

Third Sub-report on Artists and Citizens

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Artists and Citizens: Sub-Reports on the three cities

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Report on Bristol, Marine Schütz

Introduction

These last months, the issue of decolonizing heritage in public has emerged particularly strongly in Bristol that was historically at the heart of colonial entanglements. This shift has operated through the redefinition of colonial heritage and its relationship to modernity and national identity. Heritage sites, like the Pero Bridge, the Colston statue and the Guinea Street have become points of mobilization and protest for a range of artists who are descendants of enslaved persons. This process has gained new agency after the toppling of the Colston statue (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Anti-racism protesters in England have pulling down the statue of Colston.

In this last mid-term report on this city, 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.

After a short overview of the politics of memory in Bristol, the report will propose, a critical analysis of several projects initiated by artists and citizens in Bristol who unhouse Bristol's colonial/slave archive by site-specific and performative means: Libita Clayton's performance *Who Was Pero?* (2015), Marc Quinn and Jen Reid's *A Surge of Power* (2020) and finally Christelle Pellecuer and Michael Jenkins's *Echoes of our ancestors* (2021).

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 2).



Figure 2: Edward Colston statue, Bristol. Photography by Marine Schütz, 2019.

It depicted, with a pensive expression, leaning on a cane, Edward Colston, the deputy governor of the Royal African Company (1689-90) who financed slave expeditions (1680 and 1691) (Dresser 2018).

- *Libita Clayton*
- *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)

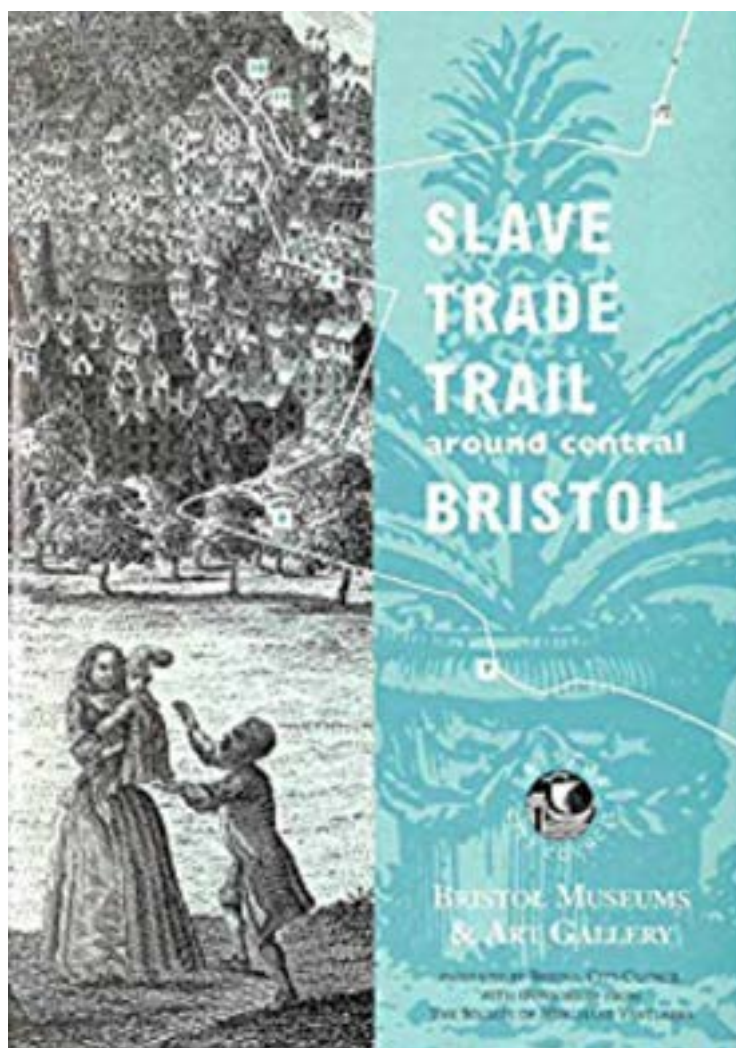


Figure 6 : Booklet *The Slave Trade Trail*, 1999.

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).

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 7). 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 7 : 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 8).



Figure 8: *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 9).



Figure 9: *Mural representing the Windrush ship, Saint 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 coloniality, 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 9).



Figure 10: 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 patrimonial response 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 11. Rob Mitchell on the top of the Colston plinth, Sunday 7th June 2020. Photography by Shawn Sobers.

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 12. 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 charge 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 13).



Figure 13. 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 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 her 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 practices.

In his discussion of delinking with the hegemonic ideas of Western colonial modernity on modern epistemic inheritance, Walter D. Mignolo argues that the parameters of identity must be considered in understanding epistemic decolonization. In 2008, 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. 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 14)”.

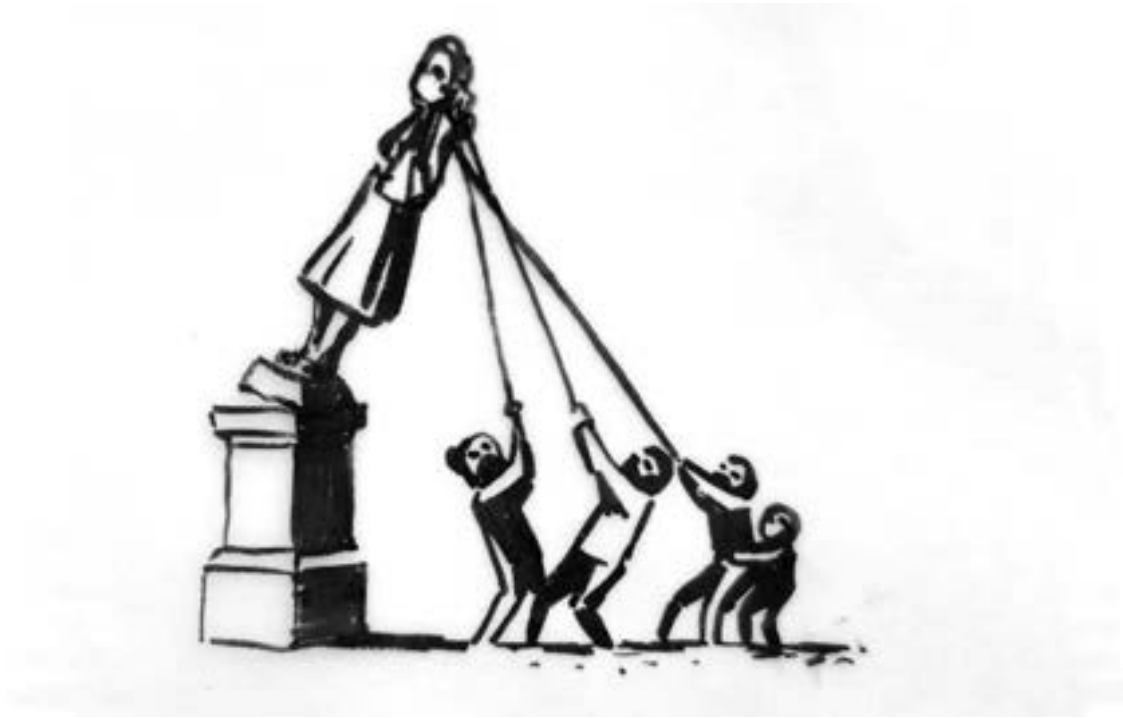


Figure 14: Drawing by Banksy, June 2020. Copyright Banksy. Source: article Tom Ravenscroft, “ Banksy proposes reinstating Edward Colston statue as part of slavery memorial”, *Deezen*.

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,” 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 15).



Figure 15: 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 idealized 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 considers 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 agentivity, 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 have already suffered enough to see the work of Quinn:

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 must 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 must be able to ensure a break with the forms that evoke “the visual currency of the imperial past (Otele 2019).” Olivette Otele illustrates this injunction with a counter-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 16).



Figure 16: Anonymous in situ installation 2018. Source: Inspiring city website.

Based on this counter-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”. 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 17).



Figure 17: 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 18) and they write, perform, produce, and direct their own materials.



Figure 18: 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 mummers*’ – 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 19).



Figure 19: 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 20).



Figure 20: 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 21).



Figure 21: 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 its agentivity, as well as the strength of its 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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Report on Cape Town, 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, respecting 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

PROGRAMME 2

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

Begins: Thibault Square



1. NGUVU YA MBEGU: THE CLEANSING
Abengcongolo Collective
Thibault Square

2. INGXOXO YABAFAZI (STORIES OF WOMEN) & GLOBAL RHYTHMS
Indoni Dance, Arts and Leadership Academy
Thibault Square

3. TWO-GETHER
Moving Stories Theatre Organisation
c/o St George's Mall
& Waterkant Street

4. ZAMANANI BROTHERSCULTURAL GROUP
St George's Mall / Strand Street Fountain

5. !OROLŌA
Anthony Chamonay,
Lewellyn Africa,
Nichelle Linnert &
Tamsyn Spannenberg
St George's Mall / Krotoas Place

6. MOVING FROM UNTRUTH TO TRUTH - A PURIFICATION
Aaraadhana
St George's Cathedral steps

7. THE LAST BOW PLAYERS OF THE EASTERN CAPE
Ensemble directed by Dizu Plaatjies
St George's Mall / Wale Street

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. It’s about how the work moves, how it is inclusive and how it really brings into focus the pedestrians (Figure

5). 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: Meghna Singh

Next, we spoke about his curatorial work within the European context in places such as Madrid, Marseilles 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 pegs on 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 have to 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 European festivals allowed him to dislodge the narrative completely or was there any supervision in how 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’t curate 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 have to 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 the legacy 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, 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! Infact, 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" (Gun-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 peoples 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 an oversize blue collar. That work became *Sunday Best*, (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. Agathes 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 intendeds 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* was 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 Wandi 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.



Sikhumbuzo Makandula was born in De Aar, studied Fine Art at Rhodes University and currently lives and works between Johannesburg and Makhanda. He works with photography, video and performance art and in 2016 did his first solo exhibition at Njelele Art Station in Zimbabwe. He has participated in group exhibitions such as the *Wiener Festwochen* in Vienna, at *!Kauru 2015: Towards Intersections* at UNISA Art Gallery in Pretoria, the Joburg Art Fair, That Art Fair in Cape Town and *Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais* in Sierre, Switzerland.

ARTIST	DATE / TIME	LOCATION
Zizimase	Thu 21st Nov - 9pm	District Six Museum
Zizimase	Fri 22nd Nov - 9pm	District Six Museum

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

Sikhumbuzo (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 Town 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” (Makandula, November 2019). Sikumbuzo said that he questioned the presence of the church, it’s 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 decent). 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 treads carefully, 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 Georges 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. Sikimbuzo'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)

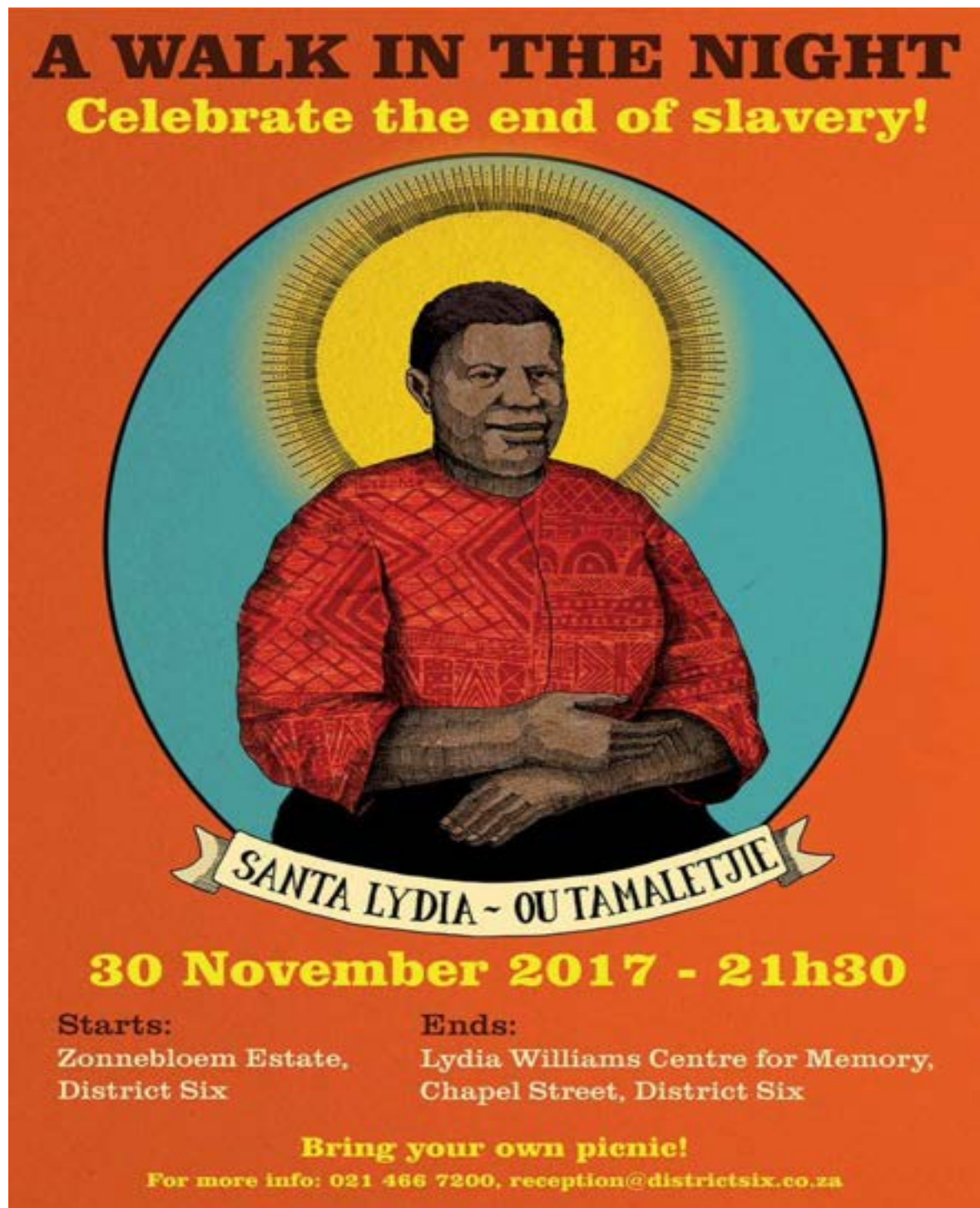


Figure 24: Lydia Williams, Slave Emancipation Day poster, End of slavery walk, 2017. Image courtesy: District Six Museum

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 his 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. 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 also presented an ethical way of commemorating slavery. He said that there were statues of white men 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 our daily lives? (Makandula, November 2019)

Sikumbuzo's work was to think about ways to 'cleanse' 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" (Makandala, November 2019). There's a conversation around decolonisation in South Africa and Makhandula 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 have all have to navigate. Sometimes it becomes messy, sometimes it becomes bloody but we all have to do it" (Makhandula, 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" (Makhandula, 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



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

Report on Marseille, Marine Schütz

Introduction

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 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.

- *Mohammed Laouli*
- *Agathe Rosa and Emma Grosbois*
- *The Campaign to rename the School Bugeaud*

Mohammed Laouli

Such memorial practices of colonial heritage have become points of contestation among citizens and artists in Marseille. Mohammed Laouli (Figure 2) is one of them and uses a plurimedial approach to reflect on how contemporary sites can carry residual memories of trauma.



Figure 2: Mohammed Laouli.

Born in Rabat in Morocco in 1972, 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 Marseilles (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 3).



Figure 3: 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: “when I juxtapose a *kepi* with the pompoms of a djellaba (Figure 4). This violence relates to that of history (Laouli 2020)”.



Figure 4: The artist studio and 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)”.

Chasing Ghost (2018)

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 5: *Ex-voto*, 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 6). On a pedestal, in the center of the arch, a bronze Victory triumphs.



Figure 6 : 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 7).

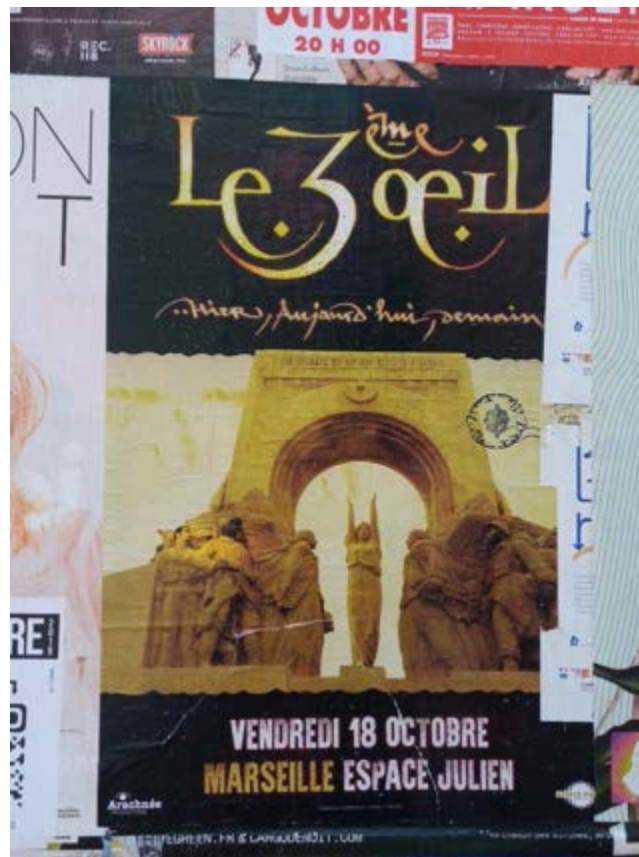


Figure 7: Poster for the 3e Œil, Marseille, 2019. Photography by Marine Schütz.

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 8).



Figure 8: 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 agentic 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.

Les statues n'étaient pas blanches (2020)

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 rally began with people speaking out before some people wrapped the statue in black film. An action she 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 *Les Sculptures N'étaient Pas Blanches* within the frame of a collaboration with the ECHOES project, especially the WP5 team (Figure 9).



Figure 9 : *Les Sculptures n'étaient pas blanches*, 2020, video.

During the summer, Mohammed 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 that the classical sculptural canon could have had if academic norms had allowed for the mixing of bodies (Figure 10), Mohammed Laouli stages himself dressed in blue overalls and thereby summons the figures of the 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 10: Mohammed Laouli, *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*. 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 11: *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 12) 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 César in 1971.



Figure 12: 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” (Emma 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 13).



Figure 13. César, *Mémorial des Rapatriés d'Algérie*, bronze, 8 meters high, Marseille, 1971. Fonds Gaston Defferre, Archives municipales, Marseille.

Study of the Mémorial des Rapatriés d'Algérie

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” (Conseil municipal 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 (Conseil municipal 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 14):

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 14: 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 Marseilles. 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 15: 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).

Study of Prism

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 Marseilles memorials”, the project has taken the concrete form of an installation at the Italian Cultural

Center in Marseilles, as part of the *Rue d'Alger* exhibition on the Manifesta biennial (summer-autumn 2020) (Figure 16).



Figure 16: *Prisme*, Marseille. Institut culturel italien, 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. 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 17: *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. For these artists, the question of absence necessarily reads as the trace of an incomplete historical narrative” (Grosbois 2020).

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).

Rue d’Alger exhibition

This project was exhibited during the biennale Manifesta, and more specifically within the show *Rue d’Alger* curated by Alessandro Gallicchio (Figure 18).



Figure 18: *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 19).



Figure 19: 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 a curatorial term, 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 20).

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.



Figure 20: Amina Menia, *Chrysanthemums*, 2009 to today.

This photographic series, presented as an installation in the theater, 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.



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.



Figure 22: 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 a 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 (Figure 23). 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.

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 23: 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 24 and Figure 25).



Figure 24. Speech and manifestation of Les Jeunesses communistes, August 2020.



Figure 25. 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 colonizers, the idea to break with such apprehensions of public space marked by the exclusion of Algerian histories and identities, 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 26, Figure 27) 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.



Figure 26. Campaign by les Etats Généraux de la culture around the rue Bugeaud, 'Et pourquoi pas une rue Assia Djebar ?' , 2021.



Figure 27. 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 civic 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 tweeted 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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