we develop buildings, we make architecture, we make interventions in space through bricks and mortar. And on the other hand, I also like to say that we make interventions *into* space, which is about thinking about loss and thinking about not the bricks and mortar but ... the social imagination.

As an architect in South Africa, you cannot actually ignore the charged landscape that we sit in, in terms of the history of forced removals, the history of colonial conquest, and the history of spatial injustice, essentially. How do we situate ourselves in this world where we're actually making space, we're intervening in space? How do we do that mindfully and with a consciousness of the deep history of our space? (Wolff, 2019)

Ilze went on to explain that, for her, the way into this mindfulness and consciousness has been narrative and storytelling. Through an unrelenting questioning in search for the real “story” behind any project, she brings a “challenge” to the practice of architecture:

How we get to that kind of consciousness is through a deep engagement with very obscure narratives. I always try to figure out: What is the story? I always ask people in our studio, when they embark on a project: So, what's the story? What is the story here? And narrative and storytelling are so much a part of how one makes any intervention ... It's a way into research. It's kind of a challenge. I think what I bring to the architectural practice is a challenge—it's not an easy thing to do. The easiest thing to do is just to draw the plans, do what the client wants, meet the budget, everybody's happy, no leaks (which never happens!). But that's the easy way of dealing with it. The other, more unsettling way is to question: Why are we even doing this? Is our intervention necessary? (Wolff, 2019)

The challenge might take the form of telling a client that they do not think a building should be constructed at all, or else it might mean convincing the government that the

in the plans for a local hospital (Wolff, 2019). Sometimes this means that projects take many long years, as issues get negotiated and dissected, to say nothing of the general bureaucratic slowness involved in government work in particular.

Because of the long duration of most projects, Ilze found the need to develop an alternative, more nimble platform for disseminating and receiving ideas in the public sphere. And so *Pumflet* was born:

Because, for me, these projects take so long, I needed, we needed a quick way to think through and present some of our projects that are simmering—that are on the stove but not ready to present in a proper “dinner” setting yet—and to explore them with people in a public setting. We wanted to figure out a way to develop a public culture around our research, and exhibitions and these kinds of settings ... are a way to do that. Lectures and talks and trips and open-house tours ... were a way to think through how do we actually collect these wisdoms that we can implement back into our practice. How do we develop our agenda, essentially, and how do we develop our position. (Wolff, 2019)

While this series of work plays out in the public setting, in the form of workshops or site-specific events, every intervention leaves a remnant in the form of a printed pamphlet-type book (*Pumflet*). The “method” for *Pumflet* emerged when Ilze was asked to design a poster for a friend’s play about the unearthed human remains at Prestwich Street in Cape Town. Nadia Davids’ play explored this difficult history through a combination of language and movement, with choreography by Jay Pather bringing the text to life (Wolff, 2019). “It was very beautifully expressed, that history, and I wanted to be part of it,” Ilze said, “because it’s part of thinking about architecture differently” (Wolff, 2019). While using white tape and photographs to create the poster for the play, she became “very interested in creating graphics that were not computerized”, an aesthetic that remains central to the *Pumflet* books’ design (Wolff, 2019). She explained her choice of tape: “The tape and the putting together of the actual publication is all cut and paste ... The way you place the tape becomes very important, because it becomes a way of marking something or taking out something or even erasing mistakes” (Wolff, 2019).

When Thania mentioned that this method reminded her of childhood, and of being unmediated by screens and devices, Ilze affirmed how valuable the process has been for her creatively:

I've found bookmaking and these kinds of publications a really good way of ordering thought. You've got a lot of thoughts in your head, but how does one edit it to become a coherent statement or position? With essay-writing, one can also think through that, but with images and graphic design it becomes a little bit more transitory. It crosses many boundaries for me, and I've found it really productive. If there's nothing to put on a page, you can always put a piece of tape there, for now. (Wolff, 2019)

In one book, "Luxurama", Ilze documents an intervention she made at the old Luxurama Theatre in Wynberg, which during apartheid served a "mixed" audience for many years—through a loophole in the draconian Separate Amenities Act—and was a stage for big international acts such as Percy Sledge and Eartha Kitt. With the building long since fallen into disrepair and disuse, Ilze decided to stage a ceremonial funeral for the building as part of the 2018 Live Arts Festival in Cape Town.

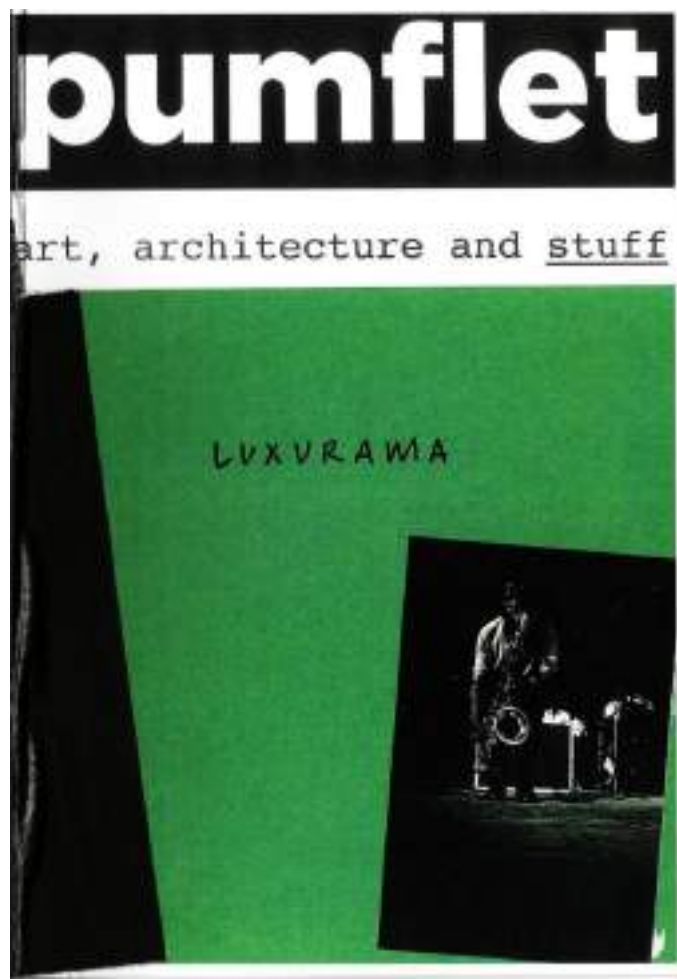


FIGURE 5: Ilze Wolff, "Luxurama", cover page, *Pumflet: Art, Architecture and Stuff* (2018). Image supplied by artist

The ceremony included a historical tour of the building by its former manager, a performance by a funeral procession band, and a celebratory tea party at a homegrown local café (Wolff, 2018B). This ritual paid homage to the building's complicated heritage and various forgotten specters, who were allowed to reemerge (Knudsen, 2018) before being laid to rest.



FIGURE 6: Ilze Wolff, "Luxurama", sample page, *Pumplet: Art, Architecture and Stuff* (2018). Image supplied by artist



FIGURE 7: Ilze Wolff, “Luxurama”, sample page, *Pumflet: Art, Architecture and Stuff* (2018). Image supplied by artist

The “Luxurama” book gives this ritual an after-life befitting the subject matter. It documents the process in a spectral sort of way that is in keeping with the style of all the *Pumflet* editions: empty space; floating heads; long, introspective letters from Ilze to her collaborators; isolated clippings from newspapers, journals, musical scores, and social media (see FIGURES 5–7). Together, these fragments, cut and pasted and held together with tape, form a story of how and why the intervention unfolded, and of the Luxurama itself (Wolff, 2018A).

Later, our conversation turned to the challenges or interventions that Ilze has made beyond her personal practice, in the broader institutions of architecture and heritage. This part of the conversation turned on the small missionary town Wuppertal in the Cederberg mountains, which late last year was razed to the ground by a devastating wildfire. Because of its perfectly preserved Cape Dutch architecture, the town had, pre- wildfire, always been “a prime pedagogical site for architects”, and Ilze remembers going there as a second-year student to “study” it, to draw the landscape, and, as she put it, “maybe talk to one or two of the inhabitants” (Wolff, 2019). Mostly, as second-year students, they were there to party. With the town reduced to ashes, she realized that the architecture community needed to do things differently this time:

When I heard over December that this village had burned down, I was quite moved. I thought, maybe this is a way for us to engage, but not in the same way that we did when we were second-year students? The Cape Institute for Architecture put out a call to say that they wanted to raise funds to help rebuild the houses ... [Wuppertal] is very rich, in terms of pedagogy and studying, but there's a violence in studying that. I went to the meeting and I said: Can we please not do that? (Wolff, 2019)

Ilze's vision of doing things differently involves using architecture as a generative, restorative force, one that reads "heritage" seriously and deeply and that tells the whole story of a place and its people. She described what this would look like in the Wuppertal context:

So our intervention in Wuppertal is to go and—we want to assist the heritage process, because it has to take place, but how does one do it so that it doesn't stifle? How does one do it to actually restore some of the dignity that was lost when people came there and just examined? I and the people who are interested in being part of this team want to have a conversation with each one of those [inhabitants]. There are only 53 homes—it's not a lot. Imagine if you just have a conversation with everyone.

The other aspect is to pay homage, because these homes were built by descendants of slaves, descendants of workers, descendants of Khoisan. They were never acknowledged. And it's so easy to acknowledge. I've been looking at the history of architects that have documented Wuppertal. They say: Oh, the church was done by so and so and so. That was done by so and so. Everyone has names. And then the houses were done by "unknown builders". So I thought maybe it would be interesting if the Cape Institute [for Architecture] could say:

This is of heritage value because these individuals or these families built them, or these were the architects of it. Without becoming all preachy or pretentious about it. But if this is our so-called heritage, then let's be serious about it. About who contributed to this heritage. (Wolff, 2019)

Here, Ilze offered up a counter-practice to the institutional status quo in South Africa, where colonial structures are meticulously preserved for students' benefits, while the actual needs and histories of those who live in them today are seen as incidental to the main event of the built environment. What would it mean to simply talk to the inhabitants, she wondered, to find out what *their* vision of rebuilding *their* town looks like?

As a model for this more attentive, more reverential style of heritage, Ilze cited Sol Plaatje and the investigative work he did in the aftermath of the Native Land Act of 1913, which forced the black majority into 7% of the land. She is drawn to Plaatje's process because of the way it pays homage to and commemorates the injustices of the past:

I'm interested in heritage that can pay homage and that can think about what Sol Plaatje talks about. Sol Plaatje went on this tour of observation to understand the effects of the [Native] Land Act of 1913—he went ten years later. To me, that is a kind of a heritage practice: how do you observe, how do you think through, the legacies of spatial violence. And that tour of observation should still be ongoing. And I'm trying to do that with this practice, going through every situation and thinking ... whose heritage? Heritage has benefits as well, in terms of homage, in terms of multiple construction of imaginaries, narratives, storytelling, indigenous knowledge, local knowledge—those kinds of things, the kind of life-giving aspects of it. But there is a threat that heritage can be a kind of a—killing ... It becomes a kind of a death. (Wolff, 2019)

Paying homage, charting legacies of spatial violence, tours of observation, life-giving heritage, heritage-as-death. These are some of the key words we took away from our life-giving conversation with architect-artist Ilze Wolff. In a trendy hipster joint around the corner in Bo-Kaap, an area where community protests against rapid gentrification have been more or less constant for the past several years, we continued our conversation over lunch. Three days later, on 28 March, the community won

its four-year-long battle to have Bo-Kaap declared a Heritage Protection Overlay Zone (Chambers, 2019), and in early May, a week before the national elections, 19 sites in the area were declared national heritage sites, in an unprecedented (and strategically timed) move by the Department of Arts and Culture (Evans and Somdyala, 2019).

In Wuppertal, tucked away in the depths of the Cederberg mountain range, heritage protection and a fixation on the built environment served the architectural discipline but became a “burden” for residents, to borrow Thania’s term (Wolff, 2019), who were not only treated as dolls in a pretty dollhouse but who also could not alter or adapt their houses in any way—even as drought conditions made their historic thatch roofs impractical and, ultimately, extremely dangerous (Wolff, 2019). In Bo-Kaap, however, situated as the area is in the very center of Cape Town, heritage protection of the built environment became the only way to counter free market forces that would turn the dense lattice of centuries-old cobbled streets, mosques, and brightly painted houses into an urban playground for the rich. Heritage, as Ilze had articulated, could be life or death, depending on who it is serving. She had taught us that this very question—whose heritage?—was the most important one to ask.

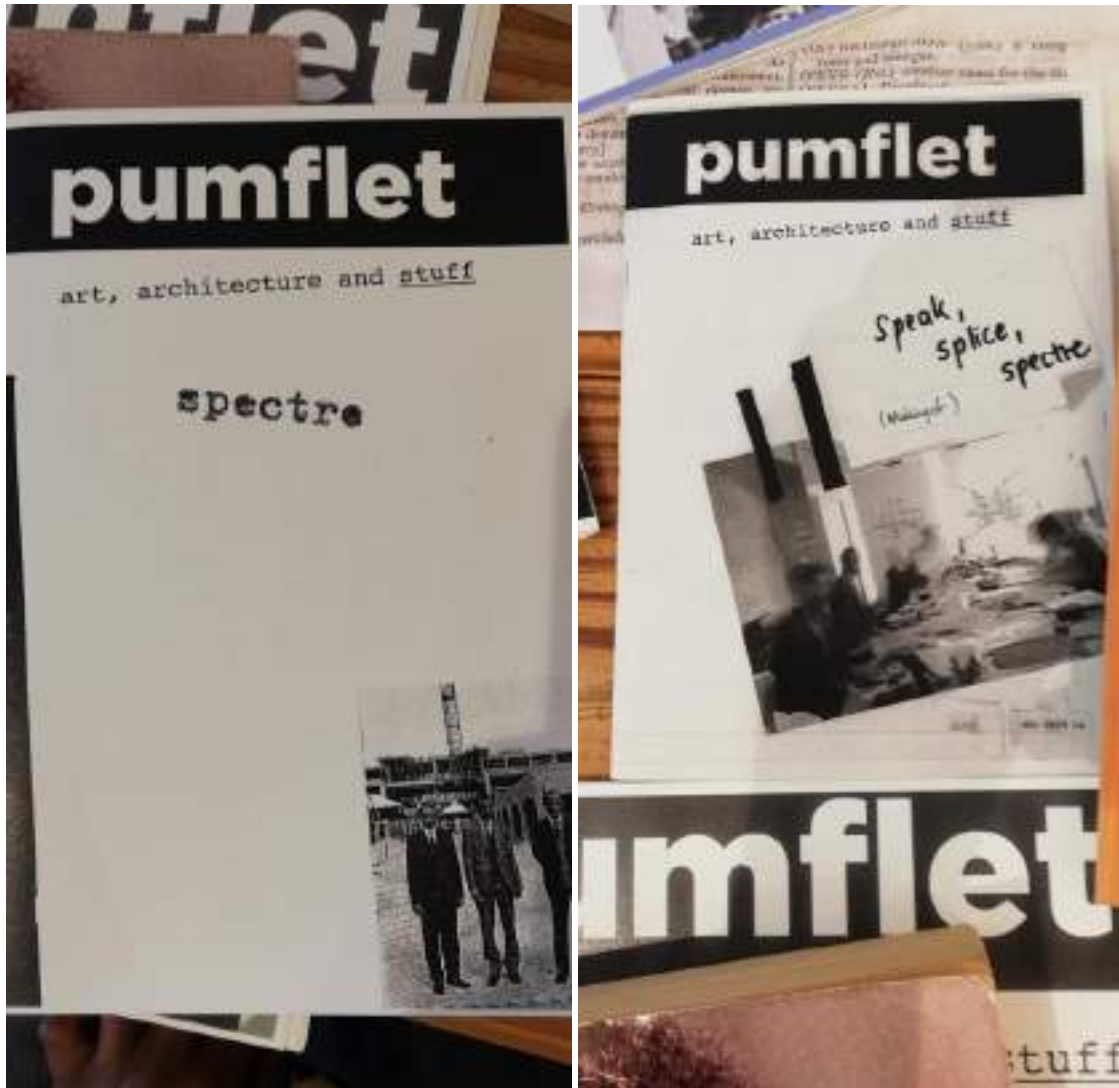


FIGURE 8: Ilze Wolff, Israel Ogundare, and Megan Ho-Tong, “Spectre” and “Speak, Splice, Spectre (The Making Of)”, *Pumflet: Art, Architecture and Stuff* (2017). Photographs by Shawn Sobers (2019)

Doung Anwar Jahangeer

“Architecture without walls”: The liberatory magic of inbetween space

Doung Anwar Jahangeer is a Mauritian-born, Durban-based artist and architect who has made many creative interventions in Cape Town, as well as in various cities around the world. Doung joined our group at the District Six Museum on the morning of Tuesday, 26 March, and together we did a tour of the museum with a man named Joe Schaffers, a former District Six resident and a storyteller at the museum. The experience was humbling. From the District Six Museum, we went to the South African National Museum, where Nick spoke to our group about the museum’s former “ethnographic galleries” and about the San rock art still on display. We then got lost for a while in different eerie rooms filled with stuffed buck, fish, birds, and giraffes, before regrouping at the nearby Company’s Garden Restaurant for lunch and a conversation with artist Judith Westerveld. Our day ended a roundtable discussion and exhibition walk-about with the young curatorial team at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA).

On Wednesday, 27 March, we sat down with Doung to hear more about his work over coffee at Muizenberg beach. We picked up the conversation again the following afternoon, before Doung flew back to Durban. When asked about his current projects, Doung explained to us that he prefers to think of his work in terms of a “process”:

I don’t believe in the concept of a project. My experience has led me to understand that it is about process, and then projects become strategic moments in the process that help to define the momentum. So my work is like that. It’s got no beginning and no end. There is a kind of beginning: the beginning is this colonial disposition that comes with me ... but there’s a moment where there was a pivot. It was not necessarily a shift but the realization of a different lenses through which I could reimagine myself. So the work is not something detached from the personal. So I’ll show you three projects within this process. (Jahangeer, 2019)

Doung speaks here of a “pivot” that instigated a process of “reimagining” himself and stresses that his various projects or interventions are “strategic moments” in this ongoing process (rather than ends in and of themselves). By the eighth year of this process of reimagining, Doung told us, he arrived at the philosophical underpinnings of his personal practice of architecture, which he summarized as follows:

The underpinning philosophy was, one, I was saying: Architecture without walls. And then number two, which came out of a realization I had in Mumbai, on the pavement: People in space make place—this is the romantic view, if you will. But the more inspirational view of architecture, and the flipside of it is: A dislocated people make a dysfunctional space. (Jahangeer, 2019)

Out of these principles, Doung’s NGO Dala (meaning *to make* or *to create* in isiZulu) was born, established as a “vehicle for social change” rather than a vehicle for “making profit” (Jahangeer, 2019).

Doung then proceeded to tell us the “story” of the pivotal events that led him to this point, framing it as exactly that: “This is also a story. I’m giving you a story. It’s nothing other than that” (Jahangeer, 2019). His story began with his travels through Africa and India after his completion of his postgraduate architectural degree in Durban. It was while travelling that his perception of architecture underwent a sea-change: “As a result of these travels, I understood architecture as a living thing, not a static sort of built form” (Jahangeer, 2019). The “realization” he had on the streets of Mumbai, alluded to in the quote above, played out like this:

This is where the idea of “architecture without walls” came from. After a long day of being a tourist, I was sitting on a bench, with my *Lonely Planet*. My wife was looking for a place for us to go and eat, and I was sitting there, zoning out ... looking through space. But in that moment of looking through, there was a momentary focus where I saw a family on the pavement. The wife was starting to light a fire next to a tree that was dead, the man was playing cards, the grandmother was sleeping literally on the back of a stray dog, and the kids were playing with firecrackers. It was twilight. Day and night were some form of inbetweenness, where time and space become entangled again.

I see this and I'm like, shit, public space is becoming private. I said to [my wife] Miranda: I'm going to walk through them and see what happens. I went and I walked through it and I was invisible. I walked back. I stood in the middle of it and I pretended [to be] the tourist looking around and trying to see this building or that. I wasn't chased out. I wasn't disturbed and asked, Who are you? I again just became part of it. Then I walked off and there was no fuss. So then again: Visibility, invisibility. Skin, body. Inside, outside. Binaries—it all started to make a little bit of sense. *That* architecture. (Jahangeer, 2019)

“Architecture,” Doung told us, *that* architecture, “is how people appropriate their struggles into magic. The magic of living” (Jahangeer, 2019). The architecture Doung had glimpsed in this pavement scene in Mumbai had nothing to do with walls or with the binaries that govern traditional architectural practice: private versus public, visible versus invisible, inside versus outside, and so on. Instead, it was an unbounded “living thing”, in which displaced people were creating their own dysfunctional space: in this case, a complex, private home space in the middle of a busy public street.

Doung returned to Durban from his travels charged with this new knowledge, but his “quest for investigating the profession in a more poetic way was denied by the school of architecture twice” (Jahangeer, 2019). This rejection led to “a profound disillusionment with the institution of learning of architecture and the profession of architecture” and, ultimately, to a “deep depression” and a number of suicide attempts (Jahangeer, 2019). Desperate, he embarked one night on what he calls a “suicidal walk”. In the white, middle-class academic circles where he had spent the majority of his time since arriving from Mauritius, the black inner-city of Durban was portrayed as a hotbed of murder and violence, a place to be avoided at all costs. So that is exactly where Doung went, heading out on foot from the suburbs:

I knew where to go to find death. So it was a suicidal journey towards the middle of town ... And when I got down to town, the actual opposite happened. People were asking me about my name, about where I was coming from—people were curious. And meanwhile my neighbors in the suburb have never asked me. They didn't know what is the sound of my voice. So I was confronted with another paradox: Who's right? Going towards my death made me find my life again ... The polarities, the binaries, of being born and dying were put face to face. (Jahangeer, 2019)

In embarking on this walk from the white suburbs to the black inner-city, Doung went from the certainty of his death to the life-giving experience of human connection, curiosity, and community. And so the walk turned everything on its head, blurring the binaries of life/death, black/white, danger/possibility, suburb/city.

This profound existential experience left him fascinated by what exists in the “inbetween” spaces: the spaces between binaries, a space he himself has always embodied through his mixed heritage. Walking became a method for exploring and practicing this architecture of the inbetween:

And out of that came the other conceptual frame that ties my whole work: how the inbetween space renders the binaries as absurd constructs. The inbetween, the creole, the creolization aspect of my own background started to come into play. So this is the walk for me. (Jahangeer, 2019)

Doung’s City Walk initiative emerged directly out this process and has seen him walking alone and with groups for over 17 years, in 13 different cities around the world. At various points during our conversation, Doung pointed to striking images he had taken of grass sprouting through cracks in the concrete surfaces of the cities he had walked through. These instances of defiant nature have been highly significant and suggestive for him as he has formulated a decolonial architectural practice:

This idea of the grass growing through the cracks of this urbanity that is so controlled and ordered is the most consistent thing and the most creative thing that I’ve come across in my world. And that, to me, observing the city through walking also, has led me to understand the little grass in the crack, in the fissure, in the betweenness, in the voids and the absence that gives meaning to presence, that we too often are not seeing because we are too busy *looking at*. You’ll find an attitude that is resistant, dissident, revolutionary, and liberatory. Those are the qualities of this very invisible force that often people would refer to as “resilient”, but I would turn it around: we are resilient to *its* force.

So this, for me, became essential when I started to think about this notion of creolité, creole culture, inbetweenness. How do I position the architectural practice in that? And this is what it comes to: asphalt, concrete, you name it—as soon as human control fails, nature prevails. As a form of redemption, as a form of poetry. (Jahangeer, 2019)

These instances where human control breaks down and nature takes over are powerful, in the same way that a street family building a home without walls is powerful, or that the creole is powerful, because these situations suggest larger creative processes at work—processes that architecture should include rather than shut out. As Doung explained, “resistance”, “dissidence”, “revolution”, and “liberation” are “keywords” that have informed his architectural process since he left architecture school (Jahangeer, 2019).

Doung then went on to talk about some of the interventions he has made within the “bigger discourse formulation” process that he is committed to (Jahangeer, 2019). One of these interventions is his Imbomvu series, which involves working with colonial statues. “Imbomvu”, meaning red in isiZulu, is the name of an earthy red clay used in the Zulu tradition to announce that the wearer has undergone a transition, such as becoming a mother or a sangoma (traditional healer), “but it is also as simple as protecting you against the sun”, explained Doung (Jahangeer, 2019). In this series, the artist used the imbomvu clay to facilitate a process of metamorphosis for colonial symbols on the South African landscape. Among these symbols was the Queen Victoria statue in central Durban, which the artist defaced/refaced with clay and renamed “Ma Dlamini”, a common Zulu name for a maternal figure (see FIGURE 9).



FIGURE 9: Doung Anwar Jahangeer, *Ma Dlamini* (2012), Queen Victoria statue, Durban. Image supplied by artist

This powerful act of transfiguration is both “forgiving” and deeply “dissident”, both an act of love and an act of monsterization, as the artist told us:

It started not rationally: it was just an impulse that I had, a love, a calling, to work with the Queen Victoria in Durban. Because that sculpture was so beautiful that I always wanted to do something with her, like make love to her, in some way—in a metaphorical way ...

It’s that grass that grows in that crack that is equally forgiving but yet very dissident, that renders beauty but at the same time monsterizes, brings it out, that defaces but at the same time refaces, that collapses the boundaries of hatred and love. (Jahangeer, 2019)

The transfigured Ma Dlamini—who is both colonial monarch and Zulu matriarch—occupies that inbetween architectural space that Doung is interested in, where boundaries are neutralized and where the entanglement (Knudsen, 2018) between categories such as foreign and indigenous, beloved and loathed, monster and mother is

left intact.



FIGURE 10: Doung Anwar Jahangeer, *Matebese Family* (2012), Settlers' National Monument, Grahamstown. Image supplied by artist Seeking to "carry on this thinking, this love affair" (Jahangeer, 2019), Doung performed a similar intervention in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, where we worked with the Settlers' National Monument, defacing/refacing the statued settler family with imbomvu clay and renaming them "the Matebese family" (see FIGURE 10). This is architectural practice as Doung defines it: it uses clay rather than walls to make, or remake, space (in this case, the space occupied by colonial symbols), and it renders that space dysfunctional and messy by introducing into it the ghosts of the displaced.

Emphasizing again the revolutionary, dissident nature of the Imbomvu series, Doung linked his process to what Fanon called the "fighting phase" of a national movement, where the combat is of a discursive nature rather than anything physical (see FIGURE 11):

The aim of the process is the develop a discourse, like Fanon talks about, and the title of the whole body is Fighting Phase, which is Fanon's third step of liberation within a national culture. And he talks about not picking up guns and spilling blood again, unlike what we are

hearing today in South Africa, but to develop a literature, another discourse that enables us to reconstitute and to assimilate the energies of the colonizers. (Jahangeer, 2019)

The distinction that Doung makes here between discursive liberation and more violent or literal liberatory energies is comparable to the difference between reemergence (Knudsen, 2018) and removal (Kølvraa, 2018) in the ECHOES framework, where removal is linked to movements such as Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) that understand restitution in terms of a complete overhaul of colonial structures. Doung in fact addressed the tension between his work and that of RMF during our conversation:

The Rhodes Must Fall, the “Must Fall”, program, is something that I understand where it’s coming from, I value its intention, but I remain a bit skeptic[al] in how it’s executed, and how it has developed its language and its form. Because it very quickly, to my mind, became capitalized into a rhetoric that is political but not politicized. So, in that sense, this work [in the Imbomvu series] talked about it and said to our colonial legacy that it’s not something to dismantle concretely—on the contrary, it is something to keep closer to us, something to better understand. It is, in the words again of Fanon, to reverse the conception of assimilation and to start to appropriate the culture of the colonizers, not to carry on in the rhetoric of decolonizing the minds of our fellow beings but maybe to start decolonizing the minds of the colonizers. So, in a sense, this is a moment of exchange, of forgiveness, maybe, of not defacing but refacing, not of expelling but of welcoming them home. (Jahangeer, 2019)

Here, Doung confronts head on the question of South Africa’s colonial heritage and legacy and contrasts the will to dismantle, deface, and expel coloniality with the will to decolonize it in a deeper way by keeping it close, refacing it, welcoming it in. He asks: What would it mean to “reverse the conception of assimilation” and appropriate for ourselves the cultural remnants of the colonizer, absorbing them into our own practice and therefore neutralizing their charge? This is in many respects what his architectural/artistic practice is about.

While Doung’s work and discourse makes space for “a moment of exchange, of forgiveness”, he is very clear on the fact that this process must be owned by—and its conversation must be on the “terms” of (Mignolo, 2009:4)—those who have been

colonized. It cannot be owned by Europe. In the second part of our conversation, which took place the following afternoon in central Cape Town, Doung shared his thoughts on the current state of cultural exchange between Africa and Europe. These thoughts have been shaped in particular by his interactions with European cultural agencies operating in Africa and by his experience at a workshop he was invited to in Frankfurt. I quote what he said at length because, as he said, it “echoes with ECHOES”:

This echoes with, I think, ECHOES ... And this is based on my engagement with the Goethe Institute and the Pro Helvetia in a very direct way about their presence as cultural agents in Africa who base themselves as teachers of their own language and then, secondary to that, funding cultural projects, which are decided by them—what is appropriate or not. I’ve been working with them a lot, and this has been sitting with me a lot.

It was also raised in this program in Frankfurt. It was called “Afropean: Mimicry and Mockery”, and it looked at drawing a parallel between apartheid and institutionalized racism in Germany. So that was quite interesting. But immediately, for me, the word “Afropean” was quite evocative and quite provocative. It seemed to me, based on my relationship with those European cultural agents, that there is consistently this desire for Europe to feel condoned with what they’ve done with colonization ...

It’s not direct. For me, over the course of a lot of interaction, it seems there is an underlying discourse that ... feels like a kind of fetishism, of not being able to let go. Like a criminal who always wants to come back to the site of the crime ... to see what’s happening, see whether they will be caught or not. It feels weird, but that’s how I’m starting to feel. We, here, we don’t have programs that will invite European artists to come to Africa and ask them, OK, so we want you to do a program around this and this and that. But it is constant from the other way around, and the agenda is not always transparent. So I don’t always know why Pro Helvetia is coming and telling me that they want to engage with me because they want to develop a two-year relationship between Switzerland and South Africa—for what? Who asked for that? And who’s telling us that this is what needs to be done? And there is the power of capital also. So it’s complex. (Jahangeer, 2019)

When African artists are constantly responding to invitations and requests and instructions from Europe, they are not setting the agenda, and the agenda, moreover, is not necessarily transparent to them. How can they avoid being coopted into Europe's efforts to absolve itself of the past without giving up any of the power or capital it gained from the past?

These astute observations necessarily raised the question of ECHOES' own agenda and even of the very dialog taking place between our research group and Doung in the moment recorded here. Doung's response was this:

Just like the work on the statue, what I'm saying is that it's offering a very good potential for us to keep the criticality alive, to pronounce those questions and to polish it so that we can then start to understand better—not to do anything, but just to understand better what's next. (Jahangeer, 2019)

The point, as Doung notes, is not to try to change anything—after all, as ECHOES researchers working with a Global South context, we cannot change our position as participants in a project directed and funded by the Global North. Rather, the point is to remain conscious of that position, to interrogate it, to foreground it, and to bring it into our dialogs wherever possible, following Doung's example. This, perhaps, is how we keep the criticality alive and how we move towards a decolonial future of North/South relations—towards “what's next”.

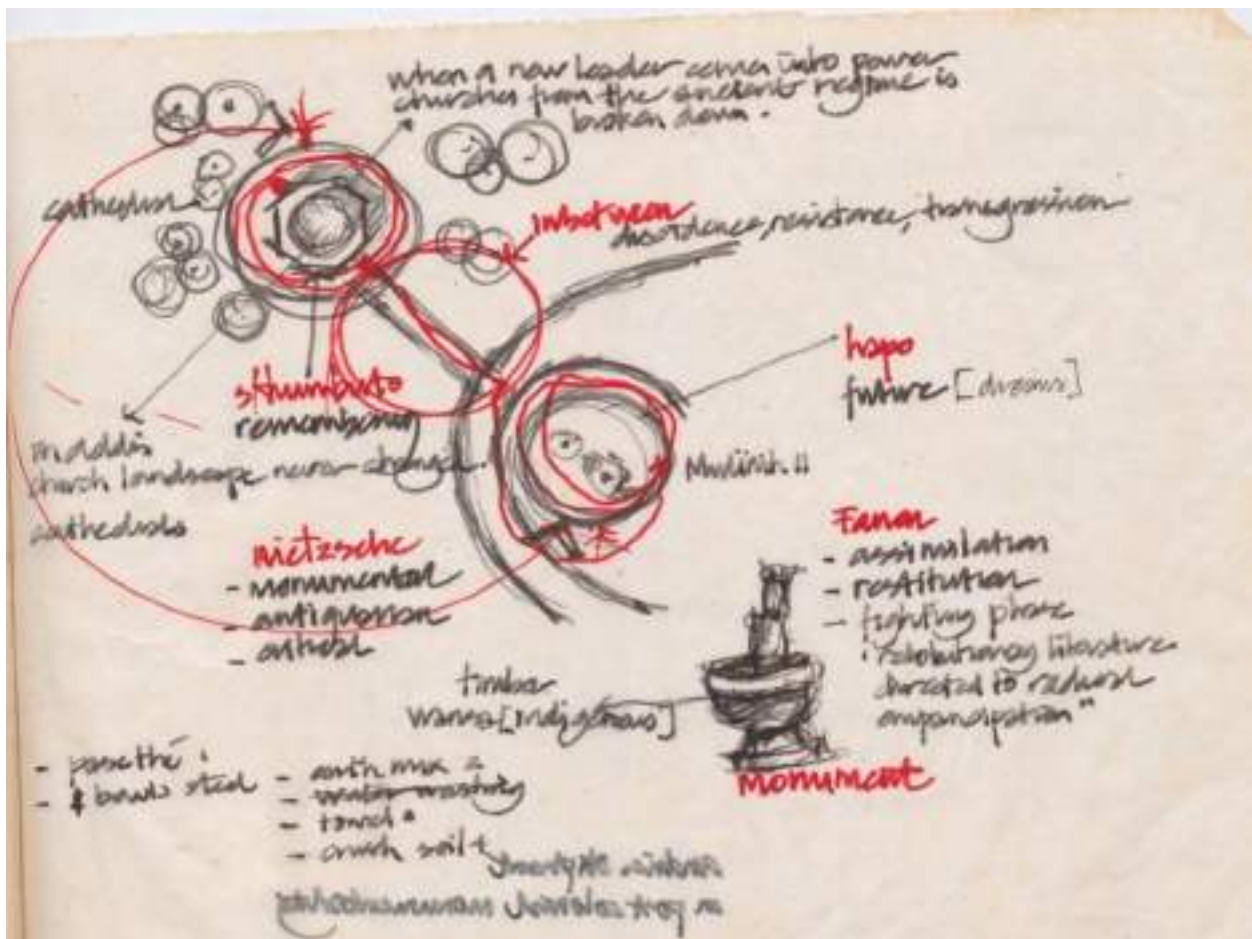


FIGURE 11: Doung Anwar Jahangeer, sketches towards a liberatory discourse of the inbetween. Image supplied by artist

Bonita Bennett

“Growing history from below”: The museum as memory-keeper and change-agent

On Thursday, 28 March, after a fruitful conversation with Gcobani Sipoyo, of the South African Heritage Resources Agency, and Calvyn Gilfellan, CEO of The Castle of Good Hope, in The Castle’s Centre for Memory, Healing and Learning, we walked up the road to the District Six Museum on Buitenkant Street. In the museum’s Homecoming Centre, whose gate is engraved with a quote by Langston Hughes (see FIGURE 12), we met with museum director Bonita Bennett, who has worked at the museum since 2001.



FIGURE 12: Entrance to the District Six Museum Homecoming Centre. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

During our conversation, Bonita told us that she came to the museum via human rights, activism, and education, as have most of the members of her team. After leaving formal teaching in the early 1990s, Bonita decided to commit herself fully to the non-profit sector, and among her first positions in this space was as the coordinator of a research project around land claims at the University of Western Cape. The project involved interviewing claimants and verifying their claims to the homes they had lost during apartheid forced removals.

It was Bonita's involvement in this project that inadvertently reignited her deep interest in narrative and narrativization, which had been instilled in her during her undergraduate studies in sociolinguistics:

Besides education, my formal studies was in sociolinguists ... That is what got me interested, really, in narrative. Coming back to being a community and student activist in the 1980s, it was always about working in communities and growing history from below, and how does telling stories not only as edutainment but also narrating yourself and making sense of your own chaotic life through narrating this very coherent story—it's always been part of my life. (Bennett, 2019)

Growing history from below and narrating the chaos of apartheid lived experience was not what the land-claim work at the University of the Western Cape was about, however. As she told us:

Our job was to do the verification interviews. And that for me was such an eye-opening experience, because I also had to lead this team of researchers who were trained in research in a very particular way, and were very great at what they did, but they couldn't hear what people were communicating. And by their template that they had, most of the people who were being interviewed and telling their stories actually would not have qualified for the land claim, for the simple reason that people were using the opportunity of the land claim not as an opportunity to just [give] the forensic information: I lived in, say, Windermere in 1950 and I moved at this time and this was the plot number and this was the erf number and these were my neighbors. That's all that the land commission wanted. But it started with: You know, I remember I was wearing a red dress when somebody came with this notice, and then it was raining. All these kinds of narrative things that people were listening to and being quite cynical about it.

So for me it was really interesting to understand the needs of people and how people remember, and the needs of the commission in order to do their important bureaucratic work of who qualified and who couldn't ... It was kind of unrelated to District Six, but it really got me very much keyed into listening in a very different kind of way. (Bennett, 2019)

As she explained, this desire to “listen in a very different kind of way” is what drew her to the District Six Museum, where her first job involved organizing the sound archives and the extensive oral histories that had been collected in the years since the museum’s inception: “It was absolutely wonderful. I put on those headphones, I went into those sound archives, I don’t think I spoke to anyone for a year or two, and I lived in this bubble of people’s stories. It was such a privilege—and I still draw on that, the details” (Bennett, 2019). She described her arrival at the museum as “a kind of homecoming” (Bennett, 2019).

In contrast with initiatives such as the land commission, the museum was created in the late 1980s for the express purpose of being a custodian and keeper of community memories. The museum emerged out of the Hands Off District Six movement, which fought to stop the removal of families from District Six and—when that was not successful—lobbied to prevent development on the demolished land and “ensure that the apartheid dream of this white neighborhood never materialized” (Bennett, 2019). Bonita described the museum’s origins as follows:

At [the Hands Off District Six] conference in 1989, very interestingly, there were two major decisions that people made. The one was that all talking and all thinking about the rebuilding of District Six, whatever happened on that land, had to be done in the context of building a democracy and restitution, and that anything else that happened outside of that framework was not to happen. And the second important decision was the call for a place of memory. And that’s how the museum comes into being.

Right from its inception, this museum was going to be something altogether different from traditional South African museums, and its inception therefore represents an important historical moment for Bonita:

For me, I’m very interested in that moment. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking and looking at the early documents and talking to people, because it was such an unusual and very, very

strange decision to make. The late 1980s, when this decision is made, is at the tail-end of apartheid, a time when locally ... there's no precedent for a museum that's leading social change or part of social change. And by my very light [examination of] the museum world at that time in South Africa, I think that South African museums were standing outside of this whole broad movement of the "new museology" that started across the world in the 1970s. There's no sign that I can see that South African museums were part of any kind of transformation, either social or internal self-transformation. (Bennett, 2019)

A museum specifically conceived as a place of memory and as an agent for social justice and change, in the context of an untransformed and conservative museum space in South Africa, naturally raises the question of whether such a place should have been called a museum at all. Bonita discussed the issue of naming with us:

When I look at the records of those minutes, I don't think people used the word "museum" at the time. It was a place that had to be the *keeper* of people's memories—that's what they spoke about. In subsequent meetings after that, people start talking about the museum. When I came into this museum, it was at a time where it was going through this whole struggle: Is this a museum? Is it a place of memory? Can it be both? Is it one or the other? Is it a community center?

... And just having spoken to some of the people who were involved at the time, because I wasn't, they say: Very soon after that decision about the place of memory, they started using the word "museum". (Bennett, 2019)

While Bonita herself was initially ambivalent about the term "museum", tending towards the site being designated as a place of memory and healing instead, she eventually understood that it could have no other name. As she explained:

For the community, when everything else was crumbling around them, when everything seemed like it was in flux, there was this broken landscape that people notionally knew that they wanted to return to but had no idea how that would happen. The museum was the thing that would be permanent, that was not going to go anywhere, that was going to be a place of safekeeping. And when I got an understanding of that, I was sold on the idea that we are a museum ...

And I think occupying the name “museum” has allowed us to enter the field in a different way ... Some of the more traditional museums in Cape Town were the ones that were asking us, Don’t call yourselves a museum! You can just be a community project. I think it was also part of the discomfort of people around us, feeling, I suppose, challenged by having to think about transforming themselves and their practice as well. (Bennett, 2019)

In “occupying” museumness and emerging as what it is today, the District Six Museum became a permanent and solid fixture on a broken landscape and also disrupted tradition museum practice in the city, setting a new precedent for what museums could and should do. “A place of memory and healing” became the museum’s byline. On the museum’s website, it also identifies itself as a “site museum of conscience” (Sites of Conscience, 2017).

The museum found its home in the old Methodist Church building on Roeland Street in Cape Town in late 1994, after existing as a mobile movement for the previous five years: “it ... moves around to different communities, to community centers, shopping malls, church halls, calls upon people to bring their stories, their artefacts, photographs, and then it also calls on people to start preparing for return, restitution” (Bennett, 2019).

The timing of the museum’s launch in fact proved seminal, particularly for the project of return and restitution:

The museum launched on the 10th of December 1994, which is kind of the beginning of South Africa’s democracy. Also, the Land Restitution Act of 1995 then is also quite groundbreaking in its provision of giving restitution to people who did not hold title deeds but who lost their right to land—so it’s not title deed that they’re claiming back. And so the museum becomes that place where a lot

of sense-making also happens. There was a land court that happened, for example, in 1999, that was held in the museum.

In 1999, there was a kind of contestation ... around individual claims and community claims. The District Six claim was submitted as a community claim, but traditionally the community claims within the Land Restitution Act were more appropriate for rural communities, where people were still [a community in] a more coherent sense ... The District Six community did exist but in some sense didn't exist as a coherent whole, so this diaspora didn't qualify to be a community claim. And that was then challenged in the Land Court, which was held in the museum in 1999. It was a very, very close walking together with memory, restitution, and the community that was part of that as well ... [The outcome was that] the community was able to claim as a community claim. (Bennett, 2019)

The physical site of the former District Six, thanks to the sustained efforts of the Hands Off District Six campaign and its ally movements, remained throughout apartheid and early post-apartheid an undeveloped “memorial scar” on the landscape (Ernsten, 2017), its emptiness leaving open the possibility of the physical return of former residents and their descendants. In 2005, this possibility was actively taken up by the District Six Museum and its partners, who launched the Hands On District Six campaign as a way to drive the community land claim and hasten the government's implementation of a restituted District Six (Ernsten, 2017).

Bonita explained to us that the restitution process has been slow and mired by bureaucratic, practical, and political obstacles: “It's taken more than 10 years to bring 165 families back. There are 2,000 more families. I mean, my maths is bad, but even I can see that's another generation or two” (Bennett, 2019). She also told us that the museum is not as involved in the restitution process as it was during the Hands On District Six campaign. This is partly because there are now many more actors in this space than there were in the 2000s—too many, arguably—which has led the museum to take on “more of a support function” and become “more of a holding space, but also a place of sense-making, because there's quite a lot of confusion, quite a lot of distress, around what's happening with restitution at the moment” (Bennett, 2019). But beyond this, the museum has also “very consciously” sought to “take on a different role” within the District Six community (Bennett, 2019).



FIGURE 13: Laying stones (“remnants”) on Hanover Street in District Six during an annual Walk of Remembrance. Photograph by Jan Greshoff, from the District Six Museum website (2019)

Today, most of the museum’s interventions are site-based and involve what Bonita described as “embedding an ongoing story into the site”, even as the site itself is constantly changing as restitution unfolds at its drawn-out pace. This work is commemorative and processional, rooted in remnants and storytelling (see FIGURE 13– 14):

Most of our public engagement takes place outside of the museum. A lot of it is site-based: it’s processional walks, it’s storytelling on site. People love also just scratching and finding things ...

If you’ll walk in the site, you’ll see—some of them are gone, but some of them are remnants—with every Walk of Remembrance that we do at a certain time, we try and leave a remnant on the site. So you’ll see there are some mural-type wheatpastes coming from the archives, and new stories and wishes that people have written at different points through the site. Obviously, it’s going to change with restitution, because some of the buildings that we’re marking are not going to be there anymore. But we’re hoping to also create a model for how people engage with a changing environment as well as how you can kind of embed an ongoing story into the site.

We are occupying this word “museum”, we want to do it differently, but you actually can’t completely ignore museum practice. And so we are also looking at how does that building tell a revised or a broader story. So that’s where are.

People usually have the opposite problem: they’re very busy with the physical building and keeping it pristine and so on. (Bennett, 2019)

The District Six Museum’s commemorative, processional work remains firmly entrenched, however. As a result, it has been able to provide advisory support to other communities in Cape Town with histories of displacement, dispossession, and forced removal that do not necessarily have access to a physical space to house their story— Langa township, for example. This effort of “making a case for the power of memory and its importance” in the absence of physical museum space has not been easy for the museum, with some seeing it as “advocating for non-museums”, but overall it has been well-received, Bonita said: “The point was that, in the absence of the resources needed to create a museum, there are quite a number of other things that can happen, and I think people have taken that on board” (Bennett, 2019).

Another challenge that the museum is navigating at the moment is that of scope: how can it represent as great a diversity of stories and memories as possible, both within the District Six community and beyond it, with the limited space and resources it has?

Addressing this issue will be part of the museum’s current revision strategy, as Bonita explained to us:

In the time that I’ve been at the museum, there’ve been people that will come in and say: What about this? You’ve left out this. Why don’t you talk about the minstrels? This is only about the middle-class. What about the gangsters? What about the crime? What about the underside? All of those things. Our way of dealing with that is: You can’t tell all of that in a permanent exhibition, although we are busy revising some of that at the moment, so that it also speaks a lot to some of what’s happening now with restitution. But I think people have also come to understand [that] we think of our museum not as a finished product: Even though we call it a permanent exhibition, there’s a way that you can layer in. So there’s a cloth [in the museum] where you can have your story. You can actually get some people together and do a temporary exhibition. We have all kinds of different

conversations and programs. And this space [the HomecomingCentre] is also meant to be complementing what's in there [the District Six Museum] ...

It's a lot of ongoing contestations. I've had several skirmishes with people who appear in my office: Why are you not telling the story of the Khoisan? Well, because, first of all, we're not a Khoisan museum. But it's part of the story. We always tell people: You are the expert. That's not my expertise. The Khoisan story is part of the Cape Town story, and very importantly. You have to come to us and see how we can support you. That's the way we've tried to deal with that. I'm sure there are many more gaps that we don't know about, but we try and keep our public programming and our conversations with the former residents active and ongoing, so that we always try to discover new ways [of engaging]. (Bennett, 2019)

Throughout our conversation with Bonita, it was this spirit of humility, openness, and collaboration that came through most strongly, along with her commitment to listening in a different kind of way, to growing history from below, and to making space for people and their memories above all. Jargon and “talking the talk” are not of much interest to Bonita. It is doing the work that matters. This excerpt from our conversation is indicative:

I think we're constantly revisiting our views on certain things. So the whole thing around the discourse of museums: We've been very conscious of—I've certainly been conscious, and I've challenged my colleagues: Don't use terms that you can't occupy with integrity. So don't say, We're co-creating, because everyone's talking about co-creating. I say, Do the work and you don't need to use the term. And in the same way with “decolonizing museums”. Our work is very much based in the theory of decoloniality in terms of museums, but you'd never see anywhere any of us talking about decolonizing. I think this has been helpful in centering our practice, but, on the other hand, it maybe is not quite a weakness but [something that affects] the way other people see us. (Bennett, 2019)

Elaborating on this last point, Bonita said that she has, for example, been approached in the past by people who have offered her their services as storytelling consultants, assuming that storytelling is not part of the museum's practice because it is nowhere explicitly named as such (Bennett, 2019). Meanwhile, narrative and narrativization are absolutely central to the museum's practice, as became

clear to us in the first five minutes of our conversation with Bonita. Integrity comes at a cost, in other words.

Towards the end of our conversation, Shawn Sobers from our group picked up on Bonita's earlier comment that neither she nor the people in her team come from a heritage background, and asked her whether she thinks this has been an advantage or a disadvantage in terms of their work. Bonita answered this way:

From where I'm sitting, it's been an advantage, but that's my very subjective view ... We almost mirror the way the museum started, without the baggage of museology, and so we could start fresh. We could create it, in a way, because we are not bogged down, I think, by all the ISO standards that one needs to create for all kinds of things within museums. We do have a set archival practice and an exhibition strategy and all of those things in place, but we work very lightly with that, because with education and human rights activism, it's always about people, human beings ... So I think it's been an advantage. (Bennett, 2019)

From where we were sitting, we thought so too.



FIGURE 15: The visitors' wall at the District Six Museum. Photographs by Shawn Sobers (2019)



FIGURE 16: Part of the permanent exhibition (“Digging Deeper”) at the District Six Museum. Photograph by Paul Grenden, from the District Six Museum website (2019)



FIGURE 17: Exterior of the District Six Museum in Cape Town. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

The Rev. Cedric van Dieman

“The main heritage here is the community that was removed”: The Protea Village story

On the last day of our Cape Town workshop, we meet with two writer-scholars in the city: first, Stephen Symons, poet and researcher on militarized white masculinities during apartheid; second, Steven Robins, academic and author of the book *Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa*, an account of his journey into his personal heritage and archive.

From Steven’s house in Newlands, we made our way down the road to Protea Village, which—like District Six and scores of other suburbs in the city—was declared a white group area during apartheid and subjected to forced removals. We were accompanied by Steven, his wife, Lauren Miller, and a student of Steven’s. Meghna Singh and the Swedish cultural attaché to South Africa, Hedda Krausz Sjögren, also joined our group.

Protea Village is located opposite the entrance to the Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, in one of the most expensive and exclusive suburbs in Cape Town: Bishopscourt. There, outside an old stone church, we met the Rev. Cedric van Dieman and his wife at their car. The reverend is the chairperson of the Protea Village Communal Property Association and, along with a dedicated team of colleagues, he has led the community’s successful land claim in this area since 1995.

The reverend’s wife stayed to rest in the car while he took us on a 45-minute walk through the Protea Village area, which was his home until he and his family were removed in 1966. Below, I transcribe his story in full, as he told it to us. The transcription becomes a visual essay thanks to the photography of Shawn Sobers from our group. Questions posed by our group are included in italics.

“We were moved in 1966 and I was about 16 years old at that time, so we were moved from—we were scattered actually—the whole community was scattered to places like Manenberg, Lotus River, Grassy Park, Hanover Park, Heideveld, Steenberg, Retreat, and all of that. I resided in Lotus River since that time, with a little bit of movement from here to there, in ministry, but that was my base,

until now. Now I've sold there and moved into my biological mom's home in Bridgetown now, in Athlone.

[See FIGURES 18–19] “So this church was built by the community of Protea Village in the 1800s. The plaque reads that it's been built in 1884. The community was a combination of slaves that were freed from the Bishopscourt area and other places, and also people that were imported from places like Franschhoek that came to work on the road that leads from Groote Schuur to Hout Bay. Cecil John Rhodes built that road.



FIGURE 18: The Church of the Good Shepherd, Protea Village. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



FIGURE 19: Plaque and inscription outside the church. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019).



FIGURE 20: The grave of the late Frances van Gusling (“Hatta”). Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



FIGURE 21: The grave of the late Frances van Gusling (“Hatta”). Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

“The Group Areas Act was actually a law that was promulgated by the government to say that people of different colors must live in different areas. This was declared a white area. We were no longer allowed to live here, so we had to move. Coloured people were moved to the Cape Flats, essentially. Black people were moved from where they lived to places like Langa, Nyanga, Gugulethu, and eventually Khayelitsha. And then the rest of the affluent areas were essentially white areas.

[See FIGURE 20] “Around the church here is the cemetery where our community was buried when they passed on. We have subsequently stopped the burials. In fact, the Church Council stopped the burials. There’s actually one grave that is very recent of a 98-year-old lady: she was the last one that was buried here. She was the most prominent one, because she was adamant that she didn’t want to take money [during the land- claim process]: she said she wants to come home.

[See FIGURE 21] “This is the grave of the late Frances van Gusling. She was known to us as Hatta. As you can see, she was born in 1909 and she passed on in 2008. She was my neighbor in Lotus River. They have subsequently opened this Garden of Remembrance for the ashes of community members to be buried there.

[See FIGURE 22] “So this is the graveyard and the cemetery where a lot of community was buried. And this building in front of us is currently known as The Hill Pre-Primary School. The status quo of the school has been [in place] since about 40 years ago—it was just about after we’ve been moved.



FIGURE 22: The Hill Pre-Primary School. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

They have done quite a bit of renovations to the building. This is the actual building where I went to school.” *And then it became a white pre-school. And today?* “Today, because of the laws of the country, anyone can go. It’s a public school.” *But it’s*

expensive. “Yes. We are busy engaging them now with regard to that and on how our development would impact on their parking, which is currently informal. They don’t have any formal parking. But probably the development will impact on part of their parking. The church is actually the owner of the school, so they are leasing the property to the school. The Anglican church.

[See FIGURE 23] “I just want to show you: this is the entrance to the school here. But when we were at the school, the entrance was actually there. In fact, these were the original steps where we entered into the school. They say in District Six they had the seven steps, and I think we’ve got about eight steps. So we’re one up on them!



FIGURE 23: The former entrance for the school (with its eight steps). Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

[See FIGURE 24] “This forms part of the land which was claimed. In fact, the whole area of land where our community lived on amounted to about 28-plus hectares. But the land that is vacant at this time is about 12.8 hectares. This is currently zoned agricultural. But they have established an arboretum on this portion of land. But that’s also subject to claim.



FIGURE 24: The arboretum in the Protea Village site. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

“This area was not primarily populated by our community—it was a bit of a forest area. But further down I’ll show you an open patch where our recreation area was, where we played rugby and we played cricket, you know. Here in Protea Village, we didn’t know that a game like soccer existed, until some people came from District Six and mixed with our community. Then we discovered soccer, but it was never played in Protea Village.

How big was the community? “It’s difficult to say how big it was at the time, but it could be a couple of hundred. It could have been, say, between 250 and 300 families. But we have only received claims from about 132 families. We tried to persuade others and they thought, Ag, man, that’s a pipedream. You know?

“There’s a lot of people that’s still out of the fold, for various reasons. But eventually, 46 of the 132 opted for the financial compensation, which was nothing really. Because each of them received at the time, 2005, R17,500, which is like pocket money. So we are left with a community of 86 claimants at this point in time.”

Why would people go for that option, knowing the value of the land here? I can understand desperation, maybe, or age? “You know, age could be one of the reasons. The most important reason would probably be poverty. Because R17,500 in their hands meant so much more to people who were

living in squalor and poverty—to get R17,500 in their hands, it was like hitting the jackpot. So unfortunately, despite our attempts to persuade them not to take the money, those 46 took the money.

“And so then, after a time, the claim was split between the financial compensation and the development option. And then there was another group that wanted to opt out and wanted money. We got the approval of the department to have them cede their claims to other members of the community who did not manage to come to court, nor their descendants. So the number remained the same, but the claimant list changed.

“When we lived in this community, there was no running water, there were no ablution facilities. There were no water toilets, so we had the bucket system. Our source of drinking water was from a natural spring, which is still here today. I will show you now.



FIGURE 25: The spring at the Protea Village site. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

[See FIGURE 25] “This is the spring. The water has recently—I mean as recent as about 10, 15 years—been tested by someone from UCT [the University of Cape Town] and it’s drinkable. So this spring was our source of drinking water. Some of our community that lived in houses that had electricity and toilets had water, but the majority of people had to carry water. In fact, like myself. Later I will show you where I lived so you can see the distance that I had to carry water maybe as a boy of ten, with two buckets.

[See FIGURE 26] “Subsequently, when they established the arboretum here, this water was actually just running and there was a pipe—strange enough, it was a wooden pipe—that lead from here and that took the excess water to the river. In them establishing the arboretum, that pipe was removed. Whether it be accidentally or otherwise, but it was removed. Then they created about three ponds. That is where those three ponds came from, with the result that a lot of this land is not developable, because of it being wetlands and eco-sensitive, et cetera. So maybe we could just walk across here.

“The spring was covered with iron. Part of our development plan is to build a memorial here.” *To make it a provincial heritage site, I believe? Are you having any success with that?* “With the heritage assessment? We’re meeting with the heritage committee on the 10th [of April]. They had a bit of an issue with the felling of trees, et cetera. But we’ve showed them aerial photos of the area as it was, and the reason that it’s so densely tree-lined now is because nothing has happened on the property.



FIGURE 26: The reverend indicating the swampy wetlands that formed when the arboretum was created, rendering the land undevelopable. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

“We are also eco-sensitive and we wouldn’t want to just willy-nilly chop down trees, but we want to prove to Heritage Western Cape that the main heritage here is the community that was removed. So that should be the main focus. It is not like we want to just destroy the landscape and build a concrete jungle or something. We would want to build reasonably good houses.”

Where did people in the community work? I heard some worked at UCT and at Kirstenbosch. “Yes, a lot of people used to work at UCT. I, for one, also at one stage worked at SANBI [the South African National Botanical Institute], at that time the National Botanical Gardens.”

I wanted to ask you about the trees. They’re non-indigenous species? “A tree survey has been done, with the environmental and heritage impact assessments, and then we had a peer review so that we had another opinion on what is indigenous and what is alien, and what should go, what must go, and what must stay.” *I’ve seen the plans and they don’t show many trees. It’s a very densely developed area without the trees.* “We’ve done a thorough study. Our development partners are very, very meticulous and they do a very good job.”

The oak trees and the pine trees were actually Cecil Rhodes’s. Rhodes had this policy of planting them out. “And then you’ve got the poplar trees, too.” *It’s the way that settler colonialism expresses itself in the natural world—by planting up trees.* “Trees from their part of the world. And trees that grew well!

[See FIGURE 27] “The open patch here that you see here used to be our rugby field, and in the center of the rugby field there was a bare pitch, which was our cricket pitch. And I mean, we did not have lawnmowers and stuff. I don’t know if we just ran the grass flat! I’m amazed as to how rugby fields are being kept today. And, mind you, rugby being a winter sport, our rugby field was across here, with one set of poles that side and one set this side, which means the field was slanting as it is—sloping. So if you were playing that way, the right-wing didn’t want to play this side because there was a lot of waterlogging, mud. If you were attacked in that area, you could drown! But we had our fun, we had good times—on the rugby field and on the cricket pitch as well.



FIGURE 27: The old rugby field at Protea Village, with its striking mountain backdrop. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

“On this portion of land, it was not primarily populated with our community, but there were some people, a couple of houses, that were on here, and some informal houses as well. So it could have been about six or so families that lived here. And before that school was built, there was a school we used to know as “the Old School”—it was just alongside the rugby field.

“Many of our community members lived along Winchester Avenue. Many lived on Bishopscourt Drive, on both sides of Bishopscourt Drive. Then, as you go past the shop around the corner, there were about six semi-detached units where six of our families lived. And then the three stone cottages were also semi-detached and six of [the families in] our community lived there. Those who worked in the botanical gardens were given accommodation there.

“Then, down Rose Street, round the bend, on Kirstenbosch Drive, there were people living there. Mostly on that side was what we used to call the “Stegman Cottages”. There we had—I cannot really say how many, it’s too far away to think of, but we’ve got it documented—we had a lot of houses and a lot of informal houses, as families got married and they built themselves an informal dwelling, et cetera.”

Some of those houses are still standing? “No, no, no. The stone cottages are the only houses that are still standing, and the houses down the road around the corner to the shop, just those few houses, that row of houses at the bottom side of the shop—those are still there.”

So all those people are part of the land claim community? “No. What we did: Obviously, you wouldn’t want to go to Mr. Booth [William Booth, a well-known criminal defense lawyer living in the area] and say, Mr. Booth, you need to move. He used to live there [*pointing in the direction of a nearby residential area*]. He took us to court—we lost five years in litigation. Subsequent to that, when he lost the case and he could not appeal because of a lack of funds, he then opted to sell his house and move. And, ironically, the person that bought his house, his name is Diedrich Otto and he is the total opposite of Mr. Booth. He’s in total sympathy with the project and says, Well, the right thing needs to be done. So at least there’s one big plus.

“[William Booth] was contesting the whole land claim, saying that the minister did not apply himself—or I think herself—at the time. According to him, the surrounding community was supposed to be part of the settlement agreement as interested parties. But this was basically a total misunderstanding of the interpretation of the “interested parties” as far as the [Land] Restitution Act is concerned. What the Act says is that people who are currently owning the land or residing on the land or leasing by whatever means—they would be interested parties. But not people who live adjacent to the land.

“We didn’t want to bother to do another injustice to correct an injustice that had been done at that time, to fight for land that people are living on today—they bought that land, in actual fact. We cannot really say that they stole the land. They bought it, maybe in ignorance.

“The majority of people that live in Bishopscourt and Fernwood Estate do not even know—they may know now, but they didn’t even know when they bought in here that there was a community that was displaced from this area.

“We are going to subdivide some plots here, of about 1,000 m², which would sell for about 8 million per plot. That is to cross-subsidize the project.” *You had to pay for sewage and electricity lines yourself?* “In our settlement agreement, the city pledged to put the bulk and link services in place, but that’s also subject to budgetary constraints. We are at the point where we are submitting our

budget, our request, for the bulk and link services. It's a fairly big amount, probably an amount of R40 million. We've run up costs already, for professional services, of over R2 million. And we're a poor community that doesn't have money."

Is the Anglican church helping? "Initially, we approached the Archbishop of Canterbury. Because the church at the time when we were moved were mere spectators and not doing anything or saying anything. They just followed the status quo of the government, the Group Areas Act ... We got somebody to go to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and they were very forthcoming, saying there could be a budget that could be of assistance, but we need to work it through the Archbishop here.

"He [the South African Archbishop] assigned a bishop who was part of our community at the time, Bishop Christopher Gregorosky, to assist our community. So obviously the first thing we needed to have was a business plan, and we did not have one at the time, so we could not move forward in that area until we had a business plan in place. Now, we do have a business plan in place and it's being refined. It needs to be submitted to the national department for approval. And also the alienation of some of the land also needs the minister's consent."

How often do you come here? "Not that often, actually. The very first time we had a reunion here, it was really an emotional time, where I didn't really feel I wanted to go home. That could have been in the mid-1990s. We submitted our claim already in 1995, so we're looking at 24 years down the line now. But at least we're getting somewhere." *The next generation will benefit.* "Yes, yes. It's a matter of: I may benefit some, but it's a matter of creating our first-generation wealth—or, I would say, re-creating our first- generation wealth.

"Heritage Western Cape did a site visit, without anyone else—they just did a random site visit. And they picked up some stuff and they took photos of the stuff. Then they came with that report to say: Well, the trees, the spring—the spring is a place of heritage. But the most important thing that community actually wants now is to be resettled. So what we have here are the plans.



FIGURE 28: The reverend showing us the community's detailed development plans. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

[See FIGURE 28] “This is actually the layout of what the development would look like, eventually. In that area, which is that area down there, we would build 86 houses for our community, with a plot size of about 300 m² each, with a house size of 100+ m², and that is dependent on the amount of resources that we can generate from this land here [*pointing at the larger, 1,000 m² plots*]. For this, we need to get approval from the minister and consent to alienate it.

“These will be probably general residential houses, 22 of those, and then there would be about 28 single-residential ones. These plots will be very small, about 100 m². Initially we were going to get plots of about 160 m². These here will probably be about 200 m², which is not too tiny, if you think about Newlands, Fernwood—the new houses in Newlands, if you would look at those. But these here will be between 400 and 500 m². And these would be the 15 erven, which would be 1000 m² each. And those [*pointing*] would be the houses for our community.

“And this green area will remain public open space, and we will be transferring that back to the City of Cape Town. And the parks and the roads obviously will be transferred back to the City of Cape Town.”

Will you be keeping the trees here? “There will be a lot of trees that will be kept. There will be a lot of new trees that will be planted. In fact, on that side of the road, you will see there’s a lot of Oak trees—some of them need to go because of their age and their health. But we will actually widen the road verge, in order to keep those trees. We have a setback, in actual fact, for the community’s houses, for those trees, you know.

“There’s a lot of existing trees, and there will be new trees planted on the road where the community is going to live, and then the others that will be kept on this side as well, so there’s a lot of trees.

“This land will be sold free-hold, outrightly, to someone who’s going to build a 15 million house there. Then this here we will sell with lease-hold for 99 years, with also a perpetual income resource for the community. So every time Peter sells to Paul, then a percentage of the sale amount comes to the community. We have a communal property association [CPA] in place, right now as we speak. The CPA will remain in place. This is where the community basically lived. I lived close to Rhodes Drive. I had to walk right across there, through the fields, to go fetch water. We were sent to fetch water, but then you find the guys playing rugby on the field. Then my bucket stands there—I’ll take the hiding when I get it, for taking so long!

“We are now at the stage where, in fact we’re looking at, I would say, if we look at the development as it is, if everything goes well, if everything goes according to plan—we should be in a house by, we should be getting title to our house by, 2023.” *When will building start?* “I’ve been a builder in my day, but legislation changes, regulation changes. Nowadays, you have to do a heritage impact assessment, an environmental impact assessment, a traffic assessment, a visual assessment, all of these assessments you need to do—all of that speaks to the environmental impact assessment, and it costs huge amounts of money.”

With no external support? No international support? “With no international support. Well, we didn’t request any international support. We would welcome international support, however! You know, if we could sell less of the land, then we would want to. But to make the project work, we need to sell a certain amount of land.

“I’ve been the chairperson of [what was] previously the Protea Village Action Committee since 1996, and then I stepped down in 2006, and then I was the vice-chair for the five years that we were in court. From 2011, I was reelected unanimously into the seat again. The reason I stepped down: at that point in time, there could have been a conflict of interest because I was a builder and I would have an interest in the building and I would have to step down. But since I’ve retired now, I don’t have any personal interest. I may have an interest for the community, where the community could benefit from the building of the houses, et cetera, but other than that.

“It’s as if I’m being a glutton for punishment, because, you know, you get a lot of flak from the community. We got about a R2.1 million planning grant from the department recently and we’ve got a loan agreement with our development partners, whereby they make x amount of money available, and whatever we use of that they will charge interest on but not the whole amount. So we’ve got R2.1 million and it was transferred into the CPA bank account, and we paid back whatever we’d borrowed from the development partners and then just continued to pay the professionals. And some of our community went to the department and said, Listen, we heard there’s R2.1 million, and whose account did it go? And when do we get our portion of it? Not understanding really what it’s all about ... I’ve got a committee of seven. We’re very supportive, very united as well, whereas there are other communities who are very much divided and committees that are very divided. I thank God for that. I thank God for the project and for what we are looking forward to.



FIGURE 29: The reverend's satchel. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)

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Appendix: Gallery



With Thania Petersen at the WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



With Thania Petersen at the WHATIFTHEWORLD gallery. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



In Ilze Wolff's architectural studio. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



Ilze Wolff demonstrating, via this powerful photograph, the principle of architecture supporting what already exists in space, rather than this interaction working the other way around (where empty space is filled according to the structure that has been built). Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



With Doung Anwar Jahangeer in a coffee shop in Cape Town. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



Doung Anwar Jahangeer outside the Cruise Terminal at the Cape Town Harbour. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



With Bonita Bennett at the District Six Museum. Photograph by Shawn Sobers (2019)



With the Rev. Cedric van Dieman at Protea Village. Photograph by Elvan Zabunyan (2019)

Key practices in Cape Town, by Meghna Singh

Introduction

Infecting the City, a six-day public art festival, curated by Jay Pather, director of the Institute of Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town, featuring South African and international artists, transformed the city of Cape Town between 18 and 24 November 2019. It has been the longest running public arts festival in South Africa bringing free, socially engaged performance and visual art into the public spaces of Cape Town and Mbombela. The festival has been held annually since 2007, and in 2019 transitioned to being held every two years.

According to the Africa Centre, one of its sponsors, “it aspires to bring the extraordinary to everyday places, and make public space genuinely welcoming for the public” (Africa Centre).

In writing the second artists sub-report from Cape Town for Work Package 5 of the ECHOES project, I interviewed the curator of the festival Jay Pather and two multi-media and performance artists that exhibited work during the festival. My reason for focusing on Infecting the City was that in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid excludes many from accessing artistic spaces like theatres and galleries. The public art festival brings socially engaged, dynamic art into inclusive public spaces, at the same time reinventing these spaces as welcoming and imaginative. The festival allows the audience to experience their own city in a new way. The audience walk from one event to the next along a fixed route but it's not only the subscribed viewers, but the curation of the works also allows the unsuspecting passers-by to become the audience too (see Figure 1-Figure 2-Figure 3).

In continuation with the theme of the previous artist report on Cape Town, the work of these artists reflects on the legacy of colonial heritage within the city and presents interventions in response to these ongoing entanglements. These can be viewed as examples of what Knudsen describes as a “principle of reemergence” (Knudsen, 2018). Their work very much calls on the ancestors, addresses these spectres to allow for a public engagement and healing. In keeping with the chosen style for the ECHOES reports, I let the interlocutors speak for themselves, respecting¹² what these acclaimed artists and highly experienced curator have to say. Over the course of the week, I watched the performances of the festival and spoke to the curator and the artists

afterwards. They explained not only the work at the festival but spoke about their overarching artistic practice and engagements. The three conversations include:

- *Jay Pather*, curator, choreographer, director of the Institute of Creative Arts
- *Haroon Gun Saile*, visual artist and activist
- *Sikhumbuzo Makandula*, visual artist and arts writer



Figure 1: Audience viewing *Jailbed*, a performance by Qondiswa James, Infecting the City festival (2019) The Company Gardens. Photograph by Meghna Singh



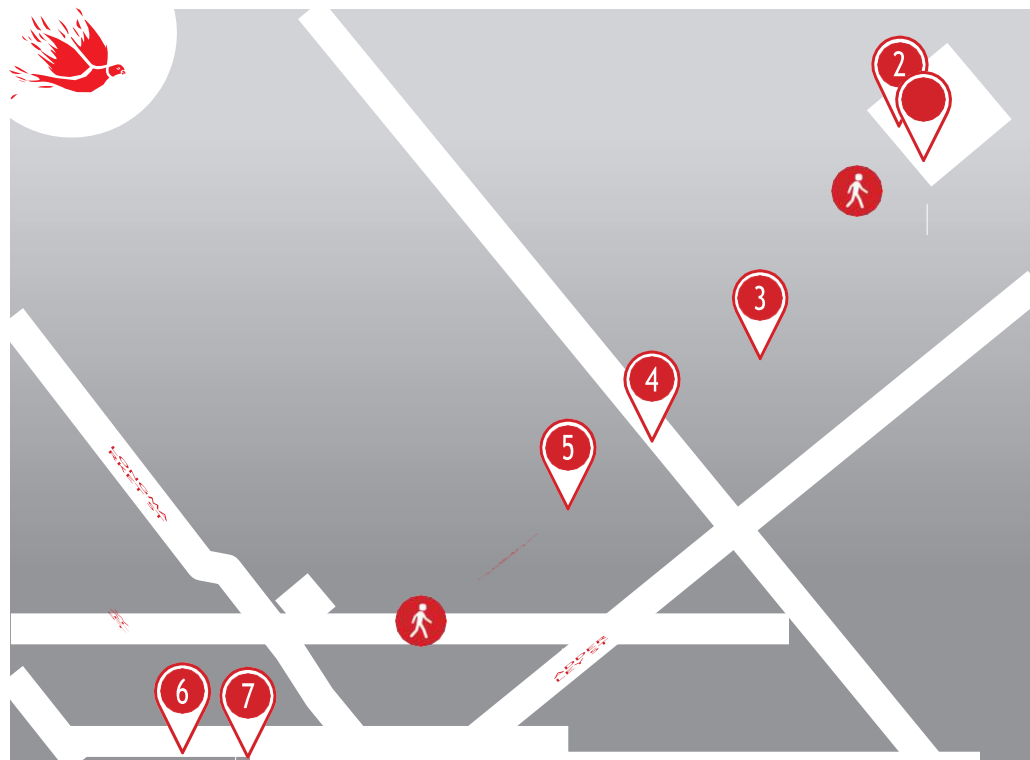
Figure 2: Audience viewing *Ingxoxo Yabafazi*, a performance by Indoni Dance, arts & Leadership Academy Infecting the City festival, Thibault Square. Photograph by Meghna Singh

1

PROGRAMME 2

Tuesday & Wednesday 19 & 20 November from 12.00 to 3pm

Begins: Thibault Square



NGUVU YA MBEGU: THE
CLEANSING

Abengcongolo Collective

Thibault Square

INGXOXO YABAFASI
(STORIES OF WOMEN) &
GLOBAL RHYTHMS

Indoni Dance, Arts and Leadership
Academy **Thibault Square**

TWO-GETHER

Moving Stories Theatre
Organisation

c/o St George's Mall & Waterkant
Street

ZAMANANI BROTHERS CULTURAL GROUP

St George's Mall / Strand Street Fountain

!OROLŌA

Anthony Chamonay, Lewellyn Africa, Nichelle

Linnert & Tamsyn Spannberg **St George's Mall /**

Krotoas Place

MOVING FROM UNTRUTH TO

St George's Mall /Wale Street

TRUTH - A PURIFICATION

THE LAST BOW PLAYERS OF

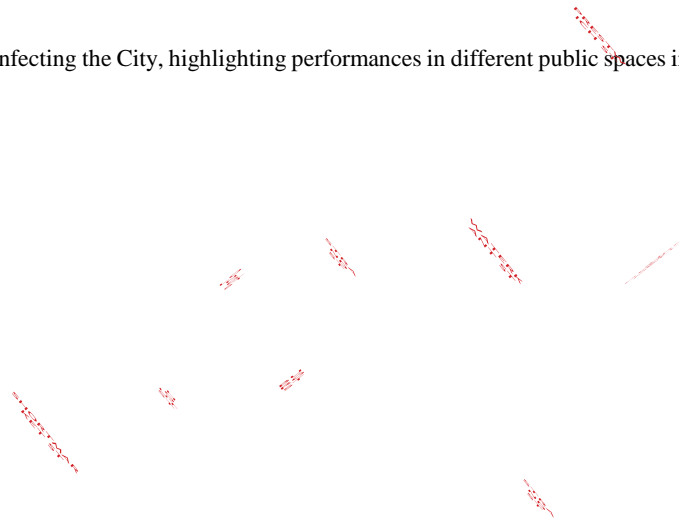
Aaraadhana

THE EASTERN CAPE

St George's Cathedral steps

Ensemble directed by Dizu Plaatjies

Figure 3: Programme 2, Infecting the City, highlighting performances in different public spaces in the city centre, Image courtesy: Institute of Creative Arts



Jay Pather

“How to curate works about crises within a situation of crises”: decolonising public art in the post-apartheid city of Cape Town

Jay Pather (Figure 4) is a choreographer, curator and academic based in Cape Town, South Africa. He is an associate professor and directs the Institute for Creative Arts at the University of Cape Town while curating *Infecting the City* public art festival and the ICA *Live Art* festival. He also curates the *Afrovibes* festival in the Netherlands, the Biennale of *Body, Image Movement* in Madrid and was the curatorial adviser for Live Art for *Season Africa 2020* in various cities in France. He has co-curated for the *Spielart* festival in Munich and has been adjunct curator for performance at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art. He agreed to meet me to talk about the public arts festival, his curation work and working with South African and international artists in creating meaningful public art.



Figure 4: Jay Pather, Curator of Infecting the City festival (2019). Image Courtesy: Institute of Creative Arts

Jay began by emphasising the difference between curating live art in a place like Cape Town to the original intention of curating, which was to take care of precious objects, to look after and be in custody of products, involving a certain predictability. While the live artwork in public spaces was “set admits unpredictability due to the economics and politics of the spaces and how artists responded to these” (Pather, 2019). He elaborated on how curating the *Infecting the city* festival was to “look at curation within a decolonial context and certainly in a space like South Africa” (Pather, 2019). He went on to discuss his viewpoint on curating work about crises in a time of crises in Cape Town:

There was a possibility during the “Rhodes must fall” and the “fees must fall” moment that the *Live Art* festival would dissolve as there was a sense that these movements would continue for a long time. The question that I faced as a curator was how to curate works about a crisis within a situation of crisis. There was something brutally ironic about staging works because a lot of the live art works at that time were very much about crisis. But of course, we adapted and shifted and changed. I wrote an essay in the book, *Acts of Transgression* about the death of the curator or the impossibility of curating live art because live art by definition responds to shifting contexts and was responding to issues of crisis. For me to try to curate crisis then became a little bit disingenuous because crisis arises out of strong human needs and the works are informed by this, so the curation of it is informed by the works itself. I can’t sit in my office and say, I want a work about migration... I want a work about race issues and land in South Africa. You cannot curate like this especially when it comes to live art and the performing arts. However, with *Infecting the City*, it is much easier because the curatorial brief is how to make work live in public spaces that speaks to diverse publics. It’s not about responding to a specific theme. (Pather, 2019)

He elaborated on his need as a curator to showcase work that the local public engaged with and wasn’t meant only to please the art critics or an art going crowd in Cape Town:

there was one critic who wrote in a review of *Infecting the City* that she didn’t think that this festival was for art critics. Unbeknownst to her, it was quite profound because the curatorial concern inside a public art festival is not just the works and the artists but the

audience as well and the geographical spaces. Its' about how the work moves, how it is inclusive and how it really brings into focus the pedestrians (Figure5). We live in such alienating cities that to make an artwork that is going to be even more alienating for people who are the workers or people who are hurrying by or trying to get onto a train etc is something I am not interested in. I find that revolting. I have seen festivals trying to do that and mainly abroad, where an artist is doing something very conceptual, but nobody understands it and they are also using the audience as a kind of a poise, so it ends up being for the ten people who know that it is happening and watch how the audience are made to feel foolish because they don't know what's going on. (Pather,2019)



Figure 5: Audience members from different walks of life in Cape Town city centre during Infecting the city. Photograph: Meghna Singh

The impetus for Jay was to involve the audiences rather than curate works that “were conceptual and potentially alienating”. He was of the opinion that it was “alright to throw in a more conceptual piece on route after the audience had enjoyed something they would respond to and comprehend” (Pather, 2019). He stated, “I think a dance work with a song by the famous Brenda Fassie which is fairly graspable coupled with another performance which they might not completely relate to is fine” (Pather, 2019). Jay’s way of curating was unusual as they didn’t have a set theme for the festival but instead responded to works/proposals submitted via the open call. The artists and their works informed the thematic for the festival which was very different to the old style of curating. “That kind of curation for me feels ungenerous and I think the generosity for me comes from really listening to what artists are doing. That has informed my curation quite a lot, especially during the public art festivals” (Pather, 2019). Jay’s special interest lay in ritualised performances by African artists and he had been following artists creating work along these themes:

For a long now I have been interested in the heritage of disruptive as well as ritualised forms in classical African performances (Figure 6-Figure 7). I understand that it’s a project of modernity but over the past five years what’s been fascinating is that performance artists have started to work increasingly with rituals and forms. There are artists like Sthembizile, Khanisile Mbongo who don’t even call themselves artists, they would like to be called as diviners and healers rather than artists. In selecting these works, I am not imposing something, there are people who are already making that work. (Pather, 2019)

Jay discussed the shift in work being created and proposed by artists post the “fallist” movements in south Africa between 2012-2014. He was of the opinion that the charged energy that was felt during that time due to the lack of transformation in the country had “flattened out”. “I think economically we as a country are in such a bad state that the government continues to ignore the arts, play a really small role. Also, there’s so much corruption in all of the art agencies that artists are really trying to find works that sell” (Pather, 2019). Furthering his concern about the lack of new volatile work being created, he stated:

There have been some really interesting works, but I did notice that for *Infecting the City*, there were few new projects, and most artists were reviving work that had been

shown before. I am not suggesting that artists are not becoming more volatile, but I can't say that with certainty. There's has been an unnerving feeling in my stomach that there's been a kind of paralysis in the imagination of what people are doing. I have seen artists get quite safe, making work that they can package, ship out and sell or it'll be a one-person performance and they are very aware of touring possibilities. In South Africa there's a kind of a comfort zone or the need for a comfort zone, it's not apathy but the need for a comfort zone. I think we are losing our hold on developing a grammar and there are fewer and fewer artists who are taking out time to make bigger work. There's only one artist in the continent who I think is going to just speed on and do all these magnificent works- Jelili Atiku from Nigeria. (Pather,2019)



Figure 6: Ritualised African performances during Infecting the city. Madi Iphidisa Madi by Mamello Makhetha performed in front of the slave lodge. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 7: The Cleansing performed by Abengcongolo Collective at Thibault Square. Photograph: Meghna Singh

Speaking more specifically about the theme of colonial memory and questions around heritage, he spoke of few South Africa artists who are doing interesting work:

I think Sethembile Msezane from South Africa does some good work going deep into the colonial past. Memory Biwa from Namibia does interesting work using memorials and statues especially when looking at the archive. One of the most significant artists to do that is Simbikuzo Makandla. His way of going into archives as he did in District Six about the initializing of the black intelligencia is extremely subtle and very profound. He is very specific in his work so he's not engaging with a general colonial heritage theme, rather his particular interests are around the legacy of black intellegencia which is so obliterated in our context and he is one of the strongest artists dealing with that. (Pather, 2019)

I interviewed Simbikuzo Makandla later that week for this report after watching his very arresting and moving performance at the District Six museum in Cape Town. Jay seemed to think that a discourse around history and heritage in the country was missing from the public arena. He was of the opinion that such a discourse was "very heavily intellectualized and kept in the hallowed halls of the academic institutions but was missing from the public imagination." He gave the example of the FWD Klerk statements about apartheid suggesting that it wasn't a crime against humanity. He reiterated that for that statement to come so boldly must mean that we don't have a discourse of history and heritage in this country: "How is it even possible for a statement like that to exist in the public domain-it's like someone saying that the holocaust wasn't a crime against humanity, can you imagine that? (Pather, 2019). He gave an example of a recent incident to highlight his point around the lack of such a discourse:

there was a young artist, Nicolene Burger, who did an installation called *take flight* around the Rhodes statue during the *Infecting the City* festival. They went from the Jan Hofmeyr sculpture in the Church Square to the Cecil John Rhodes statue in the company gardens. They had built a podium for the statue- a box was created the night before so they could get started early in the morning (Figure 8-Figure 9). That morning the Company Gardens official staff broke it into pieces and threw it out.

Seeing this Nicolene was hysterical as the performance was about to start, I ran over. This was quite interesting to me as this official was a black Xhosa speaking woman

and she was adamant that no one could interfere with the Rhodes statue. She was not ready to listen about any granted permissions and that they were not touching the statue. At that moment I thought to myself that this black woman is defending a man who killed thousands of black people. This was all to do with the fact that an artist has put a little platform in front of the statue. The irony in that situation was quite profound. This is what made me think that the heritage debate is not sitting in our society.



Figure 8: Take Flight by Nicolene Burger, Jan Hofmeyr sculpture at the church square. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 9: Take Flight by Nicolene Burger, Artist in front of Cecil John Rhodes statue, Company's Gardens. Photograph: Meghna¹³ Singh

Next, we spoke about his curatorial work within the European context in places such as Madrid, Marseille and Amsterdam and how that work differed from his curation in Cape Town, if at all. He told me that he first tried to create a relationship with people over a period of time because he was not necessarily going to do something they liked. He gave me an example of the *Afrovibes* festival in Holland whose name was already a problem to begin with for him. “There was a perception by many people that they were coming to watch African dance, drums and people adulating and then they watched Gavin Krastin putting pegson his tongue and trying to recite the constitution and the freedom charter of South Africa which is something completely different than what they thought *Afrovibes* had to offer” (Pather, 2019). Jay’s main aim was to try to change the narrative in these European spaces. “For the festival in Madrid I am curating Nora Chipaumire and she is unrelenting so you haveto shift the narrative quite dramatically” Jay’s insight was that it would also depend on the audience-sometimes he would choose to do something quite subtle but at other times he would curate in a way that dislodges and disturbs the audience. “You think South Africa has got a bad memory; you can imagine the rest of Europe!” (Pather, 2019).

I was curious whether the people who appointed him to curate the work in these Europeanfestivals allowed him to dislodge the narrative completely or was there any supervision inhow much he could do to which Jay replied:

There isn’t too much supervision. I choose to work in contexts where I do have a say. At the end of the day, I am concerned about the audience, I won’t just go ahead and make my statement. I want them to be disturbed and yet they have to sit there long enough to be disturbed or to be taken into areas of international history that they prefer not to. There are some artists that would curate easily here but I probably won’tcurate in a place like Amsterdam because there have to be different kinds of approaches. Here we will get it immediately and we will move into it. There you haveto create much more of a context otherwise it just sounds like a bunch of angry black people. (Pather,2019)

Concluding our conversation, Jay spoke about the addition of the castle of Cape Town to the different locations that had been used for the *Infecting the city* festival. As the first ever colonial building in Cape Town, he shared how he saw it as a “place of abjection holding thelegacy of colonial heritage inside its walls”. Jay spoke about the temporary nature of the performance art and how he felt that there was a sense of emptiness once it was over and the

audience moved on. I on the contrary felt that the performance during *Infecting the city* had left a strong residue in the memory of the audiences. I could not visit the castle again without thinking and feeling the presence of the performers I had watched during the festival. It felt as though the specters of the performance were returning to life, haunting the city and living on in the memory of the audiences (Figure 10-Figure 11).



Figure 10: Ghost of Awakening by Nomakrestu Xakatugaga, Babalwa Zimbini Makwetu, Thabisa Dinga at the Castle of Good Hope. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 11: Audience members watching performances at the Castle of Good Hope during Infecting the City festival (2019). Photograph: Meghna Singh

Haroon Gunn Salie

Translating oral histories into artworks: the activism and art of Haroon Gunn-Salie

One of the important works at the festival for me was the installation, *Crying for justice*, at the Castle of Good Hope by the visual artist, Haroon Gunn Salie on the 21st November 2019. Described in the festival catalogue Haroon's practice was described as "artistic interventions and installations that are translations of oral histories". Haroon is also represented by the Goodman Gallery in South Africa and internationally. I met him at the castle for a conversation about his two practices-a more gallery based one and the other being one of artistic interventions in the city of which the work *Zonnenblom Renamed* was much spoken about. In this artistic intervention Haroon renamed the official street signs of Zonnenbloem to its original 'District Six' using vinyl stickers in 2014. Zonnenbloem was a name given to the area under apartheid and its residents still live in a neighbourhood with the apartheid era name. I asked him to speak about the site-specific interventions as a way of disrupting colonial heritage in the city. He shared his passion for graffiti at a young age which led him to study art at the Michaelis school art at the university of Cape Town. "A lot of the intervention stuff I do now stems from that element of capturing audience that are unsuspecting and working in a very direct and confrontational way. The nature of graffiti is that you can propagate statements and further causes without very much support. This is something that very much captured me" (Gun-Salie, 2019). He spoke about his final year project at art school, *Witness*, (Figure 12) where he collaborated with residents of the District Six area. He had made these connections during his previous work there. He told me about the unexpected success of that university project that led him to continue public intervention work beyond the university:

Witness came out of a three-year process which was a collaboration with five veteran residents from District Six. We occupied an old house bordering Walmer state and District Six. I had to apply to the University of Cape Town Senate because no one had ever been marked off campus in the university's history. For the university, there's the white cube,¹⁴ students display work in it and that's how you mark art. Jane Alexander, my professor and

I put in an application to have me marked outside campus and I got permission for it to be a public exhibition. I did what you do when you are having a public exhibition, you tell people about it. Jane called me in the morning saying that it was in the newspaper and that I wasn't supposed to be publishing work that hadn't been marked. When the committee arrived, there was a big crowd and even a broadcasting van from the SABC news channel.
(Gun-Salie, 2019)

Haroon told me how this work laid the seeds for the work that later became *Zonnenblom renamed*. In 2013 curator Jay Pather, then the director of the Gordon Institute of Performing Arts, had organized a conference around the theme of LAND. Haroon had proposed to do a walkabout in District Six and redo his witness exhibition in one of the new houses in the area. He gave a further account of the creation of the work:

I was busy making the invitations and I realised that the house I got access to was in Tennent street Zonnenblom. I had to defy the official facts and that was really something that spurred the idea to change the road signs aligned to this invitation. I designed the invitation with District Six instead of Zonnenbloem. It was two nights before the walkabout, I gave the R 2500 from the colloquium to a good friend's father who made street signs. He made me a road sign that was exactly how the street signs were. I consulted lawyers and had a legal defense team ready knowing that I would probably get arrested to do it. Being a graffiti artist, I know the times that the police check in and out. We put up the sign the night before and put the video up on youtube showing the changing of the signs (Figure 13). Jay Pather was really quite shocked.
(Gun-Salie, 2019)

I lightly commented that he would have been safe as it was a piece of artwork and he was part of a prestigious colloquium to which he responded in a serious tone, "it's a thirteen-count malicious damage to property and the criminality to the act exists. I don't think the privilege extends to true radicals" (Gun-Salie, 2019).

What was the really incredible and interesting about this project was that the city of Cape Town authorities decided to institute the name officially after this intervention. However, there was someone who pasted Zonnenbloem over the four signs which Haroon had changed to District Six. He didn't know who would have stuck it again, but his guess was that it could have been some residents of the area or the city officials but eventually it was decided that the signs of District Six would stay.



Figure 12: Witness: a site-specific intervention, 2012, Haroon Gunn-Salie. Image courtesy: Goodman Gallery

Haroon didn't really care who changed the signs back to Zonnenbloem. For him the bigger concern was what the city of Cape Town officials thought and how they reacted to it. They have decided to institute the name officially and that was a successful outcome of the intervention. He was of the opinion that if they were to do take the signs off, they would be repeating the same injustice on the people that was inflicted through the forced removals and the renaming of the area. Haroon stated that he had spoken to some people in the City of Cape Town office and the provincial government and they actually appreciated it. They thought it was an interesting way to deal with history. In this he became one of the few artists who had acted as agents to force the government to make this change within the city. Haroon was only twenty-two when he did this work and he realized through many of the government officials that most of them were happy with the renaming, it was just the head of the department for roadworks who was initially opposed to this action. This intervention ended up in becoming a group action with multiple stakeholders and the District Six museum getting involved and taking it up with the national government to change the name officially back to District Six.



Figure 13: Zonnenbloem Renamed, 2013, Haroon Gunn-Salie. Image Courtesy: Haroon Gun-Salie

Next, he spoke about his work that was shown at the South African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015. He also thought it was very relevant to the themes that the ECHOES project was reflecting upon:

2015 was the year of the “Rhodes must fall” moment and the vandalizing or reclaiming of colonial statues around the country. This was great but I had been planning my first solo exhibition for two years since 2013. I had plotted this grand plan to mark a few colonial and apartheid era statues with fire extinguishers with different colour dyes, for example, purple from apartheid South Africa. I had also scouted for locations and finalized a few. As these monuments start getting vandalized and were reported in local and international news I had to do something else. I was advised by a mentor that now my role was to actually advance the debate in keeping with the current discourse and take it a step further. At the same time, I got an invitation to show at Venice South African pavilion. My idea was to cast the hands of Jan Van Riebeeck—just the hands, (Figure 14-Figure 15) decapitate him somehow and ship that to Venice. It’s the statue on Adderley street outside the main train station and was actually donated to the city by Cecil John Rhodes. The curators thought I was crazy to do this in time, so they had a flash drive with *Zonnemblom Renamed* as a backup. It wouldn’t have been possible to ship it to get there in time which meant I had to take it along which was cool too because I would be illicitly carrying it—the dismembered hands of the colonial leader back to Europe. It was replicated in plastic. I thought bronze would give them too much love. They were devalued by being in plastic and they were blood red. That work landed in Venice and it was the first time I was in Europe, the second time I am overseas. (Gun-Salie, 2019)

Haroon explained me the tedious and yet exciting procedure of getting permission from all the relevant officials just in time to be able to carry the sculpted hands as a part of his luggage to Venice. “You won’t believe it but in one day I got permission from all the officials”.

According to him the intervention wasn’t just at the street level but in the offices of bureaucrats. It was to say think about your monuments and think about your role and responsibility to reinterpret that is and he received amazing responses to what he thought would just be a logo and they thought it was really interesting.

The work displayed at the Venice Biennale was titled *Soft Vengeance* and it led Haroon to do an entire series of public intervention with the hands of five colonists in South Africa: “a German, a Dutch, a Portuguese, a British and a Boer. This included Dias, Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town and Paul Kruger and Carl van Brandis in Johannesburg” (Gun-Salie, 2019).



Figure 14: Soft Vengeance, sculpture, 2015, Haroon Gunn-Salie. Image courtesy: Goodman Gallery



Figure 15: Haroon Gunn-Salie casting the hands of the Jan Van Riebeeck hands, Cape Town. Image courtesy: the Artist

Speaking more about his latest work displayed at the castle, *crying for justice*, (Figure 16) Haroon said that the artwork was more about the process which was public. “When I was doing this, people at site were engaging with us like we were performers” Gun-Salie, 2019).He explained the beginnings of this work which was very personal to him as well as his parent’s involvement in the apartheid struggle (Figure 17):

I have been working directly with the *Imam Haroon foundation* and the Imam Haroon family since 2014. I have also been thinking about what it means to be named in honor of the imam himself. My father was from Claremont and was forcefully removed during apartheid. He was at the Imams funeral when he was twelve. He helped lower his body into the ground and swore vengeance towards the apartheid agency. Twenty years later he joined the armed struggle thinking about that very moment. Last year was the 50th anniversary of the imams killing, and I was invited to be a part of the organizing committee of his commemoration. I had this idea that I had been wanting to produce for some time to commemorate his passing. My idea was to create a cemetery, an open graveyard with 118 graves, one for each person who was killed by the apartheid security police. This site at the castle had caught my eye for some time and I approached the castle administration, and their immediate response was incredibly warm. The director was touched by the idea itself because the site used to be the gallows. The evangelical church which used to be the site of hangings, with a gruesome history, is positioned very close to the site of the installation. Keeping this in mind, my idea was to reimagine the castle as a historical heritage site, as a site of murder and torture. When I came up with this idea of an open graveyard, the director was totally in line with that intention. I got permission, I did the drawings and then I was trying to find support to dig the graves. The castle authorities were waiting for the work to be done so they asked me to stop waiting and come and do it myself. I put strings, knocked sticks in the ground and started work with a friend of mine. It took us two weeks to measure out the site- it was two weeks of measuring, two weeks of painting and then three months of digging. After three months of just me and my friend working on this, we were introduced to three members of the gardening team who helped us for three months to complete the work. Last, I would like to state that there are 117 names on the list but there are 118 graves in my work and that's symbolic because the list does not represent the full ramification of the truth from the apartheid security police. Also, that there are so many people who survived detention, survived torture and didn't get killed like the 117 in the official list. They are also here in spirit in that extra number. (Gunn-Salie, 2019)

Haroon explained to me how this work was very personal to him, also in terms of his career and its trajectory which had gone in the direction of displaying work at galleries and museums. "They put me in the white cube, it's not like I had been putting my hand up saying put me there! In fact, 14

it was the other way round. This gave me an opportunity to make work which was not commodifiable or commercial and definitely not for sale” (Gunn-Salie, 2019).

Haroon spoke more about his training in oral history and how he understood that life stories had what he called an “A to Z” trajectory where the artist explains exactly what happened and doesn’t do a secondary process of telling people’s stories. Describing this technique in which his training was rooted as an artist, he emphasized:

You ask an important question that oral historians don’t ask around representation and the question that gets asked may seem simple, but it is a vastly different approach.

The emphasis is on how you use devices or thoughts or feelings and how do you translate a certain highlight or low light of the person’s life, the story of their experiences to people—it’s kind of utopian but it’s also kind of liberating. What kind of creative response comes out of that simple question that normally doesn’t get asked? One thing is for a person to say what happened to them and the other thing is to put that in a form that people can access, and that process or method is a dialog based collaborative art practice. It is about representation about how to co create a piece with this collaborative approach. (Gunn-Salie, 2019)



Figure 16: Crying for Justice, site-specific intervention, 2019, Castle of Good Hope, Haroon Gunn-Salie. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 17: Portrait of Haroon Gunn-Salie with his work *Crying for Justice* in the background, 2019. Photograph: Meghna Singh

He elaborated this method of working with people to translate their oral histories into artwork through one specific example. He worked with an ex-District Six resident named Susan Lewis and created a work from her story telling. He did a life story interview with her and she told him how poor they were in District Six, how they were only able to get a new pair of shoes when they could show that their feet touched the ground through the sole and yet they were hopeful, they saw the bucket as half full and not half empty that caught the rainwater.

She told him about her beautiful, tailored dress which she wore on Sundays when they would go out. This line really moved Haroon who took inspiration from it for his work. He stated:

it was a simple statement where the dress on a Sunday was an access beyond means and was also for her an access to public spaces that were stripped away during the Grouped Areas Act in Cape Town. It wasn't only about being moved to Mitchell Plains, but it was about not having access to those places like the Company Gardens or the promenade that she so dearly loved. I asked Susan how we should represent this, and she said that if we made a dress worn by a ghost that would express how she felt, how she felt stripped of the place that she knew and loved. She said that she would wear a navy-blue dress with an¹⁴ oversize blue collar. That work became *SundayBest*, (Figure 18) and it encapsulates that

interaction in an interview with Susan. That artwork is the result of that process so when I talk about stylized collaborative work, it is that co creation process and then there have been other individuals and groups of people in the different projects that are collaborating stakeholders. (Gunn-Salie, 2019)



Figure 18: Sunday Best, Bronze cast, 2014, Haroon Gun-Salie. Image courtesy: Goodman Gallery

Towards the end of our conversation, I asked him why he called himself an “activist” and what made him an “activist” versus an “artist”. It was only towards the end of our long conversation did Haroon inform me about his parents’ activism and the story of his mother and him being imprisoned when he was only a baby. His personal background, the life his parents led and its consequences on his life influenced him and his work in a deep way. He stated:

Both of my parents were activists, they were actually militants in the western cape, and they coordinated multiple bombs, multiple operations and I was born just after my mum was framed. She was framed for a bombing she didn’t do; she did many others but not this one and it sent a witch hunt around the country. She tried to see her mother for the first time in many years and that slipped out through the leaked wires as the apartheid security mechanism was very sharp and she was captured, and we were both imprisoned.

I was only 16 months old. When we were released, I was two, I hadn't met another child. In detention, I was used as a mechanism of state torture, towards my mother. I was removed from her care, they used to play tapes of me crying to her to say what an awful mother she was. I refused to eat because I didn't know anyone except her. There were protests in the street to put baby Haroon back with Shirley, my mother (Figure 19). This community of protestors were the same people who were at Imam Haroon's wedding, it's the same community of Cape Town that thirty-five years later came out in support of us in detention. Since then, I have had to compartmentalize, process and put these life experiences into a form that is constructive and yet accessible, so the methodology question became the core of my being. My entire life has had a memory constructed on this narrative and this is where the concept for *Crying for Justice* really came about from. After our conversation you can go and repeat any part of this conversation and so you will become the carrier of that narrative. Witnessing is a very advanced process of listening and responding. My childhood was very different and instead of going into a dark depression about it I channel it through this art making process. (Gunn-Salie, 2019)



Figure 19: Picture of Haroon Gun Salie with his mother Shirley Gunn, 1991, Image courtesy: Pressreader.com

Haroon spoke about his mother being the biggest influence in his life. He respected the way his mother channeled all her post traumatic stress and anger into “something more productive but highly charged and militant”. She took him to paint graffiti illegally for the first time. He was proud of the activist bond that he shared with his mother and he saw himself first as an activist and art just a tool for his activism. Returning to the work on display at the castle he said that he didn’t like to publicize his personal connection to the *Witness* too much as he didn’t want the work to become about him. At the end of our conversation, he underlined the reason for making this work and spending eight months digging holes:

What does it mean to be someone who has had the privilege of witnessing the struggles, witnessing the shortcomings of our democracy? what is my responsibility towards that unfinished struggle? The closeness I have to the story might be the reason why I see these 117 cases, I see why all these families have had no closure, the fact that we could not close the book on the past with an empty hole in the middle-so what do we do? There are many ways to protest. I have figured out a way to protest was to negotiate with authorities, get a prime spot of land that you can’t buy to make a statement that has to be recognized. Unfortunately for those who gave me permission, I am saying that the work should only be removed. At the same time the inquest into Dr. Agathe’s case is happening and so much stuff is coming out of the woodwork. The justice department is pursuing 32 of the cases. These are cases that have been reopened. Since they are unnatural causes of death, there had to be an inquest, but the inquest was conducted by the police. The police made up statements like: one just fell down the stairs or hung himself or jumped out of the window. That’s how the record stayed because no one was overturning of the record. There has been injustice- the past is not over, and we should be able to see the records. Many of these records were destroyed after the end of apartheid but some of the people who witnessed the crimes are still alive. Let me give you an example: Imam Haroon (Figure 20) died 50 years ago, and you would assume that all of his perpetrators were killed. While doing this work, I was involved with a lawyer who took the Imam’s inquest case to the department of justice. She requested me to do three life size drawings of his autopsy report. We had to analyze all the twenty-seven bruises on his body and the judge considered that since there wasn’t much evidence from fifty years ago: the visual accompaniment to the autopsy report was more important than the fax report from 1969. (Gunn-Salie, 2019)



Figure 20: Imam Haroon, killed by the apartheid police in 1969. Image courtesy: Imam Haroon Foundation, Cape Town.

Concluding our conversation Haroon told me that on the 9th September 2019, the Heritage Western Cape declared that the grave site of Imaam Haroon and Al Jaamia mosque are now protected heritage sites. The result for the inquest hasn't yet been finalized. He intended to continue his activism work be it through public installations and engagement or shows at galleries and museums.

Sikumbuzo Makandula

How do we start a conversation on music that lives inside people, without following the example and stringent rules firmly created by colonists, or western ideology?

I interviewed Sikumbuzo after watching his moving performance, *Zizimase*, at the District Six museum in Cape Town. On both nights of the show, the tickets were sold out as the museum had limited space to accommodate the audiences. An interdisciplinary live artwork, *Zizimase* was⁵ inspired by the biographical narrative of Lydia Williams who was born into slavery at

Zonnenbloem Estate, District Six. Featuring musicians Tumi Mogorosi, Sisonke Xonti and Wandí Makandula, the artist seeks to trace sonic influences post the emancipation of slaves in Cape Town by offering oral histories and intellectual strategies through the performance of genealogies, clan names and songs. As stated by the artist, “the work seeks to explore forms of cultural resistance and the survival wisdom of those who resided within and around District Six in the mid 19th century” (Makandula, December 2019). District Six in Cape Town is a former inner city residential area where over 60,000 of its inhabitants were forcibly removed by the apartheid regime in the 1970’s. It’s a critical site of engagement and many artists and activists including the team at the District Six museum have done creative healing work here.

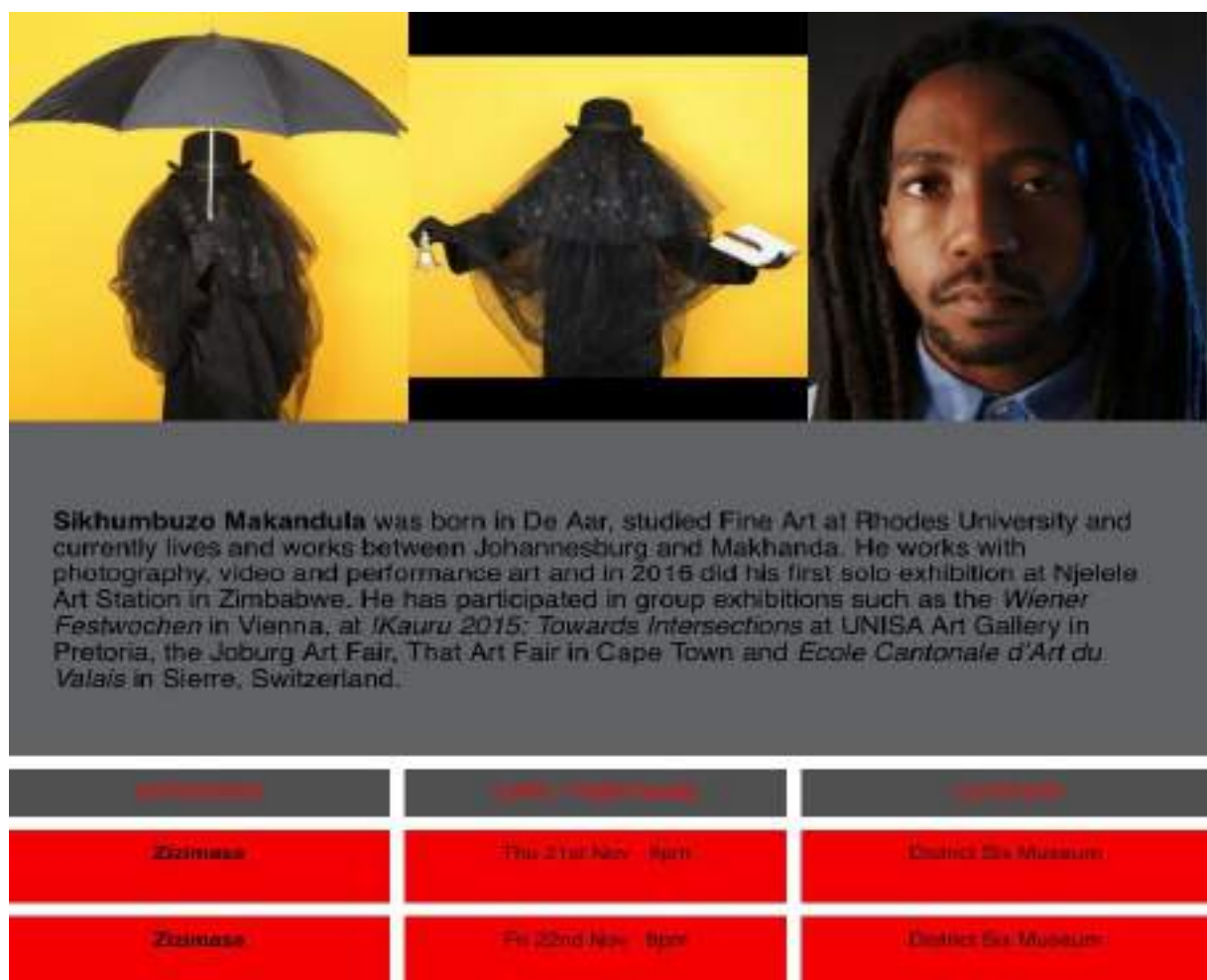


Figure 21: Zizimase, performance, Sikumbuzo Makandula, 2019. Image courtesy: Infecting the City website

Sikumbuzo (Figure 21) works between photography, video and performance art. I met him at the District Six Homecoming Centre for a conversation about his work and more specifically about *Zizimase*. Introducing himself and his work he informed me that prior to moving to Cape Town¹⁵ he lived in Grahams Town now known as Makhanda in the Eastern Cape province of South

Africa. His practice was shaped during his early years as he was confronted with a deep-rooted colonial history in everything around him, especially the cathedral in the city centre. He felt the presence of lingering ghosts within the city, watching over everyone: “this church is opposite the main entrance of the university (Figure 22). When you are walking on the high street which is opposite the church, it feels like you are under surveillance.” (Makandula, November 2019). Growing up as an altar boy in a family that identifies as Anglican, Sikumbuzo was very familiar with the architecture of a cathedral and it made him feel very uncomfortable. He stated, “as one of the oldest cathedrals in the city one witnesses a lot of history but there’s also a lot that’s omitted. All the plans inside the cathedral tell the history of British soldiers who are venerated like heroes while they still have derogatory names on display such as “Khaffirs” for black people. There’s a lot of loaded paraphilia and it made me feel very strange to be inside that cathedral” (Makandala, November 2019). Sikumbuzo said that he questioned the presence of the church, its colonial heritage and also the question around “land” as the church was actually implicated for land theft. “We don’t talk about the role of the missionaries and their centrality within land theft in the Southern African region. This further made me focus on the memorial culture in South Africa especially statues and memorials in the country” (Makandula, November 2019).



Figure 22: Cathedral of St Michael & St George, Makhanda. Photograph: Sikumbuzo Makhandula

This led him to engage in a work around Ntaba KaNdoda, a dilapidated national monument in the former Ciskei. The monument was built by Lennox Sebe who the prime minister in the 1980s in Ciskei which was then a Bantustan (an area set aside for black South Africans of Xhosa descent). He told me how this monument was inspired by what he saw in Israel. He was a dictator and used biblical ways to indoctrinate people so if you were a public servant in Ciskei during easter you were forced to converge in this monument he built and he would dictate his speeches about what it meant to be in the Ciskei and notions of nationhood and relations to south Africa. "That monument, a site of torture-is still there" (Makandula, November 2019). He made a six-minute video titled *Isigidimi* (The Messenger), 2016, in which the artist traverses the indoor and outdoor spaces of this hauntingly deserted monument, providing views of this nationalist and fracturing ruin. Throughout, Makhandula, who personifies a messenger from another world, performs what to Catholics would be a cleansing ritual. Dressed as "the messenger" in a long tunic and conical looking hat, he treadscarefully, burning incense in a thurible as he moves methodically through the space.

Elaborating his methodology, he said that his work was always conversational:

It starts by me researching and interviewing several people but the intension of that is that the research becomes a form of archive- a living archive which gives testimony to the current voices. It's important for me to place myself as an individual but also to be a part of a collective. Within these spaces I would device a performance which one way or another would be documented as film and if it was performed as a live artwork then there would be an audience to witness it. (Makandula, November 2019)

Focusing on his latest work *Sisimasi*, a multi-faceted performative work with strong elements of live music, the archive and a documentary screening he discussed its relationship with District Six and why he chose to perform it there:

During my M.A I was tasked to do an internship at the District Six museum for several months. During that time, I searched the archives specifically for the biography of the three royal children who went to study at the Zonnenbloem College. They were one of the first children to go study at Zonnenblom with the sons of the king Sandile of Maxhob'ayakhawuleza and thirty years later the grandson of king Mzilikazi came to study at Zonnembloem. They came to study here through Cecil John Rhodes. He had a plan not

only to civilize but also to break black royal families and targeted the sons and daughters of chiefs on the pretext of providing them good education and bringing them to Cape Town. During my research I realised that this targeting of the royal children didn't happen in just in South Africa but all-over Southern Africa. This pattern existed because they were trying to their steal land. Interestingly enough Emma and Lebongula Sandile challenged the government at that time about the whole issue around land- when they went back home, they fought in one of the wars around land. They identified with those that are called "Magaba", those who are not converted to Christianity. During that time, I realised that there was important archival material at District Six that needed to be engaged with and that's when I discovered the story of Lydia Williams (Figure 23) who was a slave born in the Zonnenblom state and died there. (Makandula, November 2019)



Figure 23: Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019. Projection of Lydia Williams. Photograph: Meghna Singh

As a part of the performance, Sikumbuzo screened a documentary on Lydia William, made in 1997-1998, produced and directed by Michael Wheeder, the current dean of the St Georges¹⁵ cathedral in Cape Town. The District six museum celebrates the Slave Emancipation Day on

December 1st every year and one of the people they foreground during the event is the figure of Lydia. Sikumbuzo researched more about the figure of Lydia and realised that when Zonnenbloem was operating as a school, she was very much present, but her story had been omitted in books. He told me that she worked as a domestic worker and would have been well versed in navigating the space, engaging with the royal children but one doesn't find the narrative of their encounter with Lydia anywhere. Sikimbuzo found an archive of letters that were written to Bishop Gray, the first bishop of Cape Town. Emma the daughter of king Sandilie wrote to the bishop pleading to go home to see their families, they felt like they were being held hostages at Zonnenbloem as they had been separated from their family for too long. Sikumbuzo's interest in the situatedness of the Zonnenbloem estate had to do with the erasure of slave history as the school would have been a slave quarter housing slaves before it was turned into the school. "This is where the slaves would have been brought after they were bought from the slave lodge". He further informed me that Lydia was from Mozambique and "the slaves who trace their lineage to Mozambique identify themselves as Mozambiquer's" (Makandula, November 2019). During his research he was very interested in the fact that on the 1st of December, Lydia would invite people and teach them about slavery and her own ancestry from Mozambique. She was emancipated from being a slave in 1901 and died in 1910. He described his performance "not only as an act of dignifying this history or untold histories but also what it means to humanise their narratives, their biographies" (Makandula, November 2019). He further explained the aim behind creating the multi-dimensional work:

I was interested in understanding how these royal kids who come to Zonnenbloem defined themselves outside of the missionaries defining them. During the performance, I call out their clan names as that makes us trace their own genealogy to who they were. My objective was to work with the material as though it was a living archive and not something dense and uncomprehendable. The aim of the work was to evoke the spirits of those who lived within and around District Six. Also how do you understand District Six of the 1900's which is the same time when Lydia was living there. She was born into slavery but then her parents and her were one of the few slaves who became the freed slaves. She knew what slavery was. She was fifteen years old when slavery was abolished. For me it was about respecting Lydia as a figure, as a mother figure, as a mother and her spirits (Figure 24). I wanted to pay respect not only to her but also to her contemporaries who lived in the 19th century, District Six. I wanted the audience to imagine how they would navigate the space, negotiate their positionality not just with the missionaries or

white people but with themselves and with the other freed slaves. I wanted to do this with songs, so I did extensive research around music and hymns that were written at the time as Lydia was Anglican. At the same time, I didn't want to centralise it around Lydia. (Makandula, November 2019)

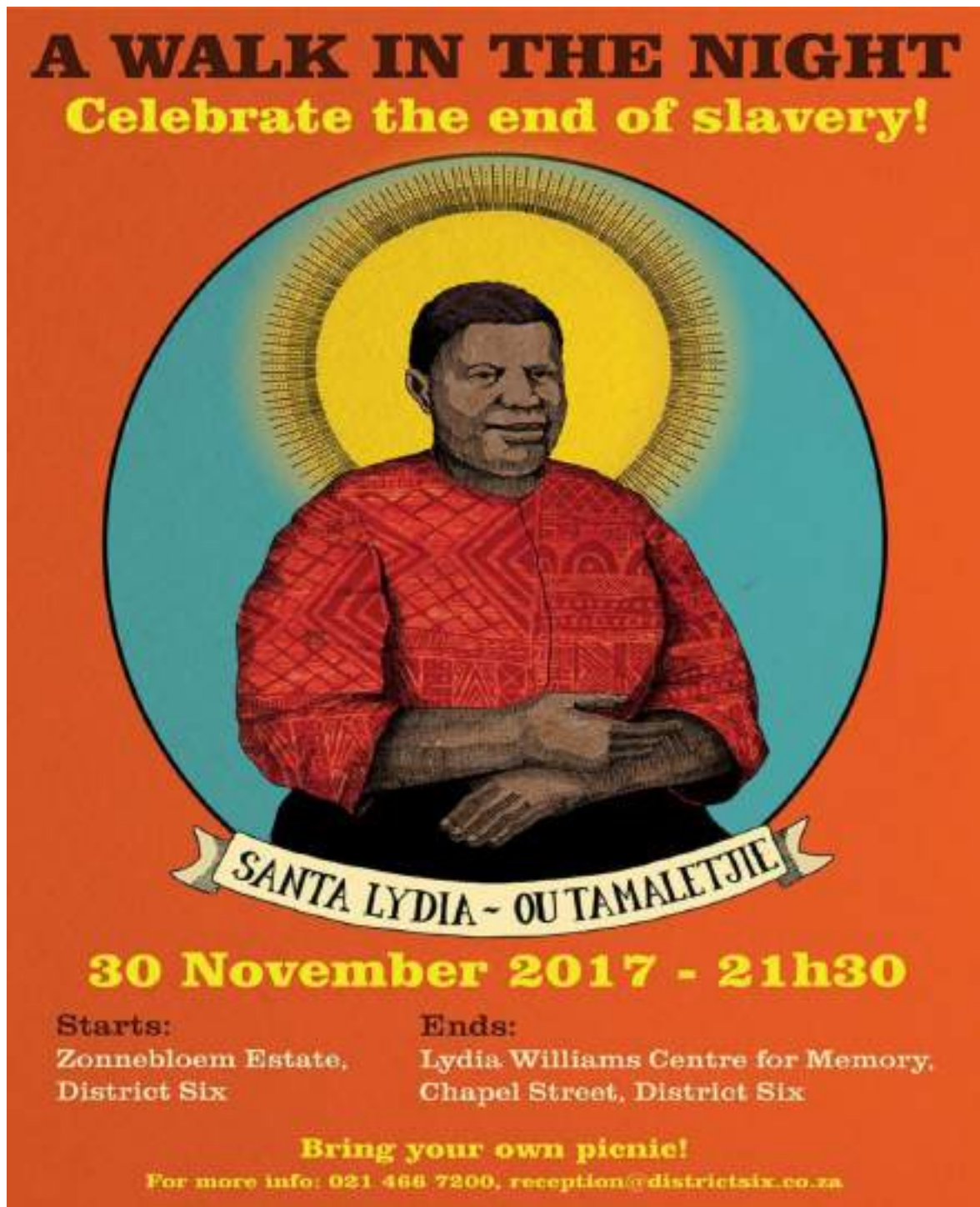


Figure 24: Lydia Williams, Slave Emancipation Day poster, End of slavery walk, 2017. Image courtesy: District Six Museum

The main aim of the creating the work for Sikumbuzo was to present an act of dignifying the narratives and histories of the enslaved. He chose the District Six museum for the performance as a way to pay homage to them in District Six itself (Figure 29). “One of the ways to think about it was to think around the sonic-the music Lydia would listen to herself” (Makandala, November 2019). He was interested in the songs the young royals would have been inducted to while in Zonnenbloem so he devised the entire performance was around music. “I spent a lot of time researching music. The first song that’s played after Lydia’s film during the performance is called ‘slave must be patient’ and it is composed by the drummer Tumi Mogorosi. He plays that towards the end of the film and there’s a whole lot of drumming that goes on” (Makandala, November 2019). According to Sikumbuzo the entire performance was devised through music. The music was not archival. Infact, it was all contemporary style music in the performance. It was very carefully thought through- he found cover songs and then a contemporary version of that song that spoke to the particular narrative of each enslaved person. One of the slave emancipation songs was dedicated to Lydia and another song was dedicated to those royal children who went to Zonnebloem. He specifically mentioned a song titled “15 Sandile Street”, as the saxophone player who composed it, himself grew up on 15 Sandile street in District Six, Cape Town. Discussing the history of District Six further he informed me that the first people to be evicted from there were Xhosas, but that history wasn’t spoken about. The song “15 Sandile Street” particularly resonated with him as prince Sandile was one of the royal children who went to study at zonnenblom. There was a very careful way of treating the songs and what they meant in relation to these narratives. Sikimbizo had a detailed conversation with the musicians about how they positioned themselves within District Six while reflecting on the archives there. He said he wanted to highlight the following: “what is the place and role of District Six museum within South Africa currently and how are they dealing with this thing called the living archive and who engages with it? Who is the public? And if this stuff is put out who engages with it?” (Makandala, November 2019).

During the performance, he invites members of the public to step into the performance space and place a stone as a way of saying “that we are also here, we also witnessed, we also claim this history as ours, to humanise without degrading” (Makandala, November 2019). He said that he wanted to present an ethical way to talk about this history: “what does it mean to humanise those who were subjugated. What does it mean to dignify those histories-that of

Lydia, of the Sandile's, of the lebungola's" (Makandala, November 2019)? He did not want this performance to be about yet another slave story but to dignify and make their narrative about a broader narrative about slavery. "If you think about Lydia most people don't know who she was, what her role was in this space and also as somebody who was a mother, an aunt, a grandmother. She had contemporaries too and also, we need a way to humanise these life stories. The other prominent element during the performance was a jarring noise of a whistle that got unbearably loud for the audience. Sikumbuzo explained his creative decision to include that in the performance while raising questions around the telling of our colonial history:

It was to pronounce the gravitas of the violence experienced by the subjugated, also to witness/experience it viscerally using sound. The bell historically was used to discipline people. I wanted to use a device/colonial tool that the settlers brought with them as a way to not only govern the space but also to violate and mark territory.

What does it mean to ring this bell? Does it become a form of catharsis? If the bells are rung, (Figure 26-Figure 27) do our bodies become witness to recall a history that we have to deal with as a part of our daily lives? How do we talk about this history and how do we pass it on? How do we think about a slave history in the cape and how do we memorialise it? Do we need monuments for this, and if there was to be a memorial, do we need a fixed way to memorialise? I think when we encounter these histories there should be a way to say that I was here, a silent way of saying I claim this space, but I also acknowledge the history within this space. (Makandula, November 2019)



Figure 25: Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019, District Six Museum. Performer using 'Salt' in work. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 26: Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019, District Six Museum. Performer ringing the bell.
 Photograph: Meghna Singh



*Figure 27: Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019, District Six Museum. Performer ringing the bell.*¹⁶
 Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 28: Drummer Tumi Mogorosi in Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019, District Six Museum. Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 29: Sisimasi, multi-media performance, Sikumbuzo Makhandula, 2019, A full District Six Museum with audience watching from two levels. Photograph: Meghna Singh

Discussing his practice further Sikumbuzo told me about particular objects that he had been using throughout his work: “salt, (Figure 25) red ochre powder and a skull are things I have used many times and the skull keeps reoccurring throughout my work” (Makandala, November 2019). Sikumbuzo’s work engaged not only with issues of social justice but an presented an ethical way of commemorating slavery. He said that there were statues of whitemen in public spaces in Cape Town but when it came to commemorating slavery there were only artifacts in museums. “These artifacts don’t make us understand the level of violence within our psyches, so I did a processional intervention on the 1st December last year where I used the ringing of the slave bell”. He described his performance questioning the colonial statues in greater detail:

the processional intervention started in front of the memorial of bishop Gray, who was instrumental in bringing the royal children to the Zonnenbloem college. His memorial statue is in front of the cathedral in the city centre. I inscribed the name of these children using the red ochre alongside his name on the statue. Moving on to the cathedral, I poured red ochre on the bible, I nailed it and burnt it in front of the cathedral. Leaving the burning bible there, I moved on and encountered the memorial of Sir George Grey. I splashed bullet guns all around the memorial and then we moved to the statue of Cecil Rhodes in the Company Gardens. There I placed a plaque with the name Indenbule because Rhodes was responsible for the displacement of Indenbule from his family to Cape Town. Within the plaque itself I wrote an inscription stating that Rhodes is a settler who displaced human being and separated families. I have a documentation of the statue with the names and then I have a documentation of it being scrubbed off. (Makandula, November 2019)

The performances ended in the Company Gardens with him ringing a bell (Figure 30) that was used as a slave bell. He informed me that the slave bell was rung during particular times of the day to mark intervals of time. “It was used very much to control people’s lives within the city space” (Makandula, November 2019). One of the objects that he used in the District Six performance was the bell. Sikumbuzo wanted the audience to think about “the bell” as an object and how it had been used over the years, not just in South Africa but globally. How as a colonial object, a tool, it had been used as a psychological device to think through time.



Figure 30: Slave Bell, The Company's Gardens, Cape Town. Photograph: Sikumbuzo Makhandula

According to him, the sound of the bell was also a kind of a violence on the body. He further stated:

In a way your body is controlled by this tool, but it also violates you in a very deep way: it's sound means that you have to be in a particular space at a particular time, whether it's time to be in the church or whether its marking someone's death. Not only is it forcing you to be disciplined but it's about how you become disciplined. It marks your body with a level of violence telling you how you need to hold yourself. Perhaps we have to think about the gravitas of this sonic, how does this sound govern our lives and what does it mean to witness these moments? What are the ethical ways to have a conversation about these colonial tools and how are these tools still very much part of our daily lives? (Makandula, November 2019)

Sikumbuzo's work was to think about ways to 'cleansed' the pathways that we always have to navigate in Cape Town and one of the tools he used was an intervention. "I don't call my work a performance because I have an ethical consideration towards those who witness the work but also play a role in the work" (Makandula, November 2019). There's a conversation around decolonisation in South Africa and Makandula challenges the role of colonial objects. He stated:

what do we do with these objects when they are a part of our everyday, what are the ways of reclaiming these tools and what is an ethical way of reclamation especially reclamation of human remains? How do we reclaim untold histories and silenced histories? Also, how do we cleanse these spaces, how do we cleanse the public sphere? By witnessing, the audience also take on the social responsibility to think through ways in which the public sphere gets cleansed. What then is the language used to think through what cleansing is? how do rituals of cleansing become inclusive? (Makandula, November 2019)

In concluding our conversation, I asked Sikumbuzo about his experience of performing in a European space and how the idea of "colonial entanglements" played out in such a context. He spoke about taking a similar performance to Lucerne, Switzerland in 2014, what he called the "space of the coloniser". I was invited to participate in an exhibition and I asked myself

what it meant for me to do a performance there, what was my role going to be in a colonial space like Switzerland? He further explained his viewpoint:

One has to be careful entering such a space. There's a role that you are brought in with. Coming from the global south, I ask: do I have to be the one to do the work? Can you now do the work, also own up and account for things? I didn't want people to come and watch a performance, I wasn't going to do that. Instead, I made the audience do a public performance by giving them directions. I find that when the role is reversed it becomes uncomfortable. It's ok when people are just spectators but when they are given an ethical, physical role to play they get uncomfortable.

(Makandula, November 2019)

Further explaining the performance, he told me that one of the things he specifically asked all the white people in the audience to do was to put a nail on top of all the pictures of all the British white missionaries and to place white beads instead. This was devised for people to think about their responsibility, not just his responsibility. He wanted them to think about what this work was supposed to do collectively. He said, "I went in with a proposition of questions and tools that we all have to navigate. Sometimes it becomes messy, sometimes it becomes bloody but we all have to do it" (Makandula, 2019). In conclusion he left me thinking about the following: "there are various ways to cleanse the city from its violent history but we also need to think about ways to restore dignity, to consider the experience of those who were displaced. How do we put those spirits at ease, how do we appease them? How that's done becomes an ethical responsibility as a part of a collective effort" (Makandula, 2019).

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Appendix: Gallery



Figure 31: Audience viewing performances at Infecting the City festival, 2019, Thibault Square & St Georges Mall. Photograph by Meghna Singh



Figure 32: Jesus Thesis and other critical fabulations, performance, St Georges Cathedral, Infecting the City festival, 2019.
 Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 33: Jesus Thesis and other critical fabulations, performance, St Georges Cathedral, Infecting the City festival, 2019.
Photograph: Meghna Singh



Figure 34: The Dish, Oupa Sibeko & Thulani Chauke, outside Iziko South African Museum, 2019. Photograph: Meghna Singh 17



Figure 35: The Dance of the Rubber Tree, Performance, Mushaandja, 2019. Castle of Good Hope. Photograph: Meghna Singh

Key practices in Marseille, by Marine Schütz

Prompted by the repressive discourses on colonial heritage and memory embedded in the public landscape, and by a city image based on nostalgia for French Algeria, artistic practices in Marseille continually negotiate the demise of public politics. Using ephemeral and conceptual approaches, artists Dalila Mahdjoub, Mohammed Laouli and Agathe Rosa & Emma Grosbois question the weight of colonization today, addressing its effects on memory and on the city's monuments.

The report analyses the ways the different and recent artistic or activist projects are informed by a dynamic consisting of acknowledging how the colonial experiences have shaped the values of society and mapping art as a point of mobilization to engage in critical ways with this enduring heritage. It will especially question the ways artists entangle the critique of colonial narration and an epistemic critique of aesthetic knowledge resonating with decolonial aesthetics conceived as a range of artistic and curatorial practices that seek to change the hegemonic ideas. It is more specifically within this frame that the report wishes to map and to interpret the uses of the past by bearing special attention to their processes and motivations when attempting to undo colonialism's effects on how the colonial past is narrated in Marseille.

Amnesia around colonial heritage and memory in Europe deeply impacts cultural artistic practices, including collective and individual artistic struggles over them. Any analysis of the ways in which artists confront the colonial past in Marseille should be prefaced by an overview of colonial memory politics and of the city's colonial background. The French colonial empire existed for more than four centuries, starting in the middle of the 16th century. It is, however, French settlement in Africa—and specifically in Algeria—in the 1830s that really changed Marseille's economy and turned the city into a major colonial capital. No city was so connected to the colonies as Marseille in France was.

The city hosted two of the three colonial exhibitions (in 1906 and in 1922) set up by France, and on these occasions the colonial capital was reshaped by monuments designed for grand displays of imperial prestige and power, claiming imperial significance for Marseille, and

giving an indication of the fervor of imperialist celebrations at this historical moment (Aldrich 2005, 92). Embedded in the city's landscape, monuments such as Saint-Charles Staircase, with its allegories of the colonies, form an obvious memento of France's colonial past as well as a sustained colonial memory (Aldrich 2005, 97) (Figure 1).

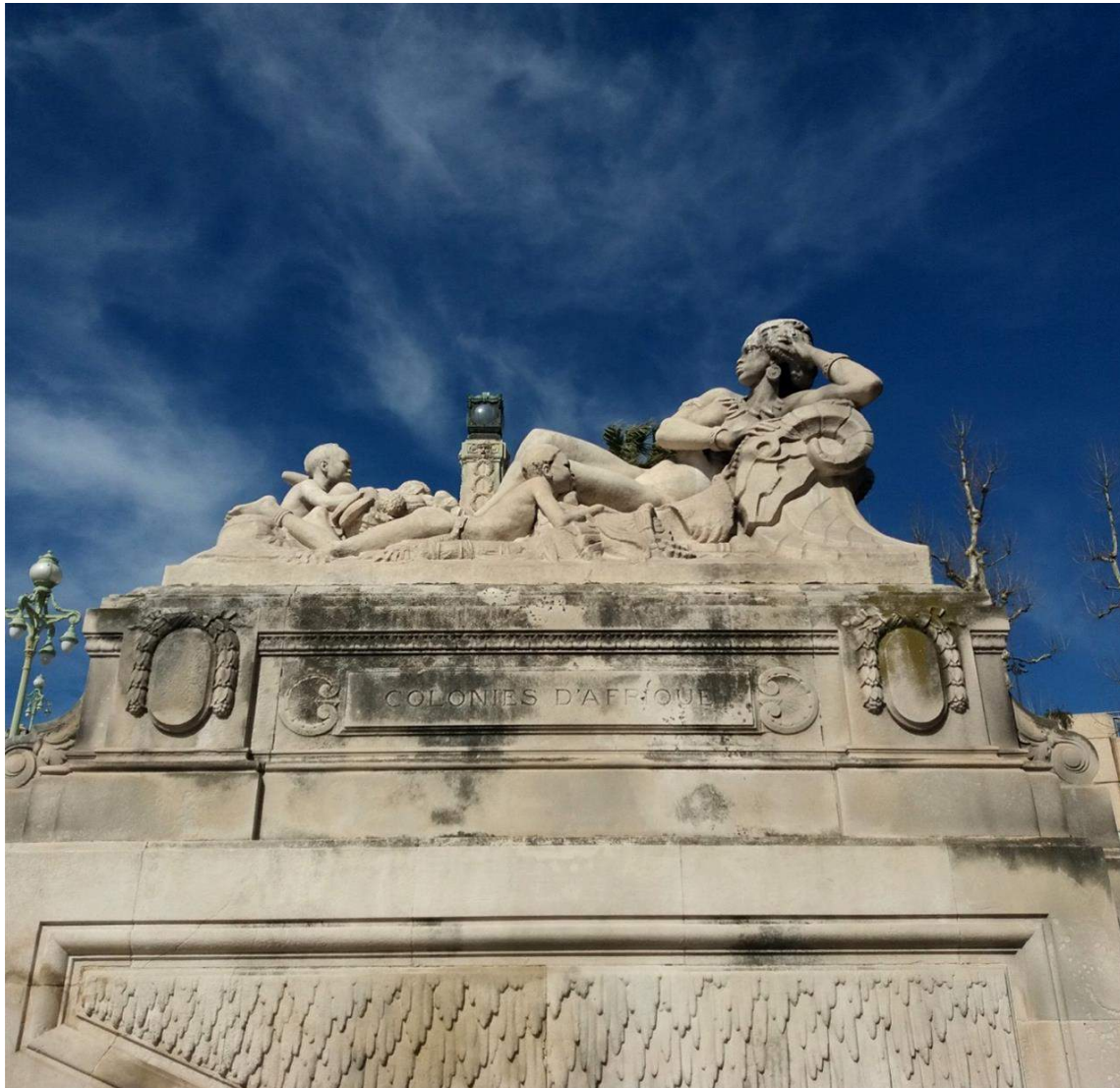


Figure 1: Louis Botinelly, *Les Colonies d'Afrique*, 1927.

The two monumental, sculpted groups *Les Colonies d'Asie* and *Les Colonies d'Afrique* were ordered by the city to the sculptor Louis Botinelly and were completed in 1927 to celebrate Marseille as an imperial capital. Their location in the staircase leading to the Saint-Charles train station as well as the imperial products represented such as the grain and fruits evoke the central role that Marseille has played in the French empire as well as they suggest how the city gained

its wealth on the back of the colonies. On the other hand, there exist very few public sites or plaques offering the former colonized and their descendants a true civic commemoration.

This is although, since the end of the French empire in the 1960s, France has witnessed a significant influx of immigrants from the Maghreb region. Their descendants today make up one fourth of the general population of Marseille. At the national level, recent debates around the “national public politics of colonial memory” (Dufoix 2012) have been marked by a deep cultural divide that has persisted for close to sixty years since decolonization and that reached its peak in the early 21st century.

Colonial French memory politics are divided. For example, in 2005 emerged the public debate around a law proposing to recognize the “positive dimension of French colonization in Algeria” (Dufoix 2012), which was finally abandoned due to protests. While state ambivalence toward colonization explains the repressive stance on colonial memory, a second line of explanation may be in the competition between heritage groups at the local level. For example, in 2014, near Marseille’s town hall in the 1st and 2nd districts of the city, officials affixed two plaques memorializing Sétif and Guelma, two Algerian villages that had known violent and deadly repression on 8 May 1945 after suppressed demonstrations, leading to riots. Under pressure from the French Algeria nostalgist group *Le collectif national: Non au 19 mars 1962* [“The national collective: No to 19 March 1962”], the plaques were immediately removed. March 19, 1962 was the date on which the cease-fire that ended eight years of war in Algeria was promulgated. The day before, with the Evian Agreements, the French government ceded its powers over Algeria and the Sahara to the provisional government of the Algerian republic. These dates, which led to Algeria's independence on 5 July 1962, today concentrate the hatred of extreme right-wing groups in France. The collective was created in Nice in 2008 to commemorate the 19th of March and the deaths of French soldiers. The key innovations that have been identified in terms of best practice of managing colonial heritage are the following :

- Dalila Mahdjoub
- Algérie rêvée au Mucem
- Mohammed Laouli
- Agathe Rosa and Emma Grosbois
- The Campaign to rename the School Bugeaud

Dalila Mahdjoub

Of Algerian origin, born in Montbéliard, in the north of Lyon in 1969, the artist has spent her youth in a large family of eight children in the suburbs of the city, where lived mainly the families of Algerian workers who, like her father, arrived in this locality, from Algeria, to work in automobile Peugeot Factory, in the 1950s (Figure 2).

She then left Montbéliard suburbs for Lyon, where she studied the fine arts in the end of 1980s, before leaving for Marseille where she is still living today. In Marseille, her work has revolved around the district of Belsunce that Michel Peraldi describes as the “historical testimony of the bond of dependence woven by the colonization between these people and France” (Péraldi 2001, 37). Such an entanglement has played an important role in the recovery of the artist’s identity.

In our last interview, she expressed the impact that the representation of young Maghrebi people had had on her practice. When she was studying for the last year in Lyon fine art School, the riots of Vaux-en-Velin happened. In this suburb of Lyon, in the night of the 6th October 1990, riots outbursted as young people burned down cars and shops, bringing the police to intervene. She made a video from the tv news footage she recollected, the latter having “an alarmist tone”, describing the city as being “at the top of the slums of France” and purposefully reworked them in a “state of emergency”. She had privileged for her video “a fragile editing”. In this event and its media coverage, bearing the trace of the harsh stigmatization for the population of the suburbs, lays one of her sources for refusing to be enclosed. This would mean for her refusing reading grids and especially those operating in art, locating her, as an artist of Algerian descent, as spokeswoman for issues of immigration.



Figure 2: Dalila Mahdjoub in Made in Algeria exhibition, Mucem.

Colonial heritage has become a point of contestation among citizens and artists in Marseille. Of Algerian origin and born in Montbéliard in the north of Lyon in 1967, Dalila Mahdjoub spent her youth in a large family of eight children in the suburbs of the city, inhabited mainly by the families of Algerian workers, who, like her father, migrated from Algeria in the 1950s to work in the Peugeot automobile factory. Mahdjoub then left Lyon for Marseille, where she lives today. Like Paris and Lyon, Marseille has witnessed many of the problems associated with France's adaptation to communities of overseas origin: violence, discrimination, and the rise of extremist and xenophobic political groups (Aldrich 2005, 92). Mahdjoub's engagement as an artist developed as a response to the oppressive hierarchies ingrained in the disquieting social structures of Marseille, a place where history is at once physically present and "absent from people's consciousness" (Phillips 2000, 117). Taking up the practice of artist–researcher, which has been one of the most remarkable aesthetic means in the past decade to contain the interrelationship between the humanities and new forms of engagement among contemporary artists, Mahdjoub programs acts of remembrance that expose the gulf between what happened in the past and how it gets remembered in the present.

In 2014, the artist presented the installation *La Maison, le monde* [“The house, the world”] in Marseille’s artist-run space La Compagnie (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *La Maison, le monde*, 2014, La Compagnie, poster.

The project was based on the juxtaposition of the archival traces of her father and those of today's global workers. Viewers were invited to enter the exhibition space and inspect two workplace medals belonging to the artist's father, Said, sewn together in a textile-based language that the artist had used in her previous series, *Mise à l'honneur*, consisting of sewing together t-shirt tags bearing the signs "Made in Bangladesh," "Made in Cambodia," and so on with red thread and painting them with soluchrom to give a "variation of red according to the label materials" (Mahdjoub 2016). With the works *Honour* #1, #2 and #3, the artist engaged with the recovery of her father's history as a worker at Peugeot, a process she initiated after his passing in 2004. Echoing the physicality of wounds, the red color also contained a reference to the difficult recognition in France of colonial workers who, like her father, spent their whole lives working in Peugeot's factory yet never obtained French citizenship. In her text "... à la bonne place" about her father's medal, the artist meditates on French society's ambiguous relationship with its colonial and then postcolonial workers. In the text, she mentions factual aspects of her father's life, like his "departure from Algeria, his passage through Marseille, gateway to work in France" and the "medals that Peugeot gave him" (Mahdjoub 2016). Thinking about these workplace medals, Mahdjoub broaches more difficult feelings, such as the paradox of the rewards offered by French industries. Despite this ritual's democratic intent, the medal never ceased to oscillate between the notion of "honor" and that of "contempt" (Mahdjoub 2016). In the artist's words, the medal was "a sham of dignity rendered, by powerful people, to exploited, worn-out workers" (Mahdjoub 2016) (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Dalila Mahdjoub, *La Maison, le monde* (2014) Photograph by Dalila Mahdjoub. Used with permission.

Mediating the artist's difficult feelings around the loss of her father, the work may also be considered an informal and individual practice of heritage from below, centering on the history of the oppressed and aimed at countering the effects of colonization on the present's relationship with the past. The artist's concern in using aesthetics for the preservation of colonial and postcolonial microhistories and for the transmission of personal memory and history resonates with Edouard Glissant's observation that "our history (or more precisely our histories) is shipwrecked, washed up in colonial history" (Glissant 1997, 14). Manifesting the need to dredge up repressed images from the past to somehow recuperate some fragments of that which was culturally lost during colonization, the artist also issues a critique of today's French institutional memory politics, which result in what she calls a "fragmented memory." This term emerged in her recent work *Enchanteur* (2019), which addresses the ways in which French history was taught to her when she was a child (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Dalila Mahdjoub, *Enchanteur*, 2019, mixed media and Paul Landowski, model for the Pavois, showcase *L'Algérie rêvée et vécue: des regards en miroir*, Mucem, Marseille. Photography Dalila Mahdjoub.

Produced in the immediate aftermath of an education-based project in a classroom in Marseille in collaboration with the Mucem museum in Marseille, the work was accompanied by placards that included a text by the artist. Based on personal and familial memories of the Algerian war, this autobiographical text contained a record of how she felt because of the gap between her mother Khedidja's traumatic souvenirs of death and violence and the “enchanted” version of Franco-Algerian colonial history recounted at school, where “nothing agreed could explain, relay, support, contextualize or invalidate snippets of a story by [her] mother” (Mahdjoub 2019) (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Dalila Mahdjoub, *Enchanteur*, 2019, cartels accompanying the work with the narrative of the artist's mother, Mucem, Marseille. Photograph by Dalila Mahdjoub

Reinforcing the importance of Franz Fanon's theoretical legacy in discussing the psychological pain of living in between these two irreconcilable national visions of the colonial past, the artist borrows his concept of "scissiparity" (Mahdjoub 2019). In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon, who himself appropriated the notion of "scissiparity" from the realm of biology discourse, described the effects of French imperial and Republican ideals—which he defined as one and indivisible—on the colonizers, who had the experience of alienation and of double consciousness. He posited this experience as the cause of a violent disintegration of the self. By transferring this term, originating in the political philosophy and psychiatry of the colonial era, to her own contemporary experience as a Franco-Algerian subject, the artist reveals that colonial memory is written on and in the body of the person who remembers. As Mahdjoub (2019) says of the weight of the colonial past in the present, her response was physical: "It took me years to vomit all this dirt that had been put in my head."

In this way, *La Maison, le monde*'s language speaks to the special difficulty of memorial work when it pertains to colonial history. The vibrant textile surfaces Mahdjoub creates, enmeshed with threads and covered with red paint, are an artistic gesture that recalls the process of mental

layering. As Amy Hubbell has emphasized, layering has entered into the vocabulary of young Franco-Algerian artists, such as Zineb Sedira and Katia Kameli, precisely as a means to materialize their peculiar type of memory.

Consequently, *La Maison, le monde* is less about probing a history that has been forgotten than it is about exposing the multiple layers of the past and how “one can reformulate what had been erased by colonization and what had been silenced by the subsequent ruptures of independence” (Hubbell 2018, 8) (Figure 7). As part of her attempt to “reveal something more accurate in what is our cultural and individual identity” (Mahdjoub 2018), Mahdjoub thus recovers a sense of multilayered identity and a specific register of memory.

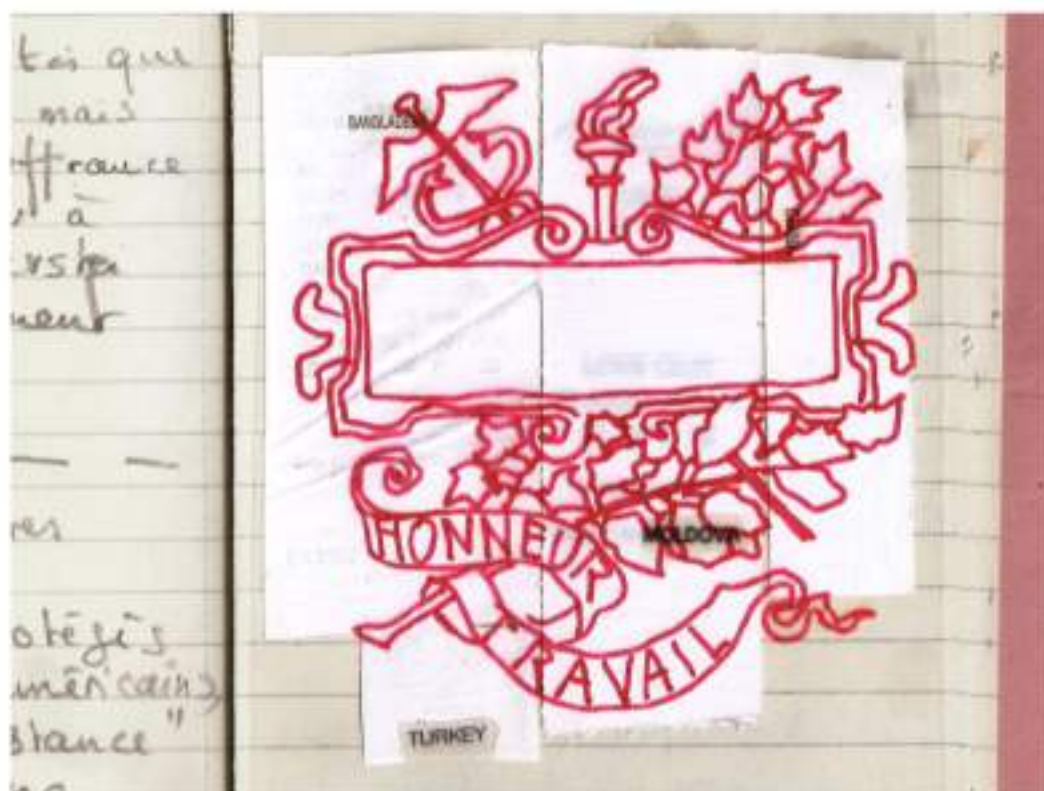


Figure 7 : Dalila Mahdjoub, preparatory sketch for *La Maison, le monde/ Mise à l'honneur 1*,

Contrary to most artists informed by artist–researcher practices, Mahdjoub uses the archive not to take part in the historical reconstruction of colonization but rather as a way to build a location

of memory for the oppressed and the forgotten, for those who have no place. Escaping the threat of essentialism, Mahdjoub juxtaposes the memorializing work of colonization and its aftermath with that of other histories subjected to power relations. Her words highlight the problem of a lacking or absent sense of community as a grave concern, exemplified by her obsessive question “What do you do when you don’t have a place?” (Mahdjoub 2018).

In the press release for the exhibition, she established a link between today’s workers in factories around the world and Maghrebi colonial and postcolonial subjects; their fate, she suggests, intersect in their shared status as oppressed people. Implied in this statement is her role as an artist, which she describes as follows: “I have found them a place. It is a question of finding them a home” (Mahdjoub 2014). As she proposes here, her task does not only consist in metaphorically finding oppressed people a home through her work but also in forcefully engaging with the memory debate by inscribing forgotten histories in places—a process she conceptualizes as “finding them a home” (Mahdjoub 2014). Commenting on her memorial process, she explains that she has found “the right place” for her father’s memory: “the house, the world” (Mahdjoub 2014).

The kind of shelter she produces— “delimited by curtains made from labels...barcodes, locks, mop curtains, curtain-drapes, curtain shroud, curtain-towel” (Mahdjoub 2014), and thus reproducing the permanent workshop that she has at home, in the family kitchen—reveals the great significance of the house in her work, as a structure that hosts the traces of leftovers. *La Maison, le monde*’s title, derived from a 1984 film by Satyajit Ray (inspired by a novel by Rabindranath Tagore), and the form of “installation-atelier” reinforce the centrality of the house/home in this project and the artist’s longstanding interest in this topic (Figure 8).

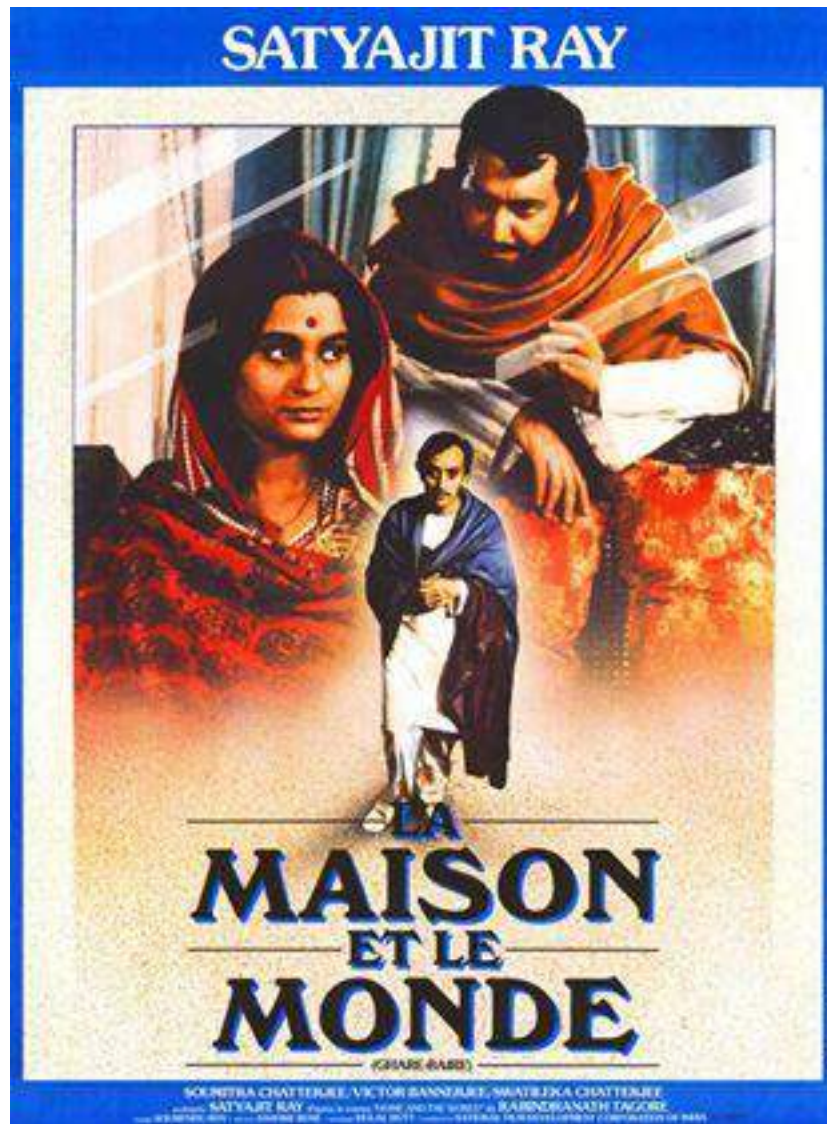


Figure 8: Poster for Satyajit Ray's film.

Indeed, before the house became a metaphor for building memory, it occurred as a concrete topic within Mahdjoub's conceptual research. One of her first projects in Marseille, *D'Un seuil à l'autre* ["From one threshold to another"], co-created with artist Martine Derain in 2007, involved documenting the issue of housing for colonial workers who arrived from Algeria in Marseille. This work was located at the physical entrance of a residence where elderly former colonial Algerian workers live today in the Belsunce district of Marseille, a district marked by the "historical testimony of the bond of dependence woven by the colonization between these people and France" (Péraldi 2006, 37). While memorializing one major site of Algerian immigration, this installation also triggered more conceptual concerns around what "home" means and how it relates to "domesticity." With its title, which comes from a Kabyle proverb

meaning “At the threshold or the door where people welcome the visitors, things are going upside down” (Mahdjoub 2007), the artist drew attention to the need to recover the modes of sensing and knowing that French colonization repressed. The title’s meaning is also critical: the dwelling, as portrayed in this proverb, is read as a site of unpredictability rather than enclosure, which deeply shifts the lines of home and belonging. This shift evokes Marsha Meskimmon’s analysis of domesticity, which is marked, as she suggests, by a tendency to equate “home and nation (‘domestic’ as opposed to ‘foreign’) with security” (Meskimmon 2006, 14).

Following the artist’s working notes on *La Maison, le monde*, the installation floor “was made from cardboard...collected from merchants in the Belsunce district,” literally bringing the world’s traces home, and also offering a workplace where “the inside and the outside communicate” (Mahdjoub 2014). It seems, then, that the proverb is physically reinterpreted by the display, prompting novel and more ethical forms of hospitality. In one rare press article on the exhibition, the commentary notes that “Dalila Mahdjoub’s commitment implies a complex, nuanced and radical political dimension” (Mahdjoub 2014). The artist’s “radical political dimension” can be mapped in the new foundational logic manifested in her work, one capable of acknowledging the interaction between the local and the global, and the domestic and its “others.” As a result, Mahdjoub’s “monument to the father’s memory” (Mahdjoub 2014) brings the representation of the colonial past—usually standing outside of civic discourse—into the field of commemoration, while the artist simultaneously emphasizes the sense of hospitality that she inherited as part of her ancestral knowledge, thereby questioning the established intelligibility of space.

L’Algérie rêvée et vécue, Mucem

The year 2019 has seen the emergence of projects that question the way in which the museum has been constituted on the basis of Western classification systems for art objects. A display of the Mucem constitutes representative cases of the integration of critical attitudes regarding the interpretation of colonial history from the objects of the collection.

The creation of l’Algérie rêvée et vécue at the Mucem, a program including debates, a display of colonial objects coming from Algeria and a showcase of students’ works, testifies of the will

to operate a change of point of view on a part of the collections of the Museum of History of France and Algeria planned in Montpellier. These collections, built up during the colonization of Algeria, were initially intended to join this establishment before the project of a specific museum was abandoned (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Collection of the Museum of French and Algerian History planned in Montpellier, Mucem.
Etienne Bouchaud, *Les arcades. La rampe Magenta, Alger, 1947*, huile sur toile, mhfa2009.8.1 / Mucem.

The interpretation of part of these collections, now housed at the Mucem, was entrusted to the Marseille artist Dalila Mahdjoub as part of an educational project aimed at re-imagining narratives about Franco-Algerian colonial history (Figure 10).



Figure 10: *Algérie-France, la voix des objets.*

The arguments are developed with the aim of questioning the weight of previous historical narratives in a desire to rethink access to the museum for so-called racialized populations. In return, the study of this display, whose particularity is the recontextualization of the collections, makes it possible to identify a type of decoloniality at work in the museum, one that proposes a narrative of colonial history based on the entanglement of perceptions and subjectivities rather than on the erasure of universalizing narratives.

Decolonial thought has emerged over the last thirty years or so around a collective of thinkers initially formed in South America by sociologist Aníbal Quijano, philosopher Enrique Dussel and semiologist Walter D'Mignolo before consolidating institutionally - especially in the United States - and more recently spreading to Europe. The transposition of the term decolonial from the political to the cultural realm, as popularized by this group, has its roots in the work of Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the publication of *Decolonizing the Mind*. With him, the meaning of decolonization shifts from describing the end of a colonial regime to a process of questioning the cultural and epistemic legacies of colonialism in broader areas of history, aesthetics, and culture that produces racial and gender hierarchies at the global and local levels (Quijano 1997) despite the end of political colonization by proposing the term coloniality. At the center of the work accompanying the research of the interdisciplinary decolonial group is a common concern: the need to reinterpret modernity through the prism of the concept of

coloniality, taking the European colonization of the Latin American continent as a starting point.

The research conducted specifically on the links between the museum and colonial histories reveals, as in the case of the Global, Local and Imperial Histories Research Group, that the colonial heritage or coloniality is manifested in the very management of the collections. According to this group, the reason it is necessary today to extract the object from old classification systems is because “Western classification systems replicate taxonomies that replicate colonial structures (Giblin, John, Ramos Imma and Grout, Nikki, 2019, 471). This posture gives rise to the notion of “decolonizing collections.” In Nelia Dias' sense, it would correspond to a process in which:

A postcolonial discourse serves to progressively singularize the ethnographic object and extract it from the old museum classification system that de facto maintained the object in its colonized status (Dias 2000, 27).

L'Algérie rêvée et vécue: des regards en miroir au Mucem is an exemplary project of reflections on decoloniality in the museum. Its discourses seem to be based on the one hand, on an understanding of the museum based on the notion of coloniality, which they invest by exploring the role it has had on cultural production - including the museum. On the other hand, they engage a redefinition of the relationship to the legacy of colonialism through a change of perspective on museum objects endorsed by their recontextualization.

The project *L'Algérie rêvée : des regards en miroir* (2019) directed by curators Camille Faucourt and Florence Hudowicz around the reinterpretation of certain objects from the collection of the Museum of French and Algerian History is informed by the desire to reverse the point of view on colonial history. Through its geographical prism, the project endorses the policy of broadening the objects of study of the Mucem, which, contrary to its initial approach as a museum of ethnography dedicated to the study of popular objects localized in the French regions, opens the focus to the Mediterranean scale. Since 2000, in fact, the museum has been updating its collections by carrying out several surveys and collections of objects from Algerian immigrants in Marseille. The project *L'Algérie rêvée* gives a new dimension to the study of society through its objects, through the specific objects that are the works of art. This perspective had already been tested in 2015 on the exhibition *Made in Algeria: Genealogy of a Territory* (Hubbell 2015, 10). This exhibition was interested in the presence in contemporary

art of cartographic descriptions made of Algeria during its first contacts with European countries and its traces in contemporary memories.

L'Algérie rêvée: des regards en miroir is part of the cycle conducted for three years, *Algérie-France, la voix des objets*, whose starting point is based on the willingly critical view of the curatorial team, as to the role played by France during the colonization of Algeria. For Florence Hudowicz, the objects that make up the MHFA's collections (Orientalist paintings and colonial postcards) bear witness to the power relations between France and Algeria. These objects constitute, according to her, the “frustrations” and “fantasies” that France projected on Algeria (Hudowicz 2019a). Yet, for her, if “this history can be appropriated, renewed and also open up to another way of telling it,” “the objective was to talk about past colonial relations between France and Algeria in the most inclusive way possible” (Hudowicz 2019b).

The project brings into play a decolonial approach to the collections, based on the multiplicity of points of view on the objects. This refers to the central questioning of the narrative of colonial history in decolonial thought. In the essay “Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum,” which deals with the museum, Mignolo develops his main hypothesis: that the museum - like knowledge, politics, and economics - constitutes and is constitutive of systemic expressions of a colonial matrix of power that begins in the 16th century with the emergence of the Atlantic slave trade. Because it is fueled by values inherited from “the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of colonization Mignolo 2011, 365), the modern aesthetic heritage is denounced for its coloniality, namely its ability to “reproduce existing structural forms of privilege and oppressive hierarchies (ibid). Because of their inability to provide people in what he calls the “transmodern world” with categories appropriate to their actual experiences, museums must, Mignolo explains, take over colonial and modern collections and bring to them the voices of subjects embedded in colonial histories. He then argues that decolonial interventions “can be a way to transform museums into sites of contamination, capable of including formerly repressed histories and migratory memories (ibid.).”

At the Mucem, the exhibition is the stake of a work on the point of view, thought and experimented visually. In March 2019, the Mucem exhibits in a window of the J4 forum the production made by the students of a 4th grade class of the Longchamp college, during the workshop entitled “Our Ghosts”. The students called upon to reinterpret the objects were from diasporas and migrations, from the Maghreb to France, without being exclusive. With the motto “Extracting the humiliated bodies, repairing the dominated bodies”, the workshop proposed to

the students a device within which they had to figure out with a liquid corrector the silhouettes of images of Algeria said to be of indigenous type such as the *Oasis Saharienne - Les Touaregs à Paris* (1909) (Figure 11).

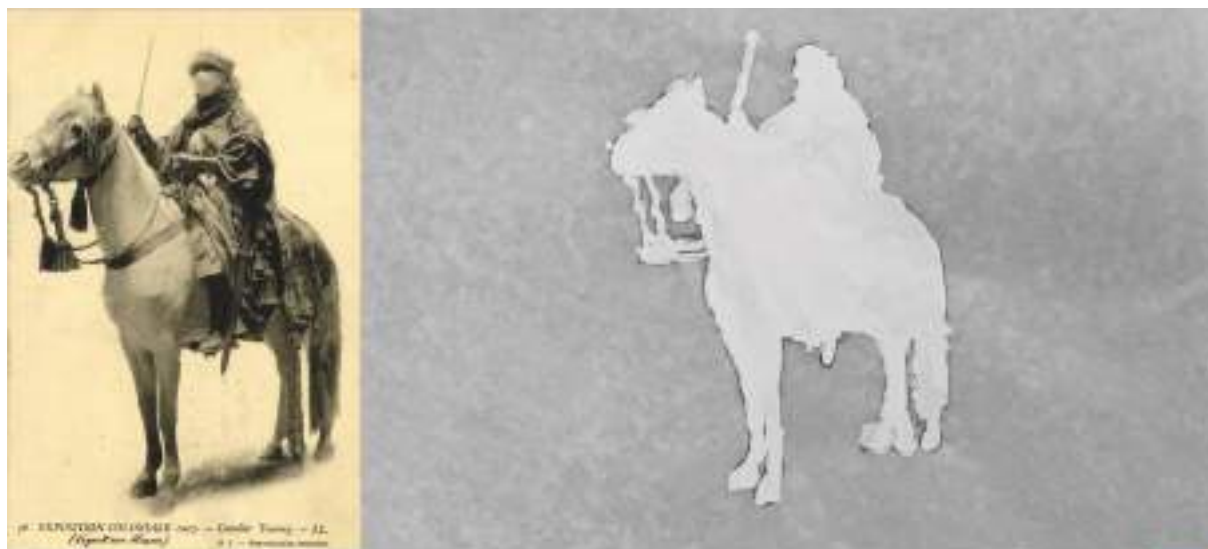


Figure 11: Karim's work from the Longchamp secondary school based on a postcard from the 1907 colonial exhibition. Workshop "Our Ghosts" as part of the project *L'Algérie rêvée et vécue : des regards en miroir* au Mucem. Photography Dalila Mahdjoub.

The title *Nos fantômes* (Our Ghosts) given to the workshop that Dalila Mahdjoub organized in view of the display of the students' work at the Mucem can be understood in the light of the artist's conception of the situation of Algerian memory in France. By playing on the dialectic of appearance/disappearance, via the work on colonial images whose white-on-white outlines the students had to retrace, the workshop's device at the Mucem seems to allow for the preservation of colonial and postcolonial micro-histories. By recounting colonial history through a visual dialectic of appearance/disappearance, the students' work summons the image of the ghost, which seems to problematize the conditions of colonial transmission in France.

For Dalila Mahdjoub, the image of the ghost refers to her perception of the unspoken aspects of colonial history in France. As she explains, "very late I discovered these shadowy areas, where my parents and we seemed to float like ghosts without history (Mahdjoub 2019)."

Yet T.J. Demos used the ghost as a metaphor for how the history of colonialism functions in the present. Drawing on Derrida's concept of hauntology in *Specters of Marx*, he argues that the mode of presence of colonialism is that of spectrality. From then on, the work around the

colonial postcards to which the students give a “new life” can be read as a possibility to tell a decentered history of Algerian colonization. Like a returning specter, they carry the potential to awaken contemporary consciousness, preventing the history of colonialism from falling asleep and quietly dying out.

If *L'Algérie rêvée: des regards en miroir* testifies to a pedagogical experiment dedicated to broadening the interpretation of colonial objects, the work *Enchanteur* (2019) (Figure 14), which Dalila Mahdjoub conceived specifically in response to the MFHA's collections, further underscores the significance of the circulation of decolonial ideas in the Mucem project by posing the question of their genealogy.

It takes its starting point in an object from the Algeria-France collection, the model of *Le Pavois*, Paul Landowski's monumental sculpture in Algiers, and the counterpoint that is M'hamed Issiakhem's response to the work, when the latter shuttered it in 1978 (see Crowley 2017).

Enchanteur is presented as the casing of a school history-geography textbook on which the artist silkscreens the three words “novel,” “national,” and “enchancing” on the front. In the same way that the students' works are shown in the mirror of the source postcards, Dalila Mahdjoub's work is exhibited in a showcase next to the Landowski model. On the reverse side, the artist silkscreened on concrete a passage from Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) in matte black ink, emphasizing her relationship to Fanon: “Frantz Fanon has put in leading words, which allow for a displacement of the gaze, a necessary decentering of the point of view (Mahdjoub 2020)”. The reading of *Peau Noire, masques blancs* allowed her “to shift from the experiences of self-denigration, internal cleavage, and violence among most of the immigrant men in our neighborhood” to the temptation to understand the “roots of a cumbersome and impulsive violence (Mahdjoub 2020).

Frantz Fanon constitutes a figure that frequently enters contemporary artists' practices, either as a central figure in works or conceptually, through visual productions that draw on his writings (Mahdjoub 2020) In *Enchanteur*, the place of Frantz Fanon's conceptual legacy is specifically associated with that of the voices of the marginalized that form the basis of decolonial interventions.

Mohammed Laouli

Memorial practices of colonial heritage have become points of contestation among citizens and artists in Marseille. Mohammed Laouli (Figure 12) is one of the artists who uses a plurimedial approach to reflect on how contemporary sites can carry residual memories of trauma.



Figure 12: Mohammed Laouli.

Born in Rabat in Morocco in 1972, Mohammed Laouli lives between Marseille and Salé. He has long used installation and sculpture to endorse an “endogenous analysis of the space in which he evolves” (Mansart 2018). Laouli’s description of his method emphasizes an approach “appropriating and dissecting the elements that surround him to produce an inventory of society and its direct environment”. (Laouli 2017)

His artistic vocabulary brings into play notions of postcolonialism, feminism, migrations, and cultures. Through his works, which are as much video, sculpture, intervention in the public space as photography, he seeks to highlight the mechanisms of domination that apply to various parts of society. In some of his works, the political or social borders are tested, they are crossed, made explicit. From Rabat to Salé (his poor suburb), from one side of the Mediterranean to the other or elsewhere, he works to make visible the life experiences linked to exile or social exclusion.

Mohammed Laouli starts from the reality that surrounds him to question the regimes of the powerful (French colonization, the Moroccan monarchy, patriarchy), he focuses on popular cultures and its rituals to account for the irony of a political situation that creates and builds on inequalities.

Mohammed Laouli's work has been the subject of several solo exhibitions as well as group exhibitions, such as at the Centre photographique de Marseille (2021) at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid (2021), at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum in Cologne (2021), at the Franco-German Cultural Center in Karlsruhe (2021), at the das weisse haus Studio in Vienna (2021), at the Tate modern (2020), at the Cube independent art room in Rabat (2019), at the Dakar Biennial (2018), at the Al Maaden Museum of Contemporary African Art in Marrakech (2018), at the Kunstmuseum Mülheim (2017), at the Carreau du Temple in Paris (2017), at the ZKM in Karlsruhe (2013), at the Marrakech Biennial (2014), at the Mucem in Marseille (2014), at the Bruges Cultural Centre (2013), at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (2012), at the Centrale pour l'Art Contemporain in Brussels (2012)

As Mohammed Laouli has pointed out, the presence of colonial issues in his work was closely linked to space, namely to urban space in Morocco and France. He started working in public space because as he explains:

At one point, the enclosed space was not enough for me; it didn't nourish me and there wasn't much to draw on from my imagination. I don't work with my imagination. I am an artist who works with reality. The evolution of my artistic practice has had as its goal public space and the streets to be in direct contact with the people and what is happening in the reality of today (Laouli 2020).

When he came Marseille, around 2017, at the time he was doing the work *Frontières Fluides* with Katrin Ströbel, the colonial traces he encountered redefined his approach to urban space. While in Morocco “there are not so many statues. They all have been removed (he mentions the statue of the Maréchal Lyautey), the situation in Marseille was different:

In Marseille, “which is a city with a huge colonial heritage, he explains, I began to confront these statues, because it is something that is there, that is present, that marks and summarizes a whole history. The whole colonial history is there, in these sculptures.” (Laouli 2020)

This geographic shift brought him to begin the *Ex-voto* series, which unhouse these questions about colonial history (since 2018). Very broad in its format, the series encompasses a set of

conceptual and formal relations that range from the production of objects to site specific projects.

Firstly, in the *Ex-Voto* series, he has made marble plaques where he writes references to historical dates and events:

“In *Ex-Voto*, I was starting from colonial facts and events such as the Berlin Conference. I found it interesting to make a Catholic ex-voto from a marble plaque. It was conscious and intentional. There is an irony. A bitterness. I am giving thanks (Laouli 2020) ” (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Some marble plaques of Ex-Voto in the artist's studio.

Mohammed Laouli explained how his series on ex-votos— some objects which are made “to a deity, in request of a grace or in thanks for a benefit obtained” (Mansart 2018)—attempted to

probe the links, often unknown to passers-by, between colonial history and today's social problems. In his Moroccan interventions, he made connections between historical events such as the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) and the displacement of people by industrial companies in Europe. With this language, this series initiated a process aimed at analyzing public space through works that staged a contrast between gratitude toward colonization and the violent colonial past.

This rhetoric of the plaque was chosen on purpose. It was suited to surface this “power relationship between two poles, the colonized and the colonizer”. He adds: “There is the balance of power: you (the colonizer) consider me weak. I am the dominated one. So, I let you believe that you dominate me. ‘Thank you for colonization’. There, I am taking care of the colony (Laouli 2020)”.

Plastically, the duality of forms and associative language allowed him to suggest these very dialectical power relations inherent to colonial history. As he states about another piece of the *Ex-Voto* series : “when I juxtapose a *kepi* with the pompoms of a djellaba (Figure 14 and Figure 15). This violence relates to that of history (Laouli 2020)”.

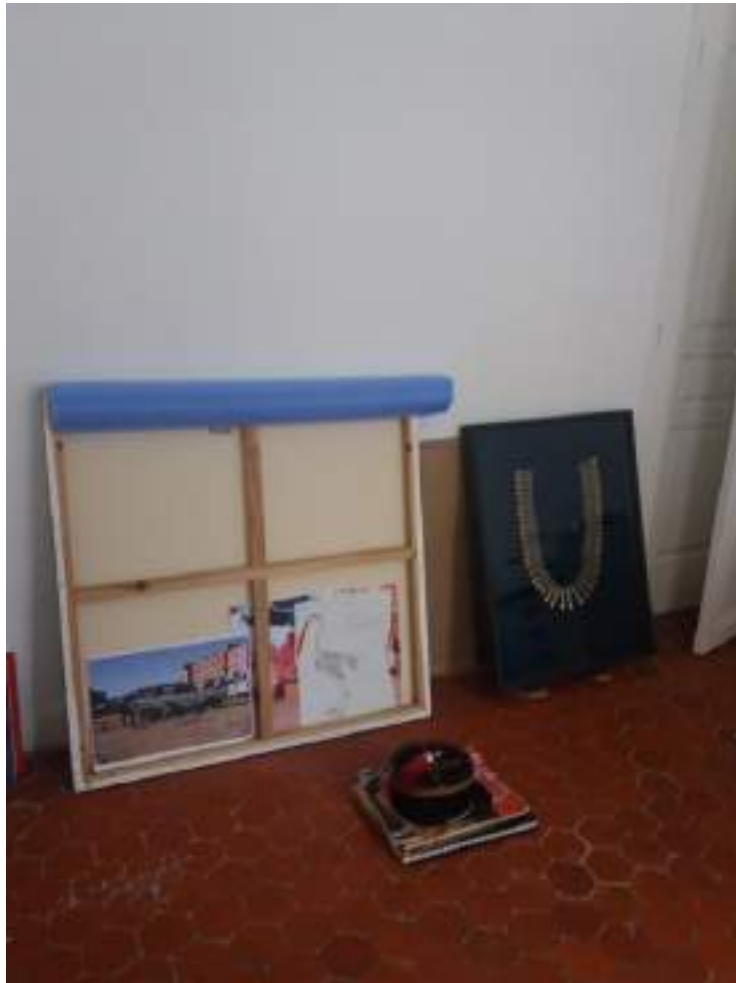


Figure 14: The artist's studio.

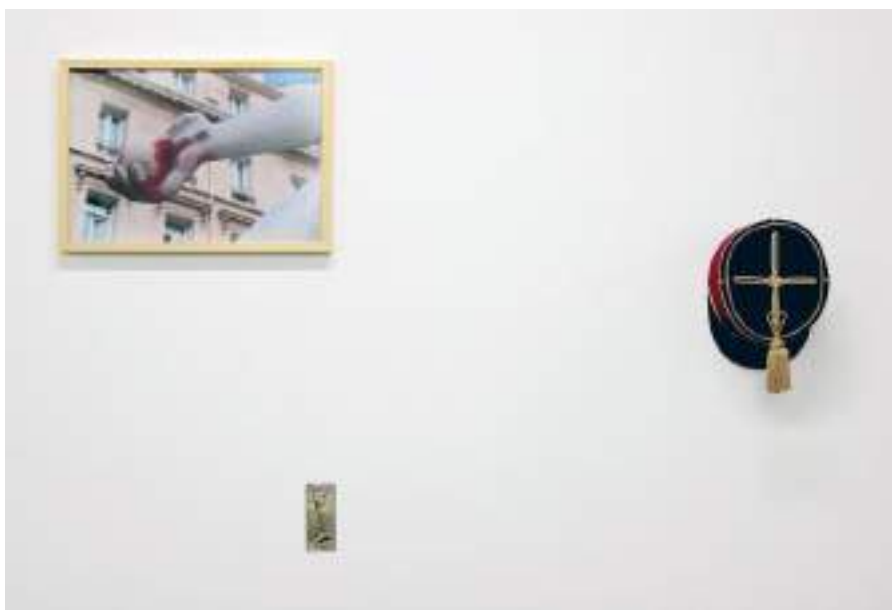


Figure 15 : View of the Ex-Votos exhibition, 2018, colonial kepi and pompon, Friche de la Belle de Mai, Marseille.

The idea to reveal the violence of history through aesthetics is invested by the artist with a sense of emergency “because up until this very day we continue to face the scars of this story. These stories are so strong and violent that they interest me (Laouli 2020)”.

While the artist uses visual binaries to question the past, he fears that the violence inherent to such a process of confrontation might “propagate an aesthetic of war and that the work may be misunderstood (Laouli 2020)”. That may explain why he progressively gave the production of concrete forms to endorse more ephemeral approaches around the physical sites of colonisation. Indeed, he progressively began to work in situ, around colonial monuments, to question the mechanisms “that produced colonialism and the effects as well as the impact of this today (Laouli 2020)”.

In 2018, he produced *Chasing Ghost, Homage to the Harkis*. In this video where he addresses the issue of the official representation of colonial memory, he handles the *Monument aux morts de l’Armée d’Orient et des terres lointaines*, a site commemorating the victims of the French colonial army who died fighting on the Dardanelle front during the First World War (Cochet 2010) (Figure 16).



Figure 16: *Ex-voto, Chasing Ghost*, 2018, video of a performance.

Inaugurated on April 24, 1927, the monument designed by Gaston Castel is inspired by the principle of a “portico in the sky” and develops a massive arch (flanked by statues by Antonio Sartorio (Figure 17). On a pedestal, in the center of the arch, a bronze Victory triumphs.



Figure 17 : Gaston Castel and Antonio Sartorio, Monument aux morts de l'Armée d'Orient et des terres lointaines, 1927.

What is more, this monument establishes a suggestive dialogue with the landscape by proposing a very dense allegorical and symbolic universe. A crescent and a star, the palms of victory, the dates of 1915-1916-1917-1918, the inscriptions “For France”, “For peace”, “To the poilus of the East”, “To the sons of the greatest France”, “East, Dardanelles, Salonika, Macedonia, Serbia, Monastir, Albania, Danube”, “Morocco, Levant, Syria, Cilicia, Cameroon”, and sculptures showing French soldiers showing the way to the peoples of the East, structure a glorifying narrative of the victorious people.

Beyond the commemoration of the victims of the First World War and the colonial auxiliaries, the monument represents the colonial history of France. Different plaques deal with the relations between, for example, France and Indochina: “Three centuries of French presence

have sealed with bloodshed a solemn pact between France and the peoples of the Indochina union”, or the “memory of the soldiers and auxiliaries of all confessions who died for France in North Africa”.

However, the monument contains references to the Algerian flag, with its star and moon symbols, as well as to remote places (“terres lointaines”), which led to its becoming as a site of welcoming when, in the 1960s, a large number of North African migrants settled in Marseille, which was a port of entry into France. Similarly, the French rap group 3^e Œil [“Third eye”], consisting of two Marseille Muslim artists from the Comoros, used an image of the monument for the cover of their 1999 album *Hier, Aujourd’hui, Demain* [“Yesterday, today, tomorrow”] (Downing 2019, 99) (Figure 18).

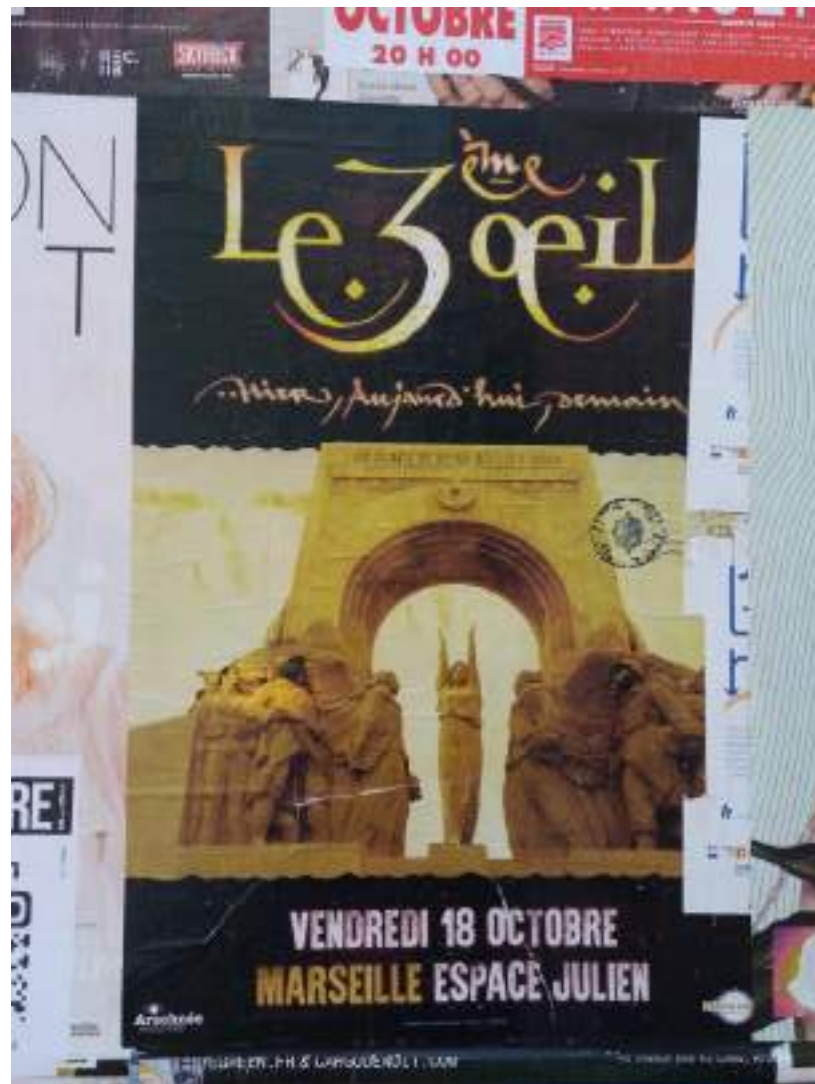


Figure 18: Poster for the 3e Œil, Marseille, 2019. Photography by Marine Schütz.

On the cover, conceived as a photomontage, the graphic designer's main gesture consists in enmeshing figures of Black and Algerian soldiers within the monument's original feminine sculpted allegories. Such multicultural readings of the monument transform it into a provisional memorial for subjects seeking mooring and contesting a sense of forgetfulness and discontinuity in the city, and they also illuminate how the uses of this heritage site have been determined by its location.

Such reappropriation of the monument illustrates the malleability of the meanings of imperial history in a city replete with various interest groups. For many Algerians, for example, the meaning of the monument and, perhaps even more so, its location at the seafront are wholly circumscribed by its function of commemorating the role of outsiders in the city.

Laouli's response to this aspect of Marseille's colonial past takes the form of a video, in which one sees him performing under the monument's archway on Marseille's coastal road, facing out to sea. On a piece of paper, the artist traces the outline of a plaque bearing the words "Hommage aux Harkis" ["Homage to the Harkis"] that stands at the back of the Monument aux morts de l'armée d'Orient (Figure 19).



Figure 19 : Ex-voto, 2018, *Hommage aux Harkis*, drawing.

The use of this technique with strong surrealist implications shows the extent to which it is necessary to bring out, to make visible, to underline this urban-colonial unconscious.

Crucially, the plaques and the monument imprint themselves on the city's memory landscape. They become landmarks of the colonial past invested with nationalist political significance and of a representation of the colonial past that celebrates colonial Algeria. This jars with the demands for reinvention and reappropriation of the colonial past as a site for multiple global memories and decentered microhistories. Indeed, what is remembered here of Algeria are the Harkis, the Algerian soldiers who fought on the side of France during Algeria's War of Independence. In drawing this plaque, the artist insists on the kinds of ideological messages that are encoded in this national monument. As the artist suggests, colonization is commemorated in Marseille as a grace: the plaque functions "in the manner of ex-votos, which like the monument has also a function of homage" (Laouli 2017).

The artist simultaneously challenges any univocal interpretation of the site. Firstly, in a recent exhibition of *Ex-voto* in Rabat called *Power Dance*, Laouli juxtaposed the *Monument aux morts de l'armée d'Orient* with other postcolonial sites in Morocco, a conversation that deeply complicated the monument's nationalist subtext dialogizing it with other African locations of colonial memory. This exhibition underlined how the legacy of colonialism can be framed in a diasporic environment. Secondly, and on aesthetic level, through the physical spectrality evoked by the operation of tracing an outline of the plaque, Laouli does more than merely oppose colonialism's legacy in Marseille: he also reflects on the possibility of bringing such memorializing to public awareness.

By the very materiality with which he endows the drawing, a graphic materiality both faint and visible, spectral, and real, the artist plastically encodes the phenomenon of colonial echoes in the present. The drawing promotes a spectral regime that becomes an equivalent to the spectral nature of colonialism in the city, at once ubiquitous and hidden since, as the artist observes, the plaque lies behind the monument and escapes the gaze of passers-by. As T. J. Demos points out, drawing Derrida's concept of "hauntology" in *Spectres de Marx*, colonialism's mode of presence acts like a specter, coming after its death. The reckoning of such spectrality here, encapsulated by the work's absent presence, lays the groundwork for agentive possibility, with the potential to awaken contemporary consciousness. By revealing the spectrality of colonial memory in the city, Laouli gives it a "new life," preventing it from falling asleep and fading away quietly (Demos 2013, 50).

In this way, we can read the artist's project as a materialization of the immaterial practices that occur around the monument, paving the way for an informal debate on sites of colonization in Marseille. Employing ephemeral practices as a key aesthetic element of his work, the artist contributes to the conversation around difficult heritage issues in Marseille, making the *Monument à l'armée d'Orient* not only a powerful symbol to be reappropriated but also a theatre where multiple memorial events can be staged.

After the death of George Floyd on the 25 May 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement has targeted certain aspects of the legacy of colonialism, such as its monuments and the systemic effects of racism on the psyche or the employment prospects of black populations in the United States and Great Britain.

While the Black Lives Matter has led in Bristol to the toppling of the Colston statue, the death of George Floyd has also had echoes in Marseille. On 2 June 2020, a Black Lives Matter demonstration was set in Marseille and on the 13 June 2020, traces of black paint were projected on the statue *The colonies of Africa*. The statues had already been the targets of red bombs during the demonstration of June 2, as revealed by a video published on Twitter.

On the 30 June 2020, during a ceremony, activists packed the statue. In an article, the newspaper *Marsactu* explains that decolonial activists claim a symbolic action, to denounce the colonial and exotic heritage of which the statues are the allegories:

These statues are offensive to descendants of immigrants. Some said they should be destroyed, others that they should be moved to a museum, some wanted a recontextualization with a plaque (quoted in Allenou 2020). The iconoclastic scope, which can sometimes be read in hostile testimonies, seems a reading to be relativized insofar as iconoclasm seems more of a rhetorical reference within a practice of counter-heritage marked quite the opposite by the will to make image. The design of the iconoclasm event on the Botinelly statue aims to produce image. According to an activist interviewed by *Marsactu*, the June 30 demonstration began with people speaking out before some people wrapped the statue in black plastic film. An action a protestor describes as an "artistic and symbolic gesture" (quoted in Allenou 2020).

In addition, images of the demonstrations of the appear on social networks, sparking an open debate in the local, national, and international community. The action of the ceremony was filmed, and the videos posted on Instagram. One could distinguish traces of paint and one of

the tags quoted in the press articles: “the colonized of Africa fuck France” (quoted in Allenou 2020).

Mohammed Laouli took this news as the starting point of the video *Les Sculptures N'étaient Pas Blanches* within the frame of a collaboration with the ECHOES project, especially the WP5 team (Figure 20).



Figure 20 : *Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches*, 2020, video.

During the summer, Mohammed Laouli finalized the film *Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches* of which he had already decided the theme before the demonstrations but, the demonstration has meanwhile repolarized the subject on the question of the color of the statues.

As he explains, he

uses current events, the debates born of Black Lives Matter, as a catalyst to underline the colonial relationships and the colonial and postcolonial situation between here and there, this space that is France and the other side of the Mediterranean. This act allows me to underscore points that are really very sensitive and that you can't define with words. It's the question of taking care of an image that represents the colonized. How can you do that without the image? That's the strength of the image (Laouli 2020).

In this work we see him at work, cleaning these stains from *Les Colonies d'Afrique*. However, while the issue of removal was often at stake in these debates, he prompted a physical approach to colonial monuments that is based on gentleness:

I consider *Les Sculptures N'Étaient Pas Blanches* as another step in my work because I was able to treat these violent facts with gentleness and subtlety. It's too difficult to approach these subjects without violence. You can't approach colonial history in the world by denying violence. It is thanks to violence that I was able to arrive at this notion of taking care. I hope that from there this will lead me back to ways of working in the realm of gentleness when dealing with violence (Laouli 2020).

The intellectual genesis of this video was both linked to the lockdown and to the artist's own rituals. As Mohammed Laouli recalls:

During the lockdown [caused by COVID-19] I made a new series. I even found a new content for my practice. I lived with this sculpture [*Les Colonies d'Afrique*] when I landed in Marseille and with the *Statue of Peace*. When I encounter something, an object that becomes part of everyday life, it is reflected in my work. It's important that my experience as an immigrant is here, in my work (Laouli 2020).

So, during the lockdown I found myself a subject: modern sculpture. In the street I found beautiful engravings of sculptures created by the Louvre Museum in the 1960s. There's Rodin, there's everyone: the French and European modern, Dutch sculptors etc. The prints were in my studio for three or four years. And during the lockdown, as I was into sculpture, I began to exchange the features of the sculptures on the prints, the head with other faces, which are faces of the South, North African, Mexican, Black etc. I played with that and I found something, without knowing the story of *Les Sculptures N'Étaient Pas Blanches* (Laouli 2020).

In relation to this “new content” the artist found out, namely the critique of classical sculpture, was unfolded a deconstruction of the concept of heritage, as the latter relies on the language of classical images. Indeed, the production of collages he realized before the video precisely probed the fact that, in relation to the ways to imagine the sculptural body, there could have an

almost infinite variety of possible of skin colors, shapes of bodies etc. His conceptions of a new ephemeral monument for Marseille precisely reconstructs the content of heritage in taking these new bodies, that encounter the requirements of specific cultural groups: those of diasporic populations of Marseille.

In the site of colonial history, the artist reinvents the modalities of national commemoration. It is a matter of sedimentating the initial message, that of the female colonial subject, by proposing the image of other subjects who have been rejected from modernity: the colonial and post-colonial workers of the 1960s.

In the same way that the artist reimagines in his collages the appearance what the classical sculptural canon could have looked like if academic norms had allowed for the mixing of bodies (Figure 21), Mohammed Laouli summons the figures of the “other” in the video. He stages himself dressed in blue overalls thereby introduces the image of immigrants who came to France to rebuild and clean up the country during the Thirty Glorious Years. The narration of the transnational social history that the artist proposes is characterized here by a change of the relations between Maghreb and France. The colonial site thus becomes a point of connection to question the various spaces of coloniality, which form the aesthetics but also the narration of the national history.



Figure 21: Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches, 2020, collage, variable dimensions.

Moreover, the presence of the geographical other is present via that of its epistemologies. Laouli explains that he has set up a ritual in the video that is inspired by the protocol of the Maghrebian hammam:

In relation to aesthetic resistance or aesthetic decolonization, I realized that I have made this gesture of cleaning hundreds of times in Morocco because when we go to the men's hammam, two or more of us go together, and one of us often takes care of the other's body by removing dirt from the skin with a glove. So, the ritual that I set up in the video is a ritual inspired by the protocol of the Maghreb hammam, a common space of sharing and of purification (Laouli 2020).

With this project, the decolonization of the body of the sculpture informed by care thus embodies a change of narrative that inscribes intimacy and gentleness within intercultural relations:

I consider *Les Sculptures N'Étaient Pas Blanches* as another step in my work because I was able to treat these violent facts with gentleness and subtlety. It's too difficult to approach these subjects without violence. You can't approach colonial history in the world by denying violence. It is thanks to violence that I was able to arrive at this notion of taking care. I hope that from there this will lead me back to ways of working in the realm of gentleness when dealing with violence (Laouli 2020).

The implications of this bodily paradigm in the video have great potential for modeling the relationship between the Maghreb and France in the field of memory and politics and for healing the wounds of the colonial divide.

Another critical particularity of this project lies in its ability to broach the decolonization of several entangled fields. Mohammed Laouli's video *Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches* not only take as its starting point the question of the decolonization of the city but reinterprets it to convey an epistemological decolonization. As the artist explains about the project's stakes:

“It is a decolonization of the body, of the body of sculpture, because it is the canon of the body, it is the basis of modern and European sculpture” (Laouli 2020).

In relation to the systemic dimension of knowledge, intersecting aesthetics and heritage, he began to discuss the roots of coloniality of the monuments when he found out that the very genesis of aesthetics was itself a site of the construction of racial relations. This dimension was determined by the visioning of a documentary produced by Arte tv channel (Figure 11):

When I learned the story of *Les Sculptures N'Étaient Pas Blanches*, I thought it was huge. There was a documentary produced by Arte called *Non! Les Statues antiques n'étaient pas blanches* (Figure 22). It said that a German politician who had a connection to Winckelmann decided that all sculptures would be white, which related to the so-called superiority of the white race. Because the Ottomans had colored sculptures, the Greeks had colored sculptures. This, so that the European would not be confused with the others (Laouli 2020).



Figure 22: *Non! Les Statues antiques n'étaient pas blanches*, Benoît Puichaud, 2019, Arte.

In this documentary that the artist mentions as a catalyst for his reflection, the archaeologist Philippe Jockey returned to the myth of a white Greece. He underlined the importance of Johann Winckelmann's work, *Reflexions on the imitation of Greek works in painting and sculpture* (1755) in the aesthetic imperialism of white, the sublime beauty consisting essentially in the harmony of the features and the whiteness of the bodies. As the author explains, this discourse found a radical expression in the racist texts exalting the figure of the white Western man, son of classical antiquity. The colors are decreed, from then on, as “the degrading mark of the Other, of the “Metèque”, so that the elements of a racial discourse are put in place at the end of the 19th century as soon as these criteria are transposed to the man.

In view of this context, to reinscribe the sculpture in its native polychromy as Mohammed Laouli does in his collages like in the video, calls for a displacement.

Such remarks suggest that, at a certain point, with the invention of modern aesthetics during the 18th century, the link between art and race was confirmed in a canon that represses any form of plurality. His work seems to be directly linked to a critique of the effects of modernity on the construction of a white, European aesthetic, which, in its very enterprise, intended to crush all forms of pluralism.

Agathe Rosa and Emma Grosbois

The Monument aux morts de l'Armée d'Orient et des terres lointaines constitutes a critical site around which artists in Marseille reinterrogate and debate the colonial past. While cultural associations like AncrAges have been proposing, for years, to question the traces of colonisation and migration in Marseille through heritage walks, this past still need to be taken out of colonial amnesia.

Despite these remarkable and committed efforts, the debate deserves to be deepened because of a form of colonial amnesia. In 2020, the artists Agathe Rosa and Emma Grosbois (Figure 23) created the installation *Prisme* around his monument and another, which is also located on the Corniche of Marseille, the *Memorial of the Algerian Repatriates*, realized by artist César in 1971.



Figure 23: Agathe Rosa and Emma Grosbois.

At a time when the relationship to identity is being reinvented by considering the transnational culture of the city, *Prisme* which was shown during the Manifesta biennial, integrates monuments to question the univocity of points of view on colonial history and to reflect on the role of monuments in the construction of the urban space.

Initiated in 2019, the *Prisme* project participates in a series of visual experiments the monuments to question “the links between image, space and memory” (Grosbois 2020).

Its study can be enlightened by a presentation of the monument, made by César, bearing the traces of a postcolonial memory in Marseille (Figure 24).



Figure 24. César, *Mémorial des Rapatriés d'Algérie*, bronze, 8 meters high, Marseille, 1971. Fonds Gaston Defferre, Archives municipales, Marseille.

Prior to Algeria's independence on July 5, 1962, the Pieds-Noirs community was forced to leave their homeland and move to Marseille. Of the 700,000 Pieds-Noirs who went to the metropolis at that time, 450,000 landed in the city. The commissioning of *the Mémorial des Rapatriés d'Algérie* carried out by César in 1970, on the Corniche Kennedy, was based on the request of “the many repatriates who had settled in Marseille” and who “wished to have a monument erected in memory of their dead and their past works” (Defferre 1970).

This type of request was part of the need for recognition of the trauma of the Pieds-Noirs carried by the associations of repatriates who, in the early 1970s, once the immediate material needs had become less acute, turned to cultural and commemorative issues. A place of remembrance in the sense of Pierre Nora because it assumes the function of valorizing a memorial past when it was not represented until then, the project was to allow the Pieds-Noirs to provide themselves with familiar references in a foreign land that deprived them of their landmarks. Contacted by the town hall in 1970, César agreed to “voluntarily compose an original work (Defferre 1970)”.

The monument was inaugurated in the presence of 3,000 people on January 20 1971 by Gaston Defferre, the socialist mayor of Marseille, who declared (Figure 25):

You are Marseillais, but you have remained repatriates. Yes, you are Marseillais, because now of your return, our city opened its arms to you and since then the hearts of the Marseillais have beaten with yours (Defferre 1971).

As the image of a heart beating in unison reveals, the memorial was conceived from the outset as a vehicle for unity between the Pieds-Noirs and the Marseillais, supporting a sense of identification, visible in the inscription on one of the plaques:

The City of Marseille

To the repatriates of North Africa and Overseas.

To all those whose final resting place is the now foreign soil where they lived, worked, and loved.

Greetings to you who have returned.

Our city is yours.



Figure 25: Inauguration of *The Mémorial des Rapatriés d'Algérie*, 20 January 1971. Fonds Gaston Defferre, Archives municipales, Marseille.

While a locution like “our city is yours” speaks to an emotional closeness, this rhetoric is primarily explained by the civic identity quest that sought to define itself as a space of “living together.” These words on the plaque reflect the work done by the local civic narrative to present Marseillais as traditionally welcoming, naturally accepting of mixed situations, in line with the mayor's policy.

The way in which the memorial celebrates the tradition of hospitality also seems to be an opportunity to reconnect with the content of Marseille’s memorial traditions. Indeed, by evoking the city's tradition of hospitality, the memorial can evoke the commemorations of the city's 25th Centenary in 1899, which celebrated the idea of a city built by its others.

However, if according to Jürgen Habermas, the uses of the past are made in response to the needs of the present, in 1970-1971 (Habermas 1987), affirming such a memorial continuity had become a necessity to appease the shock of the political consequences of the Algerian war in Marseille. Since 1961, the relations between Defferre and the Pieds-Noirs had been extremely violent. In 1961, Defferre had responded with the utmost firmness to the terrorist actions of the OAS and was equally hostile to the Pieds-Noirs whom he associated with the organization. The difficult arrival of the repatriates in crowded boats and planes from the cease-fire of March 19 to the summer of 1962 was coupled with the mayor's violent comments that they should “leave Marseille quickly” and “readjust elsewhere”. Also, eight years later, the construction of a

rhetoric of unity seems to act out the change of view on this community. Echoing the type of gap that this memorial highlighted, through the testimony of an emotional closeness between Pieds-Noirs and Marseillais, which could make such a rejection more painful, the inconsistency between the representations and the political management of 1962 was accused of being motivated by electoral reasons, even though this was a possibility that César rejected:

When this idea of the monument to the repatriates was formed, Gaston Defferre remembered my words and he thought of me. We found a very beautiful location on the Corniche, and he asked me for a model: many years ago, so I do not think he thought of the elections at that time (César 1971, 158).

The use of the term “pioneers” during the inauguration shows how much the discourse is part of the national collective amnesia about colonization:

It was necessary that a monument recalls the departure and return of the French, of these pioneers who, for years, flew the flag of our homeland in distant lands... You became Marseillais because, at the very moment of your return, your sufferings were felt by the population of Marseille as its own sufferings” (Defferre 1971).

Evocative of the ancestors of the repatriates (the Maltese, Germans, and Spaniards) who came to populate Algeria in the 19th century, but also of the Phocaeen settlers, this image of the Pieds-Noirs as pioneers could well reflect the type of memorial regime that Benjamin Stora describes more broadly as the one that surrounds the Algerian War between 1963 and 1981.

The selective nature of the analogies marks a way of invoking recent historical events that minimizes the most traumatic aspects, whether they are linked to the community (exile, their opposition to Algerian independence) or to the nation (dissolution of the empire, the stalemate of the war). In the same way that on a national scale, the reasons for this silence were above all political and linked to General de Gaulle's desire to turn the page quickly, the commemoration of colonial history, even if it is embodied in a monument, seems to be part of the same attitude of collective national amnesia. This reading can be defended further because the reference to the pioneers precisely summons the images of foundation, assimilation and integration, whose function would be, according to Benjamin Stora, to participate in the strategies engaged by a France “more and more occupied with erasing the traces of a war it had lost and of its presence in Algeria” (Stora 1999, 84).

While he distances himself from the colonial narrative, the central motif of the assimilation of the Pieds-Noirs to a new land interprets the Marseille hospitality narrative in terms that associate migration with success. This inflection is due to the very stature of César, a sculptor from Marseille of Tuscan origin, who has enjoyed dazzling success in Paris since *Les Fers*. The choice of the artist immediately allowed Defferre to draw an analogy between the stories of the repatriates and César, and to find in them proof that would validate his conception of the contribution of foreigners to the city. In 1966, Defferre recalled that

César Baldaccini was born in Marseille in the Belle de Mai district in the heart of our city” and that he was one of the “best known modern sculptors in France and even abroad. By publicly exhibiting a work by a successful artist, the commission would potentially embody the promise of the future successful integration of the Pieds-noirs in Marseille (César 1966).

The Memorial to the Algerian Repatriates also seems to have been designed to respond, in accordance with socialist thinking, to the ambition to promote the process of modernization of Marseille. Anne-Laure Ollivier observes that “in the 1960s, Defferre had tried to embody the figure of a modern politician, after having been a Resistance fighter who wanted to renew political life” (Ollivier 2015, 104).

While the implementation of a cosmopolitan discourse can resonate with a project of modernization by inducing a non-hierarchical relationship to otherness, it is still the relationship between the site and the monument that seems to express the city's desire to assert its modernization. The fact that the sculpture is located on the Corniche traffic circle reveals the desire to make it the emblem of a modern city. As announced by Gaston Defferre in the deliberation of the city council, the question of the site was central from the outset:

This monument will represent a bronze wing of night meters high on a base of 2m80 and will weigh about twenty tons. It will be placed on the J. F. Kennedy Promenade facing the open sea and the land of Africa (Defferre 1970).

The aspiration to endow the city with a modern symbol is reinforced by the role played by the sculptor's direct contact with the industrial environment. If the context of the public commission

allowed César to work in bronze, it was nevertheless necessary that the work “not be too expensive”? He therefore went to various foundries “specialised in the manufacture of propellers for ships” (César 1971, 58) (Figure 15):

The day I visited them; I was so thrilled by the beauty of these propellers that I didn't want to enlarge my model at all. I said, 'What would be interesting is to make a blade of a certain size. I found a shape that suited me, and I said to the engineers, “Can you design a blade that is ten meters high (César 1971, 58).

The motif of a work of technical prowess in its scale, as well as the mythology of dynamism conveyed by the blade, could only be adequate to promote the new representations and realities of a city that sought to assert its image as a modern city.



Figure 26 : Les Fonderies phocéennes, Marseille. Photography, Fonds Gaston Defferre, Archives municipales, Marseille.

Robert Aldrich suggests that “the repatriates did not appropriate the monument”(Aldrich 2005, 93). Generally speaking, in the years following its inauguration, the monument struggled to win over its public. One of the first factors in this dissensus between the Pieds-Noirs and the public authorities regarding the monument may be the way in which the interconnected nature of the stories conveyed by the work seems to be opposed to the demands expressed by the latter in favor of a memorial work more focused on the history of the repatriates. By invoking in the

same space of plural histories cross-references and permanent borrowings, mixing the ancient history of the Phocaeans and the contemporary history of the Pieds-noirs, the project seems to imply a type of “multidirectional” memory in the sense of Michael Rothberg (Rothberg 2009). If for the latter, such an approach would go so far as to constitute a working modality capable of articulating a counter-memory, he notes that the conditions of emergence of such an interconnected work of memories would intervene above all in the process of narration of the traumas.

But the form of the memorial, in particular its reduction to the extreme, could also play as a point of tension. The work is a continuation of *The Compressions*, which communicate in their quintessential reduction a new power of expressiveness and a power of concentration never before achieved. Born of mathematical calculations, the memorial that César describes as a “kind of abstract signal above the sea” was criticized for its abstraction, as evidenced by an article in *Crapouillot* in 1972. The latter saw in the work a “monstrosity in the shape of a cuttlebone due to César”. From this point of view, the memorial marked a strong contrast with the images attached to the pied-noir imagination based on the myth of the return to Algeria, as well as with the means usually used by repatriates to remember their land. As Amy Hubbell explains, their memorial demands, as reflected in private memorials, tombs, and novels at the time, focused on shaping a recurring and iterative narrative to reconstruct life there (Hubbell 2015).

The fact that this monument and *the Monument aux morts de l'Armée d'Orient et des terres lointaines* on the Corniche form “like a timeline and a unity of place” helped focus the artists' research on the role of monuments in “creating the image of the city” (Grosbois 2020). In the form of a “series of ephemeral interventions in dialogue with two Marseille’s memorials”, the project has taken the concrete form of an installation at the Italian Cultural Center in Marseille, as part of the *Rue d'Alger* exhibition on the Manifesta biennial (summer-autumn 2020) (Figure 27).



Figure 27: *Prisme*, Marseille. Institut culturel italien, Marseille, 2020.

It consisted of pieces presented in the showcases of the space, such as a table with a deck of cards, a 3D viewer, a mirror blade, and a black steel sculpture (Figure 28). These objects are the result of research conducted by the artists in the municipal archives of Marseille and interpret historical traces in such a way as to reveal how the monuments equate the physical and political “construction mechanisms” of the work. This approach, which apprehends the monument as a reflection of political construction, proceeds from a reading based on that of Henri Lefebvre on urban space, whose work they quote: “Space is not innocent, neutral; it is political, it is part of a strategy” (Lefebvre 1972).

Thus, the sculpture *Untitled* (Figure 17) made of thin steel blades is presented as a resumption of the skeleton of the sculpture of César.



Figure 28: *Untitled, Prisme*, Marseille. Institut culturel italien, 2020.

This work on the double meaning of the construction also passes by a questioning on the point of view.

But if the questions of perception and construction are so recurrent in *Prisme*, it is because the artists conceive their devices as a *mise en abîme* of the couple appearance/disappearance. This one was moreover capital in the genesis of *Prisme*. As Emma Grosbois explains, beyond the aesthetic attraction of the monument, its relations to the field of the absence were paradoxically a catalyst. Revealing a perception of César's work based on the collective amnesia evoked by Stora, the artists emphasize how the memorial could be both “exciting and non-existent” (Grosbois 2020). For these artists, the question of absence necessarily reads as the trace of an incomplete historical narrative.

In its form, this installation leads the spectator to position himself or herself at an angle to observe, to seek information and to question what is not visible. The search and the displacement of point of view are now constraints that the artists impose on the public to question reality in a different way. As Alessandro Gallicchio writes: “They wish to create space

for unsolved enigmas, invisible components, other narratives, other symbols, other memories...” (Gallicchio 2021)

Rematerializing the construction process of César's sculpture would then allow to underline how much the memorial has obliterated certain points of view on colonial history, such as those of the Harkis who, according to Emma Grosbois, are representative of those “who do not have the means to write history” (Grosbois 2020). In Marseille, where Algerian immigrants and their descendants represent a quarter of the general population and where no memorial in the city supports their version of history, this marginalization of views on colonial history seems more problematic” (Grosbois 2020).

This project was exhibited during the biennale Manifesta, and more specifically within the show *Rue d’Alger* curated by Alessandro Gallicchio (Figure 29).



Figure 29: *Rue d’Alger*, Exhibition catalogue, 2021.

From 29.10 to 29.11.2020, in Institut culturel italien the work was shown along with other works from Alessandra Ferrini, Nina Fischer & Maroan el Sani, Amina Menia , Muna Mussie.

Mohammed Laouli's video *Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches* was projected during a workshop co-organised by WP5 and the curators, on 18 December 2021.

The exhibition focused on the relations between the concrete urban spaces, the colonial imaginary and the memorial negotiations to its past. As an Italian academic based in Marseille, his curator Alessandro Gallicchio entered the conversation around Marseille's colonial past by his own point of view, that of colonial issues in Italia, especially with the wish to see built “a decolonized, multicultural and inclusive Italy” (Gallicchio 2021, 9).

The genesis of the project coalesced around a specific site, where the exhibition took place: the Institut Culturel Italien the former Casa d'Italia located rue d'Alger in the area of Baille in Marseille (Figure 30).



Figure 30: Institut Culturel Italien, ex Casa d'Italia, Marseille, 2020.

As Gallicchio writes in the catalogue :

this encounter eeting was extremely striking because we were immediately seized by the forms and volumes of this architectural complex, which evokes the petrification of the fascist ideology of the inter-war period (Gallicchio 2021, 9) .

This was a catalysis to gather in an exhibition works that reinterpret urban elements of Marseille's colonial history, from the intersection of artistic perspectives and academic research.

As Gallicchio writes, if *Rue d'Alger* sought to question the propaganda of the Mussolinian expansionist dream, it was not limited to the development of a discourse solely focused on Italy. The positioning of the Italian Cultural Institute in the heart of the Rue d'Alger, indeed invites to expand the subject to the legacies of asymmetrical relations that France has built with North Africa.

The idea to inscribe the issue of the colonial past in Mediterranean, was seen as an attempt to rethink the models for this regional space, and in confronting Italian and French works based on the colonial pasts, to give life to the shared and circulatory space that could draw the Mediterranean of today (Gallicchio 2021, 9)".

This integration of the colonial past in the common past of the countries of the Mediterranean intervenes in the words of the curator to reroute the geopolitics of Italy and the Mediterranean, breaking with the Mussolinian obsession of the domination in the Mediterranean, interpreted as *mare nostrum*.

In curatorial terms, the exhibition sought to interpret this issue, by proposing a polyphonic and plural device, in which artists and researchers address, both through different activities (performances, roundtables, seminars, etc. ...), as by the material forms that have the works of the exhibition, whose dimensions and processes explored the time in scales often environmental and transmedia.

The exhibition was intended to resonate with the social and memorial questions posed by the fact of living for the inhabitants of the Baille neighborhood in the face of this fascist, traumatic monument by bringing together works that themselves integrate at the heart of the process other ghosts, social relations of the present in the light of another traumatic urban past: that of colonization.

To confront these works with those that question the memorial discourses in Algeria, the curator has invited, for instance, Amina Menia to rethink her *Chrysanthemums* project for the former Casa d'Italia (Figure 31). Gallicchio states :

Amina Menia is a keen observer of the urban mutations at work in contemporary Algeria. She has in a way inaugurated artistic practices in the public space of this country, questioning with a pioneering approach the memorial reconversion negotiated by Algeria after decolonization. Architecture and monuments were indeed reinvested by a new “national order”, which tended to rename the places inaugurated by France. This led to initiatives that attempted to adapt republican rituals to a renewed local culture (Gallicchio 2021, 11)”.



Figure 31: Amina Menia, *Chrysantemums*, 2009 to today.

This photographic series, presented as an installation in the theater of the ex Casa d’Italia, shows a catalog of public sculptures, including commemorative plaques and monuments dedicated to martyrs, which the artist photographed throughout her travels in Algeria.

Chrysanthemums, a rich photographic work aimed at mapping these monumental presences, the process is deployed to mobilize the tools of the urban construction site: a wooden structure stages the image of each monument and insists on its theatricalization.

This aesthetic act confirms not only the ephemeral character of places of memory, but also their malleability. Installed in the theater hall of the former Casa d'Italia, this work reveals, in the temple of the fascist show, the backstage of the stage of power.

These eclectic sculptures are part of local memorial practices that awaken memories of the period of the Algerian war of independence. These old monuments of colonial power are the place of reappropriation for local populations, they age, are modified. It is this active process that Amina Menia documents. As the curator writes:

Indeed, it is not uncommon to note the existence of phenomena of reappropriation, where memorials initially built by the French to commemorate the Army of Africa have been transformed into monuments to the Algerian dead, as in the case of the city of El Affroun (Gallichio 2021, 11)

Thus, if the artist interrogates from urban monuments - these “interlocking memories”, she does so to understand the close dependence between the colonial past and the national present (Gallichio 2020, 11).

The Campaign to rename the School Bugeaud

These deconstruction and contextualization of colonial sites provide valuable insights into the contestation of heritage practices in Marseille. The struggles around colonial heritage for changing the sense of non-questioned sites were not only orchestrated by artists but by citizens. After the Black Lives Matter protests, there has been an increased discussion around the contested nature of the presentation of the colonial past in the city and attempts, coming from below (Figure 32).

They have especially developed around the debate of the toponymy. This followed a larger movement that engaged to question certain street names.



Figure 32: Campaign by les Etats Généraux de la culture around the rue Bugeaud, 2020-2021.

In summer 2020, emerged in Marseille a campaign to decolonize the street names. The Black Lives Matter gave a new intensity to the questionings on the role and place of memorabilia of the past, which became contested terrain of France as a global power. Thomas Bugeaud became of the main target. He was the Gouverneur general de l'Algérie (1841-1847) and the author of military tactics of “scorched earth”, as well as the inventor of the smoking of the caves.

At the intersection of actions by national political and local militant groups, actions to counter his celebration in the city were led by a group of militants composed, among others, by people working in the associations Les Etats Généraux de la culture, Les Rosas, le Collectif pour une culture vivante which was formed in 2019 and the pioneer association Ancrages. The began to gather in August 2020 in the rue Bugeaud. Ancrages for instance draws on the idea that space is crucial in the process of heritage, not only because it is where ideology and culture take on

physical existence, but because there in Marseille, the transnational nature of the city has produced archives that still need to find be turned into heritage (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Meeting of the militants in the Café la Rotonde in the rue Bugeaud, 1 September 2020. Photography by Marine Schütz.

As stated in the documentation on its website, the association Ancrages was created in 2000 to include the history of migration in the national heritage:

The history and memories of immigration concern the whole city. There are many initiatives aimed at “collecting” the memories of immigration, but the experience of migration is rarely transmitted explicitly in the family, school, and professional settings. This question is at the heart of the issues of popular education and heritage because it refers to the question of living together.

Its actions encompass a mission of valuing local history and safeguarding private archives. For instance, Ancrages runs the resource center dedicated to the memories of migrations in Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Since 2008, it engaged in a campaign to safeguard private

archives on immigration, which continues today with the regional guide, aimed at holders of private archives on immigration in PACA. Mediating, training, and international cooperation on migration issues is another of its aims.

When dealing with the renaming of rue Bugeaud, the underlying premise of Ancrage and the other associations was that France's colonial past impinged on everyday streetscapes.

The discussions between the militants to which I took part as both an ECHOES researcher and inhabitant of rue Bugeaud, made clear the ways the militants' responses to the issues of the street names were conceived to contest the persistent expression of the political matrices that governed the past.

As militants reveal, thinking about the past and the local space is always connected to processes aimed at denouncing unequal relationships of the present, following the quest of social and memorial justice and of imagining societies that are more concerned with the place of the individual.

To bring the colonial past into the conversation and to uncover Bugeaud's real history, the militants, and actors in the field of heritage and culture engaged discussions and collaboration with residents. In September 2020, they began to methodically ring at each of the inhabitants' door and to have informal discussions in the streets about Bugeaud and the hope of for the impoverished district. This process of information and discussion was sustained by the café la Rotonde, held by the Algerian Dédé in the corner of the rue Bugeaud and Boulevard National, which became a point of meeting and resources (Figure 34).

For instance, a system of mailbox was implemented to gather the comments of neighbors and their ideas to rename the street Bugeaud and the Bugeaud primary school located nearby.

Posters and pamphlets were also a critical means in the process of uncovering the colonial past.



Figure 34: Campaign by les Etats Généraux de la culture around the rue Bugeaud, 2020-2021.

The Jeunesse communistes were also responsible for a campaign of posters in the street around Bugeaud (Figure 35 and Figure 36).



Figure 35. Speech and manifestation of Les Jeunesses communistes, August 2020.



Figure 36. Poster of Les Jeunesses communistes.

The pamphlet reproduces quotes of Bugeaud's writings and informations about this character. Giving the dates of this character, it also bears a short chronology.

Research on street naming systems in general and on colonial street names is not abundant but was a task led by the associations as well they entered a process of concertation with the neighbors. Indeed, the rue Bugeaud is in the 3rd district of the city, which is not only the poorest in Europe, but an area mostly peopled by citizens who have migrated to France along the trajectories of the postcolonial journeys (Comores, Algeria, Morocco etc.)

Such colonial toponym, bearing the injustices of the past over Algerian population, therefore encounters today's a residential and social segregation despite the fact the latter is never recognized by state policies. As recent tendencies in cartography and landscape studies have established, the physical landscape is, to a great extent, an outcome of representational and ideological realms of the involved interest groups, and a contested sphere of the memories and invented traditions of these groups. Seen from a postcolonial perspective, street names are still constitutive of the colonial power.

While they believe social alienation is deeply connected to the extent to which colonizers defined and imposed a universe over the colonized, the associations proposed to imagine new spatial hierarchies, and relation between space, power, and ideologies. Thus, the second step of the campaign led the militants was to propose, collectively, an alternative naming for the street. The latter was addressed by the militant through processes sustaining collaborative reflexion and play.

Using the mailbox and emails, they started to establish lists anticolonial historical and cultural figures. Some names emerged such as Assia Djebar, Pauline Nardal, Emir Abdelkader etc (Figure 37, Figure 38) so the histories of resistants to colonial order could break into public space.

As made clear by this name, the need to break with Bugeaud's damaged historical legitimacy was read as an opportunity to rewrite history with more parity and diversity.

Et pourquoi pas une rue **Assia Djebar** ?



**JE ME VOIS POUR LES FEMMES ARABES
QU'ON SEUL MONTRÉ TOUT DÉROQUÉ
PARLER, TRAVAIL, LAUS, CUISSE, JOUR ET
ITALIANO-ARABE, PARLÉ, CÔTÉ, NOUS,
DANS TOUS LES GYNÉCELS, LES TRADY-
FONNELS ET CEUX DES ALIM.**
— Assia Djebar —

Née en 1936 à Cherchell en Algérie, Assia Djebar vient d'une famille qui a combattu aux côtés d'Abd-el-Kader. Elle est élève en hypokhâgne au lycée Bugeaud d'Alger, avant d'être la première femme algérienne à intégrer la prestigieuse École Normale Supérieure de Sévres, dont elle est exclue en 1956 pour avoir participé à la grève en soutien au soulèvement algérien contre la colonisation.

Elle écrit alors son premier roman, *La Soif*, et De Gaulle lui-même demande sa réintégration en raison de son talent littéraire. En 1985, elle publie le roman *Le Fantôme*, dans lequel elle raconte sur plusieurs générations le traumatisme subi par les Algériens et les Algériennes suite à la conquête barbare menée par Bugeaud et Cavaignac.

Elle est élue en 2006 à l'Académie française, première autrice nord-africaine à y être reçue. Elle meurt en 2015.

ET VOUS, À VOTRE BOUTIQUE, VOUS RENDRE HOMMAGE PAR UN NOM DE RUE ?
culture.les-etats-generaux-de-marseille.fr

Figure 37 : Campaign by les Etats Généraux de la culture around the rue Bugeaud, 'Et pourquoi pas une rue Assia Djebar ?', 2021.

Et pourquoi pas une rue **Paulette Nardal** ?



**C'ÉTAIT 17 JOURS EN 1921, APRÈS
LES JOURNÉES DE MARS, QU'ON A
ET SE SONT DÉROQUÉS AVEC BEAUCOUP
PLUS D'ÉTENDUE, PLUS D'ÉTENDUE QUE
DES FEMMES, NOUS AVONS GÂTÉ LES
POISSONS POUR LES HOMMES.**
— Paulette Nardal —

Née en Martinique en 1896, Paulette Nardal est la première étudiante noire inscrite à la Sorbonne.

Diplômée d'anglais, passionnée de littérature, elle devient journaliste et co-éditrice des écrivains afro-américains de la « Harlem Renaissance » (dont Claude McKay, qui a écrit deux livres sur Marseille, Borge et Florence à Marseille) qui défendent la culture et la littérature noires.

Elle crée avec ses sœurs *Le Revue du Monde Noir*, et organise chez elle des rencontres bilingues où se retrouvent les grands écrivains de l'époque et où débattent les idées de pensée et où le Noir est découvert. Fier de sa culture, elle crée « L'École » et que les écrivains Césaire, Senghor et Damas rendront célèbre sous le nom de « Négritude », qui ouvre la voie à la décolonisation. Morte en 1986, elle était Officier des palmes académiques et Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. Ainsi Césaire a donné son nom à une place en Martinique.

ET VOUS, À VOTRE BOUTIQUE, VOUS RENDRE HOMMAGE PAR UN NOM DE RUE ?
culture.les-etats-generaux-de-marseille.fr

Figure 38. Campaign by les Etats Généraux de la culture around the rue Bugeaud, 'Et pourquoi pas une rue Paulette Nardal ?', 2021.

In February 2021, a petition was published on the site change.org to request the removal of his name from official buildings, stating, “Bugeaud, these are the “enfumades” recommended to his officers in very clear terms on the goal pursued: the physical destruction of “natives” [...] Result: nearly 1000 deaths.

In May 2021, the campaign was finally reckoned by the municipal power which decided to rename the school. The Bugeaud school will be renamed Ahmed-Litim school, in honor of an Algerian rifleman who fell in Provence in 1944. Ahmed Litim, a 24-year-old corporal in the Algerian rifle squad, was killed by a shell on August 25, 1944, at the foot of Notre-Dame-de-la-Garde, during an assault against the Germans entrenched in the basilica.

The public authorities are increasingly listening to these concerns, and to the message sent by a controversial name. In May 2021, the left-wing mayor Benoît Payan twitted after the meeting in the City Council which voted this change:

Marseille will be able to come together in a shared vision of our memory where everyone finds a part of their story in the national narrative (...) A school cannot keep this name because we can neither explain it nor justify it to our children. At school we learn to write, to read, we learn our history” (Ancrages website).

This name was itself conceived to develop a reminder of colonial history that attempts to overcome restrictive nationalist visions of identity in the Maghreb and France and endorse a transnational sense that is determined by Marseille’s complex identities.

Other streets of Marseille are also affected by this wind of change, like rue Colbert, or rue Alexis Carell. More recently, the Avenue des Aygalades (15th) was renamed Ibrahim Ali, in homage to the young man who was shot dead in 1995 by a National Front poster-poster.

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