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# Empire Circumscribed:

Silence, Disconnection, Public Secrets, and the  
Absent-Presence of the British Empire in Bristol

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which the British Empire is understood and represented in historical discourse and heritage practice in the city of Bristol. It attempts to develop a wider literature on metropolitan post-colonial memory, looking at the ways in which European Empires are understood and talked about in their former metropolises. While commentators including journalists and other scholars have suggested that Britain has an amnesiac relationship with its history of Empire, this thesis uses a more nuanced framework, largely based off of Ann Stoler's concept of colonial aphasia. As with Stoler, I suggest that this is not so much a matter of memory or forgetting as much as it is about processes of silence, displacement, and disconnection. A central assumption concerning histories of Empire is that they happened a long time ago, somewhere over there and thus, have limited relevance in present-day Britain as artefacts of the past. This thesis looks at both anthropological theory and its own ethnographic data to critically explore what work this central temporal and spatial assumption does, arguing that it is a way in which Britain can effectively displace or write around this fundamentally constitutive and uncomfortably ambivalent aspect of its own history and construction, despite its ongoing material presence. The work ultimately seeks to further destabilise this central assumption, noting the ways in which a port city like Bristol was both fundamental to and fundamentally built by the imperial encounter, both historically and in the present, not least of all through ongoing debates about Bristol's contentious history as an epicentre of the transatlantic slave trade.

Based off of 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork with an emphasis on history workers (particularly heritage volunteers and alternative [non-council] historical actors), the thesis explores various practices taken by these history workers to interpret, narrate, and represent the both the city's material, urban landscape and its history.

Looking at materiality through walking tours, the thesis explores the ways in which the present-absence of Empire is manifested in the cityscape, even if it is not explicitly addressed in the Council's narrative of the city's history. Furthermore, Council museum representations effectively circumscribe the wider history of Empire from present day Bristol in accordance with the central assumption above with the exception of discussions of the slave trade which is contained and compartmentalised from the rest of the city's history. However, while these circumscribed histories of Empire are not effectively addressed by Council actors, they are confronted through alternative, non-Council heritage actors and sometimes framed as a conspiracy by the city's elite (with ties and roots to Bristol's mercantile trade) to conceal Bristol's problematic histories.

In this light, taking into account theorisations of materiality and memory, silence, and public secrets, I ultimately argue that Bristol's history debates over its past are debates about the very nature of British and English identities, as well as the time and place of Empire in the politics of the present.

KW: British Empire, materiality, aphasia, silence, public secret, absent-presence, metropolitan post-colonial memory, circumscription

## Lay Summary

How is the British Empire understood today in Britain, a country whose cities were built by the processes, connections, and unequal relationships of Empire? This thesis investigates some of the common assumptions with which the British Empire is often understood today in terms of its when and where; namely that to many (especially white, middle-class) Britons, the Empire was something that happened a long time ago, somewhere else over there. I argue that this central assumption is re-produced and re-written (however consciously or unconsciously) by many actors and volunteers involved in the presentation of history and heritage.

The problem with this, however, is that this is a way of effectively disconnecting the connections and relationships between past and present and here and now when it comes to understanding how the history of the British Empire is pertinent and arguably has its continuities (materially in terms of buildings and monuments built by the wealth of Empire and intangibly through racism and structural inequality) in Britain today.

Where some scholars and journalists have marked these disconnections as evidence of forgetting this past and declare it a case of amnesia, I am skeptical to over-interpret these motives and instead, consider the observation of a disconnection and what this disconnect effectively does in terms of understanding and in contemporary political debates about identity and the meaning of Britishness and Englishness. I argue that the ways in which the British Empire is understood in local history and heritage in Bristol, the city where I did 12 months of research and fieldwork often involve 'talking around' the ambivalent connections and history of Empire and its significance to building Bristol.

Although Bristol's role in the transatlantic slave trade is openly addressed, debates about how that history have been ongoing for over 20 years. However, my thesis looks beyond solely these representations of slavery to make connections to the wider phenomena of Empire which acts as a frame that includes (but is not limited to) transatlantic slavery.



## Declaration

I, Alex Jason Gapud hereby declare the following:

(a) that this thesis has been entirely composed by myself, and

(b) either that the work is entirely my own, and

(c) that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_





## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Lay Summary</b> .....	iii
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ix
<b>Introduction: Empire as a Narrative</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One: Empire with a Metropolitan Focus - Material and Immaterial Relationships, Connections, and Continuities</b> .....	35
<b>Chapter Two: Presenting the Past: The City, Its Past, and its Present via Historical Walking Tours, Presence, and Absence</b> .....	69
<b>Chapter Three: Silences of Circumscription: ‘Silence,’ Displacing, and Disconnecting Empire</b>	115
<b>Chapter Four: Public ‘Secrets’, Contestations of Power and History, and Historical Topographies of Privilege</b> .....	171
<b>Afterword: The Haunting of Edward Colston’s Ghost</b> .....	207
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	215



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## Introduction: Empire as a Narrative

When I first arrived in Bristol in mid-August 2014, I spent my first month staying with some friends of friends from Edinburgh in the vibrant and trendy neighbourhood of Stokes Croft, just bordering St. Pauls, which is well-known for its large Afro-Caribbean/Black British population. Introducing myself and my research and my interest in how histories of colonialism were understood and “remembered” in Bristol to one of my new flatmates, I was immediately bombarded with a number of questions. “Oh, so you’re a historian then? Does that mean you’ll spend a lot of time in the archives? And have you heard about the row over Edward Colston and his statue in the city centre?”

“Well, no, I’m actually an anthropologist interested more in how we understand and talk about this in the present than with the historical details of what *actually* happened,” I replied.

“Oh, so you’re an anthropologist?! Wow! Wait, so if you’re an anthropologist interested in colonialism, then why are you in Bristol? Shouldn’t you actually be somewhere that was *in* the Empire like India, or Kenya, or Hong Kong?”

“Well, honestly, if you think about it, are we not actually in the old Empire here in Bristol? I mean, there’s a lot said about Bristol and its role in the slave trade like the stuff with Colston...isn’t this a part of it?”

That first weekend, I found myself invited to a local church picnic in the affluent neighbourhood of Clifton, where I was in the company of eight middle-class, white English men and women and some children, and as we shared sandwiches and crisps, my conversations there largely echoed these sentiments. Other aspects of those conversations that Sunday were largely focused on Bristol’s relationship with the slave trade and the ongoing debate (which has lasted for over 20 years) on what the Council and its actors should do with the statue of Edward Colston and associated place names. My new friends seemed to think that I had come to Bristol to figure out what the city ought to do with Colston. In this regard, the latter conversation also revealed an apparently common conflation between Empire and slavery among my interlocutors.

Throughout my year of fieldwork, these two conversations (about why I was in Bristol and my supposed interest in slavery and Colston) seemed to repeat themselves over and over with friends or interlocutors, especially among folks who weren’t necessarily involved in heritage themselves. At times, it felt like one of these conversations (or something which revealed similar assumptions) happened every time I would introduce myself. Whether with fellow participants in



a historical walking tour, or, often when I would introduce myself to new people, some particular assumptions about the when and where, the time and space of the British Empire would frequently emerge. This was especially the case with friends and interlocutors who were white, middle-class, and English, whether they were born and raised in Bristol, or moved to Bristol from elsewhere in England for work or university. Or as happened frequently as well, my interlocutors would easily conflate Empire and slavery and tell me that (as in one case with a white, middle-class English female friend in her mid-20s who was born and raised in Bristol) “It made perfect sense to come to Bristol because of the row over Colston and the slave trade” although her comment was dissociated from thinking about Empire *beyond* slavery.

Conversations with Black friends or interlocutors (whether they were Black British or African) were notably different, as these friends often gave a sense of immediately understanding why I was in Bristol and what I was there to do as an anthropologist. To my Black friends, it made obvious sense that an anthropologist would critically investigate how white English people in a place like Bristol understood their Empire, especially as one of them (Syano, a Kenyan PhD student in his late 20s who had lived in England for almost a decade) noted that “they don’t really talk about it or know much about it.” For my Black friends, looking at how the British Empire was understood today in a place like Bristol seemed to be an obvious subject of inquiry, whilst my white interlocutors, although largely supportive and willing to talk, often seemed puzzled by my work.

The frequency of these encounters among white Bristolians leads me to think that there is a central assumption about how the British Empire is often thought of in white, middle-class England: something that happened a long time ago, somewhere else, “over there”. It echoes the words of Whiskey Sisodia from Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* who stutters, “The tr-trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss-hisstory happened overseas so they do-don’t know what it means.” (Rushdie 1988:343). The suggestion that despite being in Bristol, I wasn’t *in* the Empire and should have been somewhere “where the Empire happened” clearly suggests this. Meanwhile, the sense that I should be a historian working in the archives to look at “what actually happened” in the Empire also relegates this to a past which is often assumed (again, by my white friends) as over, done with, a matter of the past and separated from the present. Scholars who research the ways in which the British Empire is understood in present-day England also note the presence of these central assumptions (Tyler 2012: 2; Wemyss 2016 [2009]): 3) yet also reflect more on what these assumptions effectively *do* within the politics of the past and the ways in which Empire is understood in the present.

In her 2016 piece which I encountered after my fieldwork, Elizabeth Edwards similarly notes in her work on the archive and colonial imaginary that understandings of “Empire at home” in places like Britain are displaced into three particular elsewhere: the spatial (that Empire happened somewhere else), the temporal (that it belongs in the past), and the disciplinary (that in her account, Empire is primarily the concern of anthropology as guardian of the exotic and museums’ ethnographic collections). However, adding to Edwards, based on my interactions with informants, I suggest that the matter of Empire is also often displaced into the discipline of history which aligns with the understanding of Empire as strictly of the past.

Rather than a historical thesis, this work examines the ways in which these assumptions operate and what work they effectively do within the politics of history, memory, and the past. Beyond Edwards’ assessment of the need to “contain” representations of Empire within these displacements due to Empire’s dystopian potential, (2016: 53-54), how does this central assumption become embedded and reproduced, and what sort of consciousness does this create within social/public memory? While other commentators have suggested that Britain has “forgotten” its colonial past and suffers from a kind of “white amnesia” (for example, Tyler 2012: 3, 19-20, 80, 91), I aim to scrutinise this claim in more detail and follow Ann Stoler and Edwards in their application of an aphasic framework which looks at silence and displacement rather than a focus on memory and forgetting, significant though these terms may be in wider discourse.

Through the ethnography that follows throughout this thesis, I suggest that rather than directly acknowledging and confronting the ways in which the British Empire—both as a story which was once crucial to the making of Britain, British identity, and British cities and conceptually as the connections and relationships forged by global interactions operating materially and immaterially—still inhabits present-day Britain. Yet this story is often left explicitly silent, or effectively circumscribed and talked around in heritage representations. This is largely due to its contentious nature and designation by Bristol City Council as a “sensitive” topic. These circumscriptive silences are thus part of a wider politics of the past and are a strategy largely of conflict-aversion in addressing a history which is controversial and ambivalent. However, they also allow for the reproduction of a temporal and spatial displacement in a wider understanding of Empire rather than confronting the material and immaterial presences and connections of the imperial encounter in the here and now.

## **Empire is History**

By this, I do not mean that the British Empire is strictly a thing of the past which remains solely the domain of archivists and historians. But rather, as Hayden White suggests with his analysis of history more generally (1973, 1978), I suggest that in its own way, the British Empire is a story. By this, I mean that the British Empire is a narrative consisting of a number of (at times disparate) events, processes, and phenomena stretched around the globe and through centuries which, despite their disparities, still fall under the historical and conceptual umbrella of something we term 'the British Empire.'

On the one hand, the British Empire can be perceived as something 'real' in the world in terms of its processes of violence, exploitation, forced displacement, and forced labour. At its zenith just before the First World War, the British Empire ruled approximately one quarter of the world's population and covered one-fifth of its total landmass. Yet what rule meant on the ground varied with context, with the White settler societies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa achieving some degree of autonomy and independence, and other colonies (usually without sizeable white settler populations) experiencing more dominant, coercive forms of rule without the same degree of self-determination (for example Darwin 2012:27-28). Never mind the fact that many scholars (Armitage 2000: 1-3, Darwin 2012: 20-30 to name but two) note that Britain in fact had not one, but arguably two, Empires which were ruled in very different manners.

From its origins in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century efforts of men like Cabot, Drake, or Raleigh to discover the New World, explore the globe, and begin settler colonies, Britain developed its 'First Empire' in the Caribbean (in places such as Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Barbados, and Antigua) and the Eastern Seaboard of North America (stretching from Newfoundland down to the colony of Georgia) over the next few centuries. While the East India Company (chartered in 1600) began operating on the other side of the world, this Atlantic manifestation of the British Empire was particularly centred on settler colonialism and plantation slavery which produced a variety of commodities, most notably (though not only) sugar, tobacco, cotton, and Canadian fish. This form of Empire was vastly shaped by the transatlantic slave trade which started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century until its abolition in 1807. Following the independence of the 13 American Colonies in the 1780's however, trade still continued with a newly independent United States (which used large scale plantation labour of enslaved Africans to produce commodities traded with Britain, especially tobacco and cotton) as well as with British Canada and British colonies throughout the Caribbean. Emancipation and the ending of plantation slavery in the British Empire legally continued until 1833, although freed slaves were also required to work for their former masters for a number of years after they legally obtained their freedom. And despite the independence of the American

colonies, trade with Britain in many of these slave-produced commodities continued until the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865. It is this First Empire which was the manifestation of the British Empire that was critical to the growth and wealth of British port cities like Bristol, Glasgow, and Liverpool.

With American independence in the 1780's and the decline of Caribbean plantations, Britain then turned its attention from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, with its focus on the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Australia, the South Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa. This manifestation of Empire was rather different however, although plantations (particularly of tea, rubber, opium, and cotton) were still central to its operations. This manifestation also had its moral qualms and forms of violence, from the policy of gunboat diplomacy and the Opium Wars fought against China, to the lavish exploitation of the East India Company before the Company was dissolved by the Government, to a range of massacres and the forced displacement of local and indigenous populations in many parts of the world such as Australia. Given these two manifestations, the British Empire was anything but a monolithic entity, but rather, was a heterogenous, at times chaotic political, social, and economic formation.

The British Empire can be read through vast swathes of British military history, particularly the history of the Royal Navy. One can trace it through the histories of the East India Company, the British Raj in India, of West Indian plantations, North American Colonies, or any number of colonial wars and expeditions that involved British soldiers and sailors fighting around the world. In a sense, all of these written histories are in themselves stories told of events, people, places, processes, relationships, and interactions. While these events recorded by historians happened in the past, one can also argue that their legacies, resonances, or even continuities (particularly in patterns of inequality, for example) are also still with us, as the next chapter explores in greater detail.

But on the other hand, Empire is also something symbolic, immaterial, imagined. For example, the British Empire could be symbolised as countries coloured pink on a map. Or it could be imagined as trade networks and infrastructures spread over thousands of miles. In other understandings, it entails ideas and hierarchies of race and religion which inform certain actions and practices with real consequences and effect in the world. All of these are ways in which we can imagine or think of the British Empire, and they suggest an entity which is far from monolithic and also entails an abstract, and at times chaotic, concept. As historian John Darwin contends, Empire was informed and shaped by different visions and imaginations of what it might and ought to be (2012); it was something envisioned and produced, and retrospectively, in the wake of its

formal dissolution, it is a large formation that was largely conceived rather than 'real'—though that is not to say that it did not leave its fair share of material remnants which Stoler (2013) terms imperial debris.

Returning to the phrase “the British Empire is history”, the British Empire can also be seen as a narrative, a story told by a certain people about themselves in relation to others and primarily to themselves to create a particular sense of cohesion and identity which differentiates them from others. As Hayden White describes, myths of characters such as the Wild Man or the Noble Savage were also used in the Victorian era to differentiate and contrast European norms (White 1978), just as Edward Said notes the use of the dichotomy of “us” and “them” stemming from Greek thoughts on barbarians (Said 1994: xxviii). And as Said suggests of nations “nations are themselves narratives. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them.” (Said 1994: xiii). I use this in relation to the notion of Empire as a national history and a component of a national narrative

None of this is intended to reify British or English identities as static or monolithic entities (Cubitt 2007:16, Said 1994: xxviii, or Bhabha 1990:292 on the transitional temporality of the nation and narrative). But scholars such as Colley (2009 [1992]) and Kumar (2003) have argued that the experience, the possession, and the story of the British Empire has played a fundamental role in shaping a sense of both Britishness and Englishness, which will be elaborated in the next chapter. This thesis looks at the ways in which those articulations of identity contend with what is now perceived as at best an ambivalent history, or at worst, a “difficult heritage” (Macdonald 2009)

As Hayden White suggests in both *Metahistory* (1973) and *Tropics of Discourse* (1978) history is a particular construction of knowledge which falls between the domains of art and science. For White, history is above all a narrative (1973), rather than some objective representation of a series of events (1978: 106). As he writes, “a historical discourse should not be regarded as a mirror image of the set of events that it claims to simply describe.” (1978:106). Furthermore, “an historical discourse does not represent a perfect equivalent of the phenomenal field it purports to describe, in size, scope or the order of seriality in which the events occurred.” (1978:111). He goes on to suggest that while this is often suggested to be a matter of selectivity on behalf of the historian, it is, rather, a distortion through which the historian creates a particular form of narrative to fit a wide genre of story type (Ibid.) History is, as he suggests, “*a story of a particular kind*” (1978:58, 66, emphasis in original on p.58). Within this, an act of interpretation by the historian is necessary to link these events together and to help the historian’s audience

interpret what sort of story this history *is* in the first place, whether it be a comedy, tragedy, romance, or satire (1978:51-75).

Following this, as a form of history, the history of Empire—the ways in which this story is interpreted, told (or not), represented, and construed—is therefore its own sort of narrative. This is what I mean by suggesting that “Empire is history”—in the sense that just as history (and the history of a nation) is a form of narrative, a story, so is Empire. Again, this is not to reify Empire into a singular, static, monolithic structure, or to suggest that it is completely imagined or abstract without any real consequence in the world. Rather, the idea is that considering Empire from this lens, as history and as narrative, in part accounts for the chaotic disparity in what is still nevertheless called “the British Empire.” This also accounts for the centrality of this narrative in the making of British and English identities. It also explains the various ways in which this story is told or not told, its various interpretations as “good or bad,” and the ways it is considered to matter or not matter (see for example the “Mackenzie-Porter” debate, MacKenzie 2008). But as part of a national history, it also accounts for the story’s connection and linkage to a specific place (like Britain as a whole or a city like Bristol) and a specific people.

While there is a vast amount of literature written on the British Empire from the perspective of history (e.g., the University of Manchester Press’s *Studies in Imperialism* series which includes over 130 titles, the vast majority of them within the realm of academic history; or MacKenzie 1984, 1986, Darwin 1988, 2012, Armitage 2000, Cannadine 2001, Porter 2004, Hall and Rose 2006, Levine 2013, just to name a few), this thesis does not aim to address the whole of the historical literature on the British Empire or to describe the events of the Empire in detail. There is also admittedly a wealth of fairly recent scholarship on the ways in which the transatlantic slave trade is commemorated and represented in Britain (for example Kaplan and Oldfield 2010, Smith et al 2010, and Smith et al 2011 not to mention the journal *Slavery and Abolition*). And while a discussion of the ways in which the story of the transatlantic slave trade is understood and represented in the present is pertinent to this thesis, the slave trade alone is not the focus of this entire work.

However fascinating and broad the literature on the history of the British Empire is, the details of this history as told by the immense range of historians are beyond the remit of this thesis. Rather, this thesis looks at the story of the British Empire as a particular narrative told by the British about themselves and asks a different set of questions: How do cities, nations, and societies deal with histories which are constitutive of their presents and their current existence, yet which are controversial, or perhaps even morally ambivalent from a contemporary

perspective? Specifically, in this ethnography, how does a city like Bristol which was built by the wealth of this Empire and its processes 'deal with' this aspect of its past? How is the story of Empire thought of, spoken about, understood, represented, and commemorated (or not) in a city where the material and immaterial remnants (and arguably continuities) of Empire are prevalent throughout the city? How does the city address the absent-presence of Empire in its built environment (including buildings, landmarks, place names, and monuments) and a topography of inequality, as well as through its large Black British population?

This thesis also notes that the literature is relatively limited in terms of scholarly engagement regarding questions of how Empire is "remembered" in the present and in places in Metropolitan Europe which possessed vast Empires through anthropological frameworks of memory and related fields (Stoler 2011, Bijl 2012, 2016; De L'Estoile 2008, Edwards 2016, Edwards and Mead 2013, Tyler 2012, Wemyss 2016 [2009]). In this vein, it aims to develop a genre of ethnographic consideration that I term "metropolitan post-colonial memory" to address the ways in which these stories of Empire and their connections are handled in the European former metropolises of various Empires, and thus framing these metropolitan cities as Imperial Cities (cf. Driver and Gilbert 1999). Thus, rather than taking an angle on "what actually happened" as historians may focus upon, this work takes a more critical, social scientific approach, considering for example the ways in which the British Empire is often talked about today: in the past tense, in the vernacular and among the broader population. It finds itself situated in a wider nexus of literature on the anthropology of history in "the West" (for example, Palmié and Stewart 2016, Hirsch and Stewart 2005) and looks at the ways in which actors within a particular social context engage and represent histories, processes, and relationships of Empire (as events of the past and as a narrative with vestiges and continuities in the present) which have been crucial to the material constitution of Bristol and the immaterial construction of British and English identities. It looks at the sort of processes and relationships through which the past is known and how "sensitive" topics such as those of Empire and slavery are engaged within a wider politics of history, memory, and the past in the present moment.

Framing Empire in the manner of narrative, we are able to see some of the ways in which this story has been told and has been seen as relevant in the past (as developed further in Chapter 3), but also the ways in which this story, this narrative, can also be invisible (Wemyss 2016 [2009]), "forgotten" (Tyler 2012), silent (Stoler 2011 on the French Empire or Bijl 2012 on Dutch colonialism), or displaced to temporal, spatial, and disciplinary "elsewhere" (Edwards 2016).

## **Within an Anthropology of History and Memory – Basic Assumptions**

Although this thesis deals with the ways in which historical events of the past are represented and understood in the present, it is clearly not a history thesis so much as it is an anthropological thesis that fits within the anthropology of history and the anthropology of memory. As Palmié and Stewart (2016) suggest in their call for an anthropology of history (which they suggest was first called for by Sahlins 1985), such an approach does not take “Western historical practices” for granted, or as monolithic, and rather, seeks to critically investigate the “principles...that underpin practices of inquiry into the past, as well as the forms and modes in which the past is represented to others.” (Palmié and Stewart 2016:210). In a sense, they seek to examine the ways in which understandings of the past are constructed, produced, and understood. While their approach partially aims to expand an understanding of alternative ways of understanding and representing the past, it also calls into question the dominant paradigm of understanding “history” which they term “historicism.” In their formulation, they list historicism’s key tenets for further scrutiny:

- (1) The assumption of temporal linearity; (2) chronological code; (3) basis in objective evidence/objectivity; (4) intentionally produced on the basis of research, usually in writing (historiography); (5) the separation of temporal zones—past, present, future; (6) the assumption that events are contingent and unpredictable; (7) the avoidance of anachronism—the past must be understood on its own terms; (8) causality as a standard mode of explanation (Palmié and Stewart 2016:210 ff5).

Rankean history (named after Leopold von Ranke, the “father of modern history”), as Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart suggest in their special issue on ethnographies of historicities, is perhaps best described under this label of historicism, which aims to “tell [the past] how it really was” and which therefore assumes the existence of an objective account of the past to tell and a notion of ‘truth’ in the first place (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:264, cf. Trouillot 2015 [1995]:5 in this discussion on positivist perspectives). The historians’ task is therefore to “use available documentary evidence (such as archives) to render as accurate a picture of the past as possible” while avoiding “anachronism: the retrojection of present-day assumptions into the past. The past is to be treated as a foreign country steeped in its particular institutions, culture and forms of thought” (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:264). According to Hirsch and Stewart, this notion of Rankean historicism is at the foundation of Western historical consciousness and the conventions of academic history as a discipline and as a discourse of power and knowledge. While the ethnographic practices illustrated in this thesis often rely on Rankean historicism in many ways, historical practices such as the historical walking tour often defy the assumptions of historicism in praxis.



Historicism as a form of knowing the past is both contextually particular and contains its own set of assumptions as suggested above. Among these are what Levi-Strauss terms as the “‘historical code’: history as a distinct class of dates (events) organised in a linear series; the division between past and present taken as given” (Levi-Strauss 1966 [1962:260 cited in Hirsch and Stewart 2005:265, cf. Trouillot 2015 [1995]:7). Indeed, this assumed rupture between past and present deserves further attention and scrutiny to follow in the ethnography of this thesis. Additionally, this mode of historical consciousness also “privileges archival sources and depends upon narratives thereby created” (White 1973 quoted in Hirsch and Stewart 2005:265). As a result, there are forms of knowledge and perspectives that are effectively given priority over others, such that anthropologist Eric Wolf notes that modernist, ‘Western’ notions of history effectively write others out of history without written, formalised archives (1982, cf. Trouillot 2015 [1995]). Such an approach also invalidates oral histories, as well as other notions of time and temporality beyond linear time (Hodges 2008). Yet, as Palmié and Stewart suggest through their concept of *chronotope* (following Bakhtin), historical practices do not so easily follow a linear temporality, as demonstrated in Chapter 2 through the historical walking tour and Sharon Macdonald’s suggested concepts of past presencing and the multitemporality of things (Macdonald 2013:12-13 and 54-56). Likewise, Ann Stoler in her account of the material detritus of Empire notes the sort of temporal entanglement revealed by the presence (in the present) of objects from the past (2008, 2013, Gordillo 2014).

The sort of work that Hirsch, Stewart, and Palmié call for has a different agenda and a contrasting aim in mind. Hirsch and Stewart as ethnographers note that history is not only relevant to understanding the present, but it is also noteworthy to consider the “‘social past’ (Schapera 1962:152 quoted in Hirsch and Stewart 2005: 268)—namely the political uses to which versions of the past (histories) may be put, the communicative forms of these histories may take and the social occasions on which they are disseminated within any particular community” (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:268). Thus, “[t]he ethnographic study of history as it is realised in Western societies or elsewhere is not concerned with objectivity, accuracy, and factuality in local accounts of the past, *but rather with recovering all of the social and cultural assumptions with which a people imbue these accounts*” (Ibid., emphasis added). The task then is not to tell ‘history as it was’ but rather, to consider the context in which history is constructed and understood today, or in other words, to consider the ways in which the present shades our understanding of the past (cf. Lowenthal 1985).

In many ways, these problematic pillars of Rankean historicism and Western historical consciousness destabilise a positivist vision of the past with its associated assumptions and demonstrate its own cultural particularity, as opposed to considering these conventions to be a universal norm (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:267). Both Hirsch and Stewart's special issue of *History and Anthropology* (2005) and Palmié and Stewart's special issue of *Hau* (2016) with their corresponding ethnographies of historicity and the anthropology of history respectively propose more theoretically nuanced and flexible frameworks for engaging and understanding of how anthropology can provide a more critical engagement with the past, and with histories, through understanding the present social contexts in which these pasts are reflected upon.

Like Hirsch, Stewart, and Palmié, historiographer Keith Jenkins touches upon the many problematic assumptions tied into common understandings of history (1991). Jenkins' own work functions as a polemic to non-critical views of history which hold a strictly positivist view. With clarity and brevity, Jenkins opens up the construction and practice of academic history to reveal a series of problematic assumptions which cannot stand, such as claims of objectivity, lack of bias, or claims to 'truth' as if there were one "single correct view" (White 1978:46-47, quoted in Jenkins 1991:68). Rather, Jenkins offers his own definition of history (which is not without his own admitted caveats):

History is a shifting, problematic discourse, ostensibly about an aspect of the world, the past, that is produced by a group of present-minded workers (overwhelmingly in our culture salaried historians) who go about their work in mutually recognisable ways that are epistemologically, methodologically, ideologically and practically positioned and whose products, once in circulation, are subject to a series of uses and abuses that are logically infinite but which in actuality generally correspond to a range of power bases that exist at any given moment and which structure and distribute the meanings of histories along a dominant-marginal spectrum. (1991:31-32)

Jenkins also raises the question of "Who is history for?" in terms of both audience and its purpose, especially in light of power relations which do not only legitimise/delegitimise certain historical narratives, but also operate in terms of dynamics of dominant/subordinate, referring to the oft cited cliché that "history is written by the victors" (1991:21-22). Returning to the critiques of Rankean historicism and its ability to marginalise and exclude, this is particularly important as it again destabilises the claim of history as truth or objective. It furthermore places history firmly within the realm of the political, as opposed to considering it politically neutral. In this sense, Jenkins' arguments about history and its place within discourses of power (1991: 34-39) do not only note the ways in which history is constructed, but also the ways in which it is contested ideologically (1991: 22-23).

Following these critiques, I have already suggested with Hayden White that “a historical discourse should not be regarded as a mirror image of the set of events that it claims to simply describe” (1978: 106) and thus cannot necessarily be taken for granted as objective. In this regard, we can also contend that ‘history’ and ‘the past’ are not one and the same, but rather, historical discourse is again a narrative told about events, people, processes, or phenomena that happened in the past (White 1978). Noting the ambiguity of the word “history”, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes the dual usage of the term history, referring to “both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, both ‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened’” and thus encompasses both “a sociohistorical process...[and] our knowledge of that process or on a story about that process” (2015 [1995]:2, cf. Bhabha 1990:297 on the pedagogical and performative aspects of history). In this vein, I follow a wide range of historiographers, philosophers of history, and anthropologists critical of historicism (for example White 1978, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Jenkins 1991, Trouillot 2015 [1995], Hirsch and Stewart 2005, Palmié and Stewart 2016) who suggest that history is something constructed and produced and involves a degree of subjectivity and interpretation.

To deal with this, Hirsch and Stewart offer the concept of *historicity* which “recognises the situation where past, present, and future as fused as unavoidable” (2005:268) rather than considering these temporalities as completely ruptured. By embracing this notion of historicities rather than a linear historicism, we are hopefully able to establish an understanding of temporality which goes beyond the conventional rupture between past and present and future. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to build upon this in order to not only highlight the presence of continuities as in the next chapter, but also of multiple co-temporalities which will be explored in Chapter 2 on materiality and historical walking tours, particularly through the notion of absent-presence by Eva Domanska (2006) as well as haunting, as discussed by Jacques Derrida (1994). This term of historicity is also used throughout this thesis to encompass the many historical practices and accounts illustrated throughout the ethnography which differ in practice in its understanding of the past from the rather blunt framework of positivism.

### **Memory: What does it mean to ‘Remember’ or ‘Forget’?**

Admittedly, there is a massive amount of literature not only on historiography and the philosophy of history, but also on social and collective memory (for example, Olick and Robbins 1998, Olick 2003, 2005, 2007, Olick et al 2011, Cubitt 2007, Halbwachs 1992). Memory is often

presumed to be distinct from history (not only in the ways in which 'history' as we have described above is a particular form of knowledge complete with its own disciplinary criteria and conventions which are often linked to power), but as we have described, history is at times presumed to be a supposedly superior, more accurate form of knowledge than the sort of collective memory of pre-modern societies where memory was embodied, repeated in ritual and the day-to-day (Nora 1989). While memory via Plato is often conceived as an imprint on a block of wax, a trace, forgetting is thus considered an erasure of the imprint (Ricoeur 2004:9). However, this section goes beyond the notion of individual (psychological and neurological definitions of) memory to consider the wider phenomenon of social and collective memory from a social scientific perspective (cf. Cubitt 2007). Particularly the concern here is how do societies, nations, or communities 'remember' the past? What sort of processes and practices are involved with commemorating or representing the past?

Admittedly, this takes a more social scientific approach to the question than a historian such as Geoffrey Cubitt may take, particularly with his understandable hesitation to reify social entities or to assume their cohesion or continuity (2007:16), as well as caution over the tensions between individual and social memory which he notes (2007:14). Nevertheless, his definition of social memory is quite a helpful one despite many other possible understandings of the term, such as that of Maurice Halbwachs, the 'father of social memory studies' who suggested that memory is not an individual phenomenon, but rather, a social one in that memory is retrieved and re-created in the context of social relations such as families or societies and which exceeds the memory of the individual (1992). However, Cubitt suggests that:

By *social memory*, I do not mean some kind of functional analogue of individual memory—a unitary mnemonic capacity that does for a group or society what individual memory does for the individual. For me, the term is a general one, which covers the process (or processes) through which a knowledge or awareness of past events or conditions is developed and sustained within human societies, and through which, therefore, individuals within those societies are given a sense of the past that extends what they themselves personally remember (2007:14-15, emphasis in original).

Yet Cubitt is also cautious of the term *collective memory*, which he suggests:

is the species of ideological fiction, itself often generated by and within these processes of social memory, which presents particular social entities as the possessors of a stable mnemonic capacity that is collectively exercised, and that presents particular views or representations of a supposedly collective past as the natural expressions of such a collective mnemonic capacity (2007:18).

To differentiate between the two, Cubitt emphasises the "diversity of understandings both of what pasts ought to be evoked or described or celebrated, and of the particular contents that

representations or evocations of each of those pasts should incorporate or articulate.” (Ibid.). In other words, the danger of collective memory is the reification of a single, stable collective as opposed to acknowledging the diversity of memories and understandings of the past within a social formation.

Nevertheless, despite the unstable, dynamic, and diverse differentiations in memories within a society, there are nevertheless events, phenomena, personalities, and narratives which still play a role in the formation of social identities in line with Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities” (2006 [1983]) and the importance of shared memories, if not shared things which are forgotten (Anderson 2006 [1983]: 199-201, quoting Renan 1882). Among these, the social memory of the nation is a topic discussed in great detail by scholars such as Jeffrey Olick (2003, 2005, 2007) and Sharon Macdonald (2009, 2013) as they explore not only a number of different approaches to social and collective memory, but also particularly invoke questions of how societies ‘remember’ and deal with difficult and problematic pasts such as memory of the German state under Nazi rule from 1933-1945 (in the case of Olick 2005, 2007 and Macdonald 2009). Furthermore, as scholars of the nation such as Benedict Anderson and 19<sup>th</sup> century scholar Ernest Renan point out, the nation itself is predicated on shared memories in the form of shared commemorations and historical narratives, as well as shared forgetting (Anderson 2006 [1983], Renan 1990 [1882]). This is not to deny that the nation itself is a complex and diverse entity, but to note the ways in which there are still hegemonic or significant events, people, and narratives around which social identities of groups such as the nation at least partially coalesce.

The point of social memory is yet taken further by Paul Connerton, who argues that societies remember in various different ways, including through clothing, dates in the calendar, and commemorative events, much akin to the embedded collective memory which Nora writes of (Connerton 1989, Nora 1989). In a later work, Connerton also notes the ways in which like memory, trauma (whether individual or social) is effectively embodied (2011). But Connerton also provides us another conceptual relationship worth considering between remembering and forgetting, noting for example a presumed *ethics of memory* (Connerton 2011:33) as a widely perceived “duty to remember” in light of the many traumatic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (contra Rieff 2016). Connerton also offers additional insight to question this perceived ethics of memory, noting some of the ways in which forgetting can be both “successful” in a positive sense, as well as coerced (Connerton 2011:33-50).

Connerton also offers us yet another vital theoretical question when we speak of memory: what do we make of the relationship between forgetting and silence? What does it mean to

forget? Does silence always imply forgetting? (Connerton 2011:47). While there may be an assumption that silence can be repressive as an “attempt to bury” (ibid.), we must, as Connerton notes, be careful not to infer silence as forgetting. While Trouillot may make a linkage to silence as a form of repression, or Eviatar Zerubavel (2006) may make this assumption that silence is an implicit form of denial in an intentionalist conspiracy to forget, this connection between silence and forgetting must be approached with care. After all, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger (2010) note that silences can be both “overt and covert,” involving a literal, physical absence of speech, as well as a form of silence which can effectively silence with too little or too much speech. Connerton as well complicates this assumed relationship with silence and forgetting with the example of the Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae* noting the paradox at hand:

To attempt to forget something consciously, by not referring to it, requires that one think of the thing, and to think of the thing is the opposite of forgetting it. If one must continually remember not to mention a person, then one is not forgetting that person. When we are told to remember to forget, we are in effect being told to remember what is supposedly forgotten (Connerton 2011:72).

Although this literature is vast and inexhaustible, much of it consists of binaries such as memory and forgetting and the association between forgetting and silence. Though the binary between memory and forgetting may be helpful to a point, it is also limited in the sense that it does not necessarily capture the complexity or nuance of these social phenomena in practice. As such, perhaps we need another, more nuanced framework which engages these complex dilemmas, complete as they are with their own fair share of paradoxes as well.

Ann Stoler’s 2011 piece “Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France” turns our attention not only to these paradoxes and the limitations of binaries such as memory/amenia (forgetting) which are often applied, but also to the paradoxes within colonial histories and our contemporary understandings of them:

Not least they [colonial histories] raise unsettling questions about it means to know and not know something simultaneously, about what is implicit because it goes without saying, or because it cannot be thought, or because it can be thought and is known but cannot be said (Stoler 2011:122).

The result is that in the French example of which she speaks, colonial history is “alternately irretrievable and accessible” (ibid.). Noting that the situation was often referred to under the trope of “colonial amnesia” and “historical amnesia,” Stoler suggests the more apt framework of *colonial aphasia*:

It is to emphasise both loss of access and active dissociation. In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a

dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things. Aphasia in its many forms describes a difficulty retrieving both conceptual and lexical vocabularies and, most important, a difficulty comprehending what is spoken (Stoler 2011:125).

This framework of *colonial aphasia* is central to this entire thesis and the following engagement with existing arguments on memory of the British Empire. As such, this thesis attempts to trace just some of the ways in which this framework of aphasia operates in Britain's social memory of its own memory and history through nuanced practices such as silence and temporal displacement. Furthermore, this aphasic condition of the imperial past effectively denies the continuing and ongoing effects of Empire in Britain today, as well as the violence of Empire in Britain and throughout the world in the past.

### **History, Memory, and the British Empire**

How then is the British Empire "remembered" according to scholars, and what might this even entail ethnographically and practically? And for the ethnography to follow, how do popular audiences understand the British Empire? This section considers the ways in which the Empire is often spoken of as in the past, as a historical subject, suggesting a notion of rupture rather than continuity—a point which will be returned to in greater detail in the next chapter and which also echoes Edwards' temporal and disciplinary displacement as suggested above (2016). Furthermore, this section will focus on two existing ethnographic studies on the various ways in which anthropologists have engaged the memory of the British Empire in Britain today. While *The Invisible Empire* by Georgie Wemyss (2016 [2009]) and Katharine Tyler's *Whiteness, Class, and Legacies of Empire* are the two notable ethnographic works which begin to explore this vast topic, this thesis seeks to build upon and nuance their arguments by more precisely placing these issues within Ann Stoler's framework of *colonial aphasia* and Elizabeth Edwards' developments of this framework (2016) which go beyond the frameworks of visibility (Wemyss) and amnesia (Tyler).

#### *Invisible Empire*

Georgie Wemyss' (2016 [2009]) ethnographic account and discursive argument offers a range of relevant insights to the topic of memory of the British Empire in contemporary Britain. As an anthropologist considering the memory of the British Empire in East London, she deploys her ethnography to critically engage with a wider discourse on whiteness, race, and the hegemonic

ideology which dominates conceptions of Britishness. Although this thesis is not immediately concerned with constructions of whiteness, her illustration of the ways that the Empire is made invisible in the former West and East India Docks of East London is both a detailed ethnography on the methods and manifestations of the invisibility of Empire in Britain today.

For Wemyss, she places the concept of *Invisible Empire* as the central and foundational characteristic of white liberal discourse, which she further describes as the dominant, hegemonic discourse on the constitution of Britishness. She notes that this white liberal discourse is marked by four distinct characteristics: 1) the Invisible Empire by which she refers to “asserting positive narratives about Britain’s colonial past and obscuring contesting histories, including those of white violence”; 2) the privileging and naturalisation of whiteness wherein whiteness is not only made invisible as it is assumed to be “normal” and to entail “us” instead of “them”; 3) the creation of white as an aspirational category for others, which therefore gives whiteness a particular place in a “hierarchy of belonging” at the centre, yet at times, is able to include and exclude others from belonging; and 4) that white liberal discourse—due to processes of Empire—is both global, yet locally and “internally differentiated” and is therefore “manifested differently over time and space” (2016 [2009]:12-15). Although the pillar of the Invisible Empire is only part of her argument, she deems it the “pivotal element” of her critique, and its operations and effects are the primary focus of my engagement with Wemyss’ work.

By referring to this Invisible Empire, Wemyss references the ways in which positive aspects of the British Empire—narratives about exploration, merchants, trade, and values such as democracy and liberty—are celebrated, but stories of white violence concerning “exploitation, disease and racism—the Invisible Empire—are obscured.”(6) Like Katharine Tyler below, Wemyss notes historian Catherine Hall’s use of the term “amnesia” specifically in reference to “white England during the main period of decolonisation in the 1960s and 70s, where guilt and embarrassment meant Empire was either forgotten or remembered nostalgically” (Hall 2002:5, quoted in Wemyss 2016 [2009]:12).

In her analytical framework, Wemyss also notes the relevance of Trouillot’s work (2015 [1995]), particularly in the latter of Trouillot’s two moments of historical production: the making of narratives and the making of history as such. She notes the ways in which particular commemorations and celebrations of colonial events and anniversaries effectively foreground particular white histories, while silencing and marginalising alternative histories of others, thus rendering them “invisible” (Wemyss 2016 [2009]:25). Here, as with Chapter 1 of this thesis, she also notes the prevalence of connections, particularly through her deployment of



Subrahmanyam's concept of "connected histories" (Subrahmanyam 1997 quoted in Wemyss 2016 [2009]:25) and the ways in which contemporary tellings of colonial histories often sever these connections through various methods such as silences and oversimplification.

Her methodological approach, set in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets where she lives and works looks at the development currently known as the Docklands including one of London's financial centres at Canary Wharf. However, as Wemyss notes, the Docklands have a more complex history as the site of the former West India and East India Docks, where for centuries, the ships of these gigantic mercantile corporations came to and fro throughout the British Empire, filled with commodities from all over the world to be sold in Britain for immense profits.

In presenting her argument about the "Invisible Empire", Wemyss' ethnography takes a diachronic approach to note multiple events over a 20-year period and the involved tensions, debates, and contestations of how the past is presented in her corner of East London. In Chapter 1, she notes three episodes in 1990, the early 2000s, and 2007 on the site of the former West India Docks (opened in 1802 and abandoned in the 1980s) which now house Canary Wharf, one of London's financial centres. At the beginning of the development of the site, she notes how Olympia and York Canary Wharf Ltd, the Canadian-owned property developing company involved markets the site as *terra nullius*, as "empty land" where "virtually nothing" exists and new opportunities await in the imminent future. She notes how this not only echoes the rhetoric and logic of colonialism, but how it also marginalises the voices and accounts of the local community at the time, a predominantly working-class community with a substantial Bengali population (23% according to the 1991 census [Wemyss 2016 [2009]:23]).

In the early 2000s, this rhetoric had begun to change as Canary Wharf Group, the successors of Olympia and York began discussions and plans on how to commemorate the bicentenary of the opening of the West India Docks in 2000. She notes how the language used shifted to include and engage the local community, partly through historical exhibition panels and a "celebration fun day" (Wemyss 2016 [2009]:31). Much of her data in this discussion is focused on a souvenir programme included in the local newspaper with a close reading of the wording of the programme. She notes that contrary to the 1990 discourse, the local community and the docks' history marked the main theme of this discourse (34). And while she notes that difficult topics such as slavery are addressed in the exhibition panels (33), she observes a disconnection between slavery and the docks through indirect references and a lack of wider context.

Rather, the 2000 discourse foregrounds *trade* and mercantile wealth, also noting the central role of George Hibbert, the Parliamentarian, West India Company Chairman when the docks were built, and a slave owner and defender of the practice (Wemyss 2016 [2009]:35, cf. Dresser 2007 [2001]). Wemyss also notes the ways in which the exhibition panels suggest that there is a “correct view” that viewers should have towards Hibbert as a manner of delegitimising contesting accounts and alternative readings of Hibbert and his role in slavery, plantations, and the slave reliant trades which made the docks necessary in the first place (37-38). She also notes the ways in which “the Community” which is referred to as endorsing the commemoration was largely “white, ageing, and long established,” thus marginalising and silencing the presence of people of African and West Indian descent in the wider present community. In her reading of the exhibition panels and souvenir programme, Wemyss also draws attention to the language of trade and mercantilism while silencing and omitting details, connections, and context between trade, Empire, slavery, and the docks. Furthermore, in her reading, it becomes apparent that slavery is spatially disconnected from the site on the Isle of Dogs; the reading of the panels suggests that slavery was something that happened elsewhere, although its profits and processes directly entangled the local site on the Isle of Dogs.

And yet, by 2007, she notes how much of this had changed with the opening of a Museum in Docklands in 2003 and the decision to install a permanent gallery in 2007 (as part of the Abolition 200 commemorations, cf. Cubitt 2013 or Hamilton 2010 on another installation in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich) entitled *London, Sugar and Slavery*. While she notes the language of the mercantile discourse and its emphasis on trade made mention of the Empire, it still avoided any thorough investigation or scrutiny of the Empire (Wemyss 2016 [2009]: 41-43). Furthermore, the controversial figures of slave owners and anti-abolitionists George Hibbert and Robert Milligan still held prominent places in the museum layout and advertising (Ibid). As is often seen with potentially controversial figures such as these men, any broader context to these men beyond mention of their roles as “merchants” is omitted (43).

Despite some of these problematic continuities, the 2007 gallery made an explicit shift to make connections between London and enslaved Africans (Ibid, cf. Dresser 2009). These shifts—including a caption of Hibbert’s portrait with more context to his role as a slave owner, for example, noting him as both a Parliamentarian against abolition and as the recipient of a substantial sum of money for his emancipated slaves (Wemyss 2016 [2009]: 44). As Wemyss notes, “[t]ogether with the other exhibits the gallery makes the Invisible Empire visible” (Ibid.).

Despite these positive steps in addressing these controversial contexts, she also notes that there are flaws and limitations to this shift, such as the foregrounding of the role of white abolitionists such as William Wilberforce which places white Britons as the conscientious heroes of the narratives, rather than noting “the far longer term involvement of Britain and Britons in the forced enslavement and commercial exploitation of Africans or on the resistances and rebellions of African people throughout the period” (Wemyss 2016 [2009]: 46, Wood 2010). Throughout her critical reading of these various events, Wemyss maintains that for the most part, there are a lack of connections between the local scene in London and wider, violent, and exploitative processes of both Empire and slavery. Rather, what she calls the “Invisible Empire” continues to focus on and celebrate the “positive virtues” of wealth creation, trade, and even when slavery is addressed, the emphasis is on white abolitionists while avoiding wider contexts which would problematize these simplified presentations of history (cf. Trouillot 2015 [1995]: 96).

In her second chapter, Wemyss continues her evaluation of the operation of the “Invisible Empire” through another discussion on commemorative events linked to colonialism in the neighbouring Tower Hamlets ward of Blackwall, just on the eastern shore of the Isle of Dogs. This area saw two historic events in Britain’s imperial history two centuries apart: the unremarked 1606 departure of three ships of the Royal Virginia Company which founded the first permanent English colonial settlement in North America at Jamestown and the opening of the East India Docks in 1807. She notes that the latter event was celebrated with grandeur with over 20,000 guests of London high society in attendance at its opening. Yet, where the former event happened with great anonymity and hardly any comment and the latter event was marked great pomp, both the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Virginia expedition and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the East India Docks were met with an incredibly different response in 2007.

Wemyss notes that the Virginia celebration was marked with great “celebration”—a word she notes as significant—with American and British dignitaries attending a host of events, as well as another property development of Virginia Quay, complete with street names which reflect the early colony. Erected monuments and plaques (as well as promotional literature marketing the development) continued to make reference to the (predominantly white) linkage between the Jamestown settlement and the site in Blackwall. Yet she also notes how these were “‘celebrations’ [which] excluded narratives about the enslavement of Africans and marginalised Native American experiences” (Wemyss 2016 [2009]: 61).

This sort of simplified historical narrative is crucial to Wemyss’ argument. She notes how this

absence of Africans in the creation story of Virginia as told in England is a glaring example of the Invisible Empire in 2007, a year throughout which there was a national focus on 'celebrating' the anniversary of the British Government's 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act (Ibid.: 62).

Even more astonishing is her observation that some of these omissions are present in the Museum in Docklands "Journey to the New World: London 1606 to Virginia 1607" exhibit (Ibid.: 61). By this account, this happens almost simultaneously (within the same year) at the same museum which hosted the aforementioned *London, Sugar and Slavery* gallery. In her own words, "the mercantile discourse reinscribed the venture capital of London as central to the story of the creation of the US whilst the connections between venture capital, colonisation, and slavery were obscured" (Ibid.: 63).

At the same time, she notes that the bicentenary of the East India Docks was hardly remarked upon at all. Although the Museum in Docklands discussed potential anniversary events to commemorate the opening of the Docks, she notes that "rather than a big event, a series of lunch time public talks took place during the latter part of the year" which catered to a rather small mostly white, elder audience without any critical scepticism of the British Empire (Wemyss 2016 [2009]: 64). She notes that the only critical talk on the East India Company was given by historian Nick Robins at a book launch to discuss the EIC's corruption and violence (Ibid.). She attributes the differences in these two anniversaries to the ways in which the Virginia event fits in with a narrative of white history and white belonging, while acknowledging the bicentenary of the East India Docks is problematic because it makes a connection between Bengal and Blackwell, and thus implies a valid, thorough, shared history between the two places (66).

Central to her wider argument about racial belonging and white liberal discourse, throughout her ethnography, Wemyss "Invisible Empire" operates by making particular narratives—of profit, of trade, of exploration—continuously foregrounded in commemoration, if not outright celebration. At the same time, awkward and morally dubious episodes of white violence—exploitation, slavery, genocide—are effectively silenced, marginalised, disconnected, or as I suggest in Chapter 3, circumscribed in that they are indirectly addressed. Additionally, context is often absent from these commemorations, particularly in discussing historical figures who owned slaves such as merchants George Hibbert and Robert Milligan.

For Wemyss, this "Invisible Empire" results in a disconnection between Britain and its places of Empire, certainly within the context of colonial relationships and violent histories. Adding to her argument, I suggest that Wemyss' examples speak to Stoler's aphasic framework rather effectively. As Stoler notes in her French example, this is not necessarily a matter of

“forgetting” as it were so much as a matter of disconnection—of placing the atrocities of the Empire over there (spatial disconnection between the Isle of Dogs and the Caribbean, Americas, or India, cf. Edwards 2016) and disabling these pasts (and the opposing claims from minority groups for belonging and recognition, as within Wemyss’ argument) from being recognised as legitimate in the present (as a form of temporal displacement, cf. Edwards 2016).

Yet similar to the ethnography to follow in this thesis in Bristol, the very materiality of artefacts, statues, buildings, and place names also suggests the ongoing presence of these entanglements and connections and thus problematises the attempts at *disconnection* or claims of forgetting. As does the very presence of tens of thousands of Bengalis in the Borough of Tower Hamlets. Thus, I suggest that perhaps it is not so much that Empire is ‘invisible’ as the violence of Empire is left circumscribed, omitted, silenced, disconnected, and displaced. Contrary to the concept of in/visibility, the presence of these imperial and colonial encounters is often there, perhaps hidden in plain sight, or disconnected. In the representations of Invisible Empire illustrated by Wemyss, the British Empire’s spatial reach of violence and oppression does not include the metropole of England, but some place over there while its temporality is situated a long time ago in the past rather than connected and continuing here and now in the present.

### *Historical Amnesia*

Building off of Wemyss’ work, Katharine Tyler’s *Whiteness, Class, and Legacies of Empire* (2012) is another of the few texts which directly considers the problematic of how the British Empire is ‘remembered’ in Britain today. Through her multi-sited ethnography in Leicester/shire and a framework which focuses on constructions and representations of whiteness, she argues that at the heart of the matter is “‘the art of forgetting’ (Bauman 1997:53) the significance of the colonial past in shaping contemporary and everyday formations of Whiteness and Englishness.” (Tyler 2012:3, citation in original). Therefore, her work traces “the forgetting of the colonial past within White discourses that objectify and Other BrAsians”<sup>1</sup> (Ibid.).

In her introduction, she notes the example of a BBC4 documentary aired in 2010 in a rural Leicestershire village entitled *The Story of England*, where the writer and presenter, Michael Wood investigated the local history of the Leicestershire village of Kibworth in order to present a wider history of England. As Tyler writes, “[i]n other words, national history is mirrored in the

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<sup>1</sup> BrAsian is a term that Tyler specifically uses to discuss British Asians.

local, and local history in that of the national” thereby assuming that Kibworth could be ‘any village’ in England (2012: 7). Notably to Tyler’s interests, she astutely notes that the “relative absence of information on Empire” is actually the most interesting aspect of the series (2012: 8). She goes on to suggest that in relation to her own work, “an analysis of how the history of the British Empire is screened out of this particular story of England signposts some of the processes that constitute the *forgetting* of the more recent colonial past” which were central to her own work and discourses of Whiteness in her ethnography (Ibid., emphasis added).

Tyler is right to note the way that

Wood’s representation of the nation’s history rests upon silencing the cultural and political tyranny, economic exploitation and human suffering intrinsic to British colonialism” and it “only makes fleeting references to the colonial pasts...rather than the more uncomfortable recent past of Britishness and Englishness associated with imperial projects, the legacies of which are interwoven with the history and contemporary social fabric of Kibworth and the neighbouring city of Leicester (2012: 9).

With the popular examples she provides, Tyler accurately points out the ways in which these histories of colonialism are displaced, or seemingly absent, in contemporary historical consciousness and popular historical representations. She also notes that this is a matter of the history of Empire being present in England, yet not seen or recognised, particularly by white Britons. Language such as “screening out”, “blinding”, or “side-stepping” used throughout her text certainly supports this lack of recognition.

Citing Hall and Rose (2006:21), she also notes that “Empire was often an *unremarkable* feature of everyday life” which influenced British culture in myriad, banal ways, even if these were not necessarily “consciously noticed” (Tyler 2012:11, cf. Porter 2004). The effect is “the illusion that Britain has been or can be disconnected from its imperial past” and that “the histories of BrAsian and British Black people’s colonial relationships to England and Britain are displaced and forgotten” (2012: 12). Her case therefore rests upon a notion of “White amnesia” of British colonialism and its connections and relationships with other parts of the world which she particularly illustrates in the first part of her text (2012: 19-20).

In her chapter entitled “The Country, the City and the Forgetting of Empire,” Tyler notes how the process of White amnesia “forgets” the relations and connections created between Britain and its Empire, thus “allow[ing] Leicester BrAsians to be depicted as immigrants and cultural outsiders who belong categorically in the city and not the English countryside” (due to tropes which suggest the countryside as a quintessentially “English” locale and the city as “multicultural, urban, and ethnic”) (Tyler 2012:79-81, cf. Baucom 1999:150). Much of her data

here stems from an investigation of online and print publication by Leicester Promotions, a tourist marketing firm working on behalf of Leicester City and Leicestershire County Councils (Tyler 2012: 81). As she notes, much of the rhetoric used in these promotions uses a reductive, “binomial opposition” between “us/White/English” and “them/Other/BrAsian” (2012: 81-82). She also notes that despite historical “references to the nation’s histories of being invaded, no mention is made of the violence and atrocities of British colonialism...and the impact of Empire on the economic and social constitution of the city, the countryside, and the nation” which results in BrAsians being “written out” of the countryside’s history (an unmarked, racially White, symbolically English place) and placed into the “contained and set apart” locale of the city (2012: 83).

Another example invoked by Tyler explores the way that the website discusses local foods, such as Stilton and Red Leicester cheeses and Melton Mowbray Pork Pies as “nationally and internationally recognisable symbols of Britishness and Englishness” (2012: 86). Yet she notes that, for example, the fact that the sugar used to make Melton hunt cake would have been produced by slave labour in Caribbean plantations is unremarked upon, thus “screen[ing] out the historical connections between Leicestershire, the nation and the colonies, ‘the power relations between them, and the circuits of production, distribution and consumption in which they lived’ (Hall and Rose 2006:10)” (Tyler 2012:87, quote in original). The role of food as a boundary of cultural difference between countryside and city, white and Other is also explored in conversations with her informants. Tyler’s ethnography clearly demonstrates that there is certainly a problematic colonial, essentialist logic between us and them, White and Other which tends to reproduce itself by association with the village and the city. In her work, white village residents expressed a desire to live in homogenous (and therefore segregated) communities as opposed to diverse ones. Tyler thus claims that “[i]t is collective White amnesia of BrAsians colonial relationships with the countryside and the nation that enables Simon, and indeed Sheila [her informants] to construct this idea of a wholly White and culturally homogenous village past” (2012: 95). William, another white informant in the chapter who was born in India, whose

biography is thus intimately interwoven with the histories of British colonialism...[and] does not connect how his family’s colonial relationship with India...mirrors BrAsians’ varied colonial and postcolonial trajectories of settlement to Leicester and the UK. In this way, William’s *side-stepping of the consequences of the colonial past for the present blinds him* to the significance of the colonial for understanding his own biography, BrAsian presence in Leicester, the governance of immigration and the meaning of contemporary multicultural Englishness and Britishness in the postcolonial present. One effect of this White *amnesia* is for William to construct the culture of BrAsians who live in the city as

immigrants who are thought to be fundamentally distinct not only from village culture but also from White society more generally (2012:97, emphases added).

Tyler closes this chapter suggesting that

Thus it seems to me that simply *remembering* and *evoking* the histories and connections between BrAsians and Empire does not take us quite far enough. Rather, it matters how the colonial past is remembered, and so it matters *how* we come to know and think about the meaning and legacies of the colonial relations that bind the countryside to the city, and that bind the White English and BrAsian populations who live there (107, emphasis in original).

But with Stoler's framework of colonial aphasia in mind, as well as the distinction between silence and forgetting—is it actually accurate to say that the British Empire has been *forgotten* or that this is a form of *amnesia*? In the example quoted above with her informant William, the language of “side-stepping” and “blinding” (emphasised above) suggest something more nuanced than forgetting, especially considering this informant's own colonial family history. This is clearly a silence observed, but its intent (whether wilful or a silence of ignorance) is a more complex matter. In my reading of Tyler's excellent work, I am hesitant to make the linkage between silences observed and this being indicative of amnesia or forgetting.

In this vein, I would suggest that the interchanging and overlap among terms such as silence, displacement, concealment, obscuring, etc. seem fitting here, they are also worthy of further scrutiny. This does not appear to be a forgetting or amnesia of Empire altogether. Additionally, there is a certainly a colonialist, essentialist discourse of race which is applied by Tyler's informants which is mapped onto the countryside and city as spaces of whiteness and Other in a way which indexes a notion of spatial displacement—where the Other belongs over there. But this reproduction of an imperial logic is not necessarily convincing as amnesia or forgetting. It is (as Tyler herself suggests) both a continuity and legacy of colonialism that whiteness is unremarked upon and reproduced in relation to a discourse which creates both the colonial Other and the white self (Tyler 2012:17, citing Frankenberg 1993:17).

In critiquing Tyler's application of amnesia, I attempt to nuance and enhance this analysis with more precision from a perspective within the anthropology of history and memory. As she properly states, the real issue is not “simply *remembering* or *evoking* the histories and connections between BrAsians and Empire but that it matters how the colonial past is remembered, and so it matters *how* we come to know and think about the meaning and legacies of...colonial relations” (107, emphasis in original). While a debate on amnesia may seem tangential, a more accurate analytical framework (such as Stoler's) could potentially provide more effective remedies in terms of making these interpretive connections between Empire and present.



## Empire Forgotten?

Within a contemporary context, the rhetoric of Commonwealth or Empire has certainly resurfaced in light of the Brexit campaign, referendum, and result. Furthermore, Wemyss' ethnography of the Museum of the Docklands would suggest that Empire is not altogether forgotten either, even if it is rather concealed or its connections between Bengal, the Caribbean, and East London are dismembered. After all, it seems like a bit of stretch to suggest that Britons forgot that they had an Empire; popular historians of a nostalgic tinge such as Niall Ferguson (2003), or more critical theorists of Englishness such as Krishan Kumar (2003) would perhaps suggest that the very loss of Empire is at the core of the existential crisis of Englishness. Likewise, Tyler employs Paul Gilroy's work on *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005) to suggest that "colonial history remains marginal and largely unacknowledged, surfacing only in the service of nostalgia and melancholia" (Gilroy 2005:2, also quoted in Tyler 2012:11).

Considering the ways in which I frame Empire above, and in more detail in the following chapter, I would contend that the presence of Empire is not forgotten at all, especially with my informants who are a combination of professional and amateur historians and historical tour guides. Indeed, the ways in which it operates, lingers, haunts, and continues to make the present *are* obscured, disconnected, unremarked upon, and displaced both temporally (relegating it to a distant, ruptured past) and spatially (to a distant over there). In this regard, Empire's operation in the creation of racial discourses and Whiteness is not readily recognised or remarked upon by my own informants, as well as Wemyss' and Tyler's. But the issue of whether these are indicative of forgetting or amnesia or something more akin to aphasia still needs to be untangled.

Furthermore, there is perhaps a methodological problem which arises in Tyler's claim of "historical amnesia." What exactly does this amnesia entail, and methodologically, how can one make the claim that one's interlocutors have forgotten the Empire and Britain's colonial past (Tyler 2012: 34)? While Tyler astutely observes the (in)visibility of whiteness in discourses of identity à la Wemyss, the interpretation of this as evidence of amnesia is founded upon a particular assumption that **silence is akin to forgetting**; that when her informants do not mention, recognise, or consider particular connections made by histories of Empire, this is indicative of white amnesia (cf. Connerton 2011:47). Methodologically, such a claim seems to suggest that because informants do not mention the significance of Empire, they have forgotten something, or they have forgotten that Britain ever had an Empire. Yet, is this silence actually the same as forgetting? While this may indicate a failure to recognise the presence of the colonial in Britain, is it demonstrative of a form of forgetting or amnesia?

The claim of “amnesia” is highly significant because it is one made over and over again not only in key works in this sub-field like Tyler, but also in a number of popular and journalistic pieces (for example Tharoor 2017 in *The Guardian*, or Andrews 2017 in *The Guardian*, or Rachman 2017 in the *Financial Times*<sup>2</sup>). I would argue that the amnesia trope has gained much traction, but it doesn’t quite fit the situation. The observation of *silence* about the Empire seems largely relevant, save in exercises of nostalgia and melancholia (Gilroy 2005), or in right-wing political rhetoric surrounding Brexit and its references to the Commonwealth.

But is this actually a matter of forgetting the Empire? Is there a difference between people knowing (or remembering) that the British Empire happened, yet not being able to articulate what it was and what it did and therefore, failing to recognise the sort of connections and relationships it wrought? I would suggest that most Britons *know* that the British Empire was a thing and that it happened, while at the same time, most are unable to articulate much about it any detail. In the broadest sense, this does not constitute forgetting per se, but a range of other dynamics. Invisibility, obscuring, or concealment perhaps—although the latter two terms certainly imply a matter of motive and agency (cf. Dresser 2007 [2001]). There is no doubt a matter of disconnection, apathy, and ignorance. But I am wary to consider this an example of amnesia. There is no shortage of historical accounts, photographic evidence, or popular journalism about the British Empire. As Paul Bijl writes in his Dutch study of colonial aphasia, “critics of Dutch colonial memory...overlook the fact that the traces of colonial atrocities had always already been available to the Dutch” (2012: 446) And indeed, all of this raises the question of whether or not silence is equivalent to forgetting.

In part, my critiques of Wemyss and Tyler’s work admittedly arise because of a different theoretical focus and a slightly different ethnographic concern where I approach this as an anthropologist of history and memory as opposed to their focus as anthropologists of whiteness and race. Yet we can certainly agree that these displaced histories are problematic for reasons such as the problematic continuity and reproduction of colonialist, essentialist discourses on race and the perpetuation of inequality and injustices of exclusion. But as Tyler has herself suggested, the problem isn’t one of simply memory or evocation, but *making the right connections* (2012: 107, emphasis added); rather than simply remembering, what matters is understanding how colonial pasts continue to affect, shape, and haunt the present and produce their relationships and hierarchies of inequality and injustice. But this precisely builds the case that responding to

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<sup>2</sup> See for example at the time of writing claims about “whitewashing” and “colonial amnesia” in the film *Dunkirk* in August 2017 such as Khan 2017 in the *New York Times*.

an aphasic framework (which stresses silence and disconnection) rather than one of amnesia provides a more productive and fertile manner of interpreting the ways in which the British Empire and its imperial formations (Stoler 2007) continue to operate and how it is remembered in contemporary Britain today. An aphasic framework which explores the connections, hierarchies, and logics of Empire which continue to reach into the present not only offers a more accurate observation, but it also allows us the opportunity to explore the ways in which Empire operates through logics of difference, displacement, and exclusion both historically and in the present.

While the conceptual metaphors of (in)visibility and amnesia are useful to a point, we must question whether or not these are the most accurate frameworks to assess the situation. Chapter 2, with its emphasis on the materiality of the port city and the temporality of the historical walking tour, provides further data to complicate not only claims of invisibility and amnesia, but also the methods of temporal displacement and rupture which effectively attempts to relegate the British Empire to a distant past ‘a long time ago’ instead of acknowledging its problematic entanglements in Britain and in the present.

### **Methodology and Positionality**

I approach this work not only as an anthropologist of history and memory, but specifically, as a first-generation, middle-class Filipino-American who had lived in Britain for the better part of seven years, on and off, before commencing my fieldwork. I had also been raised in the American South, specifically in Atlanta, Georgia in the heart of the old Confederacy. I had always been intrigued by the ways in which histories of the Confederacy had been taught to me in school, especially as the world’s largest Confederate monument, the bas-relief on Stone Mountain, was 10 miles away from where I grew up. This experience and my friendships with many English friends played a fundamental role in shaping my curiosities of the ways in which the British Empire was understood in England today. This became especially apparent when I noted during a prior research project that my English peers and friends my age had little to no understanding of the Empire at all, even if (as in many cases), they took GCSE and A-Level History in school.

As a result of my upbringing, I had a curious understanding of difficult histories as a person of colour, and in many ways, this positionality—as a person of colour sensitive to these issues—proved to be a valuable asset during my research. Whether with Black heritage activists or with middle-class white interlocutors in Bristol, my positionality as a middle-class Filipino-American allowed me to approach the topics of Empire and slavery without any difficulty; at times (as in

parts of Chapter 4), my positionality was an asset as some of my informants apparently explained “the truth” about the Empire to me. I was also able to articulate that considering my upbringing in another corner of the so-called “triangular trade,” I was in no position to judge Bristol’s history—a statement which often helped gaining the trust of some more conservative informants. I could also articulate my own memories of learning about the British Empire in my European History classes in high school, with vivid memories of my history teacher pacing around the room and pointing at those famous pink maps while waxing about the sheer size and impressive magnitude of British colonialism. Sharing these experiences was often useful in building rapport with a range of informants from an early stage, especially when sharing that I had learned about this history in school, whereas my English friends had not.

Bristol has a long history as one of England’s main port cities, and as written in local histories such as MacInnes 1968 [1939], Poole 2013, Richardson 2005, and Dresser 2007 [2001], the city was a key port for various trades, particularly with Britain’s (First) Atlantic Empire in the Caribbean and the Eastern Seaboard of North America. Thus, Bristol was a key port for the Empire, particularly in commodities such as sugar, tobacco, and it was one of the epicentres of the transatlantic slave trade. Furthermore, debates over how Bristol ‘deals with’ and represents its slave trading past have and continue to be an ongoing topic of debate throughout the city, especially among those concerned with history, heritage, and among its sizable Black British population (for example, Chivallon 2001, Otele 2012). For the better part of 20 years, much of this debate has centred around the statue of Edward Colston and various place names (schools, pubs, streets, and other landmarks) which bear his name. Many of Bristol’s other place names (such as Black Boy Hill and Whiteladies Road in the affluent neighbourhood of Clifton which blossomed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) are said to have connections to these histories of Empire, as addressed in Chapter 4.

In a busy English city of 430,000 like Bristol, single-site ethnography is hardly a feasible option. Rather, my fieldwork in Bristol followed a multi-sited approach (for example Falzon 2009, Marcus 1995) in order to focus on the specific topic of the ways in which histories of Empire are understood and represented in the city today. As such, the emphasis of my fieldwork was on historical practices, and therefore, those that are involved with these processes.

Considering the wide variety of historical practices, the ethnography seeks to go beyond the expected work of the academic historian, the archivist, and the museum curator. Admittedly, these characters are involved to a degree; however, they are not sole the methodological focus of this work. Rather the ethnography of this thesis instead looks at the wide range of actors which

Sharon Macdonald (2009:20) brands as 'history-workers.' Although this includes the professional history workers in museums, archives and university History departments, it also includes, and arguably focuses on, the broader constellation of amateur historians and heritage volunteers working in a variety of official (Council-sponsored) and unofficial (non-profit or independent) contexts. The term 'constellation' also accurately portrays some of the ways in which these actors co-exist in the same realm but are not necessarily involved in direct relationship or communication with each other in the connectivity of a network (Gordillo 2004). At times, some of these actors comment on one another directly; in other instances, it is clear that they are aware of other actors' existence, however involved they may or may not be with another's work. As such, there is not so much a single network of history-workers in Bristol who necessarily interact on a regular basis, so much as a group of people who do a lot of their own projects, but occasionally maintain contact or work with other like-minded actors, whether in person or through online projects such as the Council's 'Know Your Place' project (which crowdsources information from the public and allows them to post photographs and information which are pinned to an interactive map).

As Macdonald contends, this methodological focus on 'history-workers' offers a fuller understanding not only of the construction of a historical narrative and its presentation, but also its negotiation, contestation, co-production, and interpretation. To a limited extent, the ethnography following touches upon the consumption of history as well, although the data on this is admittedly sparse due to some of the practical and methodological challenges of acquiring this data.<sup>3</sup>

This obviously reinforced the need for a multi-sited ethnography to follow the constellation of history-workers in their various locations, routines, and relationships. As such, each of the ethnographic chapters demonstrates a slightly different methodological focus in order to capture many of the various dynamics and practices in Bristol's heritage scene. While Chapter 2 focuses on historical walking tours, Chapter 3 focuses on interpreting museum displays, and Chapter 4 looks at alternative narrations of history with unofficial, non-Council sponsored walking tours. Specific methods are discussed in each chapter, thus adding to the length of each.

I arrived in Bristol in August of 2014, where I promptly made contact with two particular groups which I used as a base for networking. Firstly, the Bristol Commonwealth Society, located in Clifton, was a place where I spent time with its elderly, white, middle-class English members. Most of the club's activities included weekly social luncheons which boasted quite probably the

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<sup>3</sup> Laurajane Smith's work on visitor responses to museum exhibits on the transatlantic slave trade offers an example of engaging with visitors (Smith 2010, 2014).

best roast potatoes of my life, and many of these conversations were largely social, although at times, they included conversations about my research. Considering the informality of these luncheons, I did not record them, but did take specific quotes when important topics were mentioned. In addition to these luncheons, the club held two formal events—the Founders Day Dinner in October (a black-tie event) and Commonwealth Sunday (discussed in the latter half of Chapter 3). The club also had regular (often monthly) talks about various Commonwealth-related topics or by speakers from the Commonwealth, as well as occasional student socials throughout the academic year. At other times, I attended events held with associated groups (which often involved the same members) such as the Royal African Society, the Royal Commonwealth Society in nearby Bath, and I also attended a one-day conference in London with officials and dignitaries involved with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Foreign and Commonwealth Office which briefly appear in Chapter 3.

The other group I used to begin my networking in Bristol was the Bristol Civic Society, a group concerned with issues concerning the built environment (including heritage) throughout the city. While meetings were not frequent, this did connect me with various heritage actors, including one of its officers who had an interest in the history of tobacco and urban archaeology around the tobacco industry, who I did some work with. This group also held monthly talks on various themes which I often attended, and through which I was able to engage in a number of informal conversations about my research.

Additionally, I did a couple of interviews with two Council museum curators, a few interviews with other museum staff (including an archivist) and made many visits to three of Bristol's museums: M Shed (the city's local history museum), Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and the Georgian House Museum (a period museum dating to the Georgian period). These visits involved a close inspection and reading of various displays related to Empire and the slave trade, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Interviews with curators also led to interviews with academic historians with a concern in local history at both the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England (UWE), including Madge Dresser, arguably the leading historian on Bristol and the slave trade. These connections also led me to engage with a number of Black heritage activists who I was also able to interview.

I also volunteered throughout the year with various heritage organisations, including the Bristol Record Office, as part of the Know Your Place project, and discussed this in an interview with an archaeologist employed by the Council. However, my main volunteering role was with the Underfall Yard, a local heritage project in Bristol Harbour which focused on collecting oral

histories from various people who worked in Bristol Harbour, as well as the creation of a visitor centre which explained the engineering and mechanics of the Floating Harbour in order to control the drastic tides in Bristol from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This, like many other heritage projects (such as Know Your Place, or the Brunel Centre based at the Clifton Suspension Bridge) had a very specific, local focus which touched on history and the Harbour without wading into some of the city's larger controversies around Colston, slavery, and Empire.

Starting in January of 2015, I began going on more or less weekly Council-sponsored historical walking tours based out of M Shed, and these walks and the narrative offered in them compose a large bulk of my data and are central to Chapter 2. Although I did not record these, I took detailed notes throughout each tour, and would type these up in further detail later that day. Considering that many of the 26 tours I went on were repeats of more or less the same tour route and topic, by the end of my fieldwork, I was able to duplicate the tours to friends visiting the city. Throughout my time, I became particularly close to three of the walking tour guides who were all very interested in local history and my research. As such, Jon, Steve, and Ed are key informants who feature throughout the thesis, especially in Chapter 2.

These connections also led me to other walking tours and informants, especially since the month of May features a Festival of Walks with various topics. The Bristol Civic Society officer led a number of tobacco related walking tours, and I also came across the Treasure Island tour which features in Chapter 4. Through a connection with the Commonwealth Society, I also came across the Pirate Walks featured in Chapter 4 and its claims of presenting a 'secret' history which is further investigated in that chapter.

In August of 2015, prior to the end of my fieldwork, the Bristol Civic Society also allowed me to do a hybrid presentation and public forum (for data collection) about my research and some of the data I collected. This presentation was especially productive in affirming the directions of my research, as well as gathering further opinions on Bristol's relationship with Empire and slavery as I began to transition towards writing. The crowd for that event—of about 50 people—included a mix of Black heritage activists, Council-involved actors (including volunteers and employees), Commonwealth Society members, various friends in their 20s, and members of the public who I had not yet met. One of the connections from this included Rebecca, a white, female activist who invited me to do a radio interview with Ujima Radio, one of the city's urban radio stations and a hub for Black heritage activists. Our conversation is also a key piece of data presented in Chapter 4.

Since leaving Bristol in early September 2015, I have visited the city on numerous occasions in order to maintain my relationship with informants, catching them up with my writing and activities. I have also done presentations by invitation on my research with the Bristol Commonwealth Society in June 2016 and with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in April 2018.

### **Thesis Structure**

In terms of the structure of this thesis, the chapters are admittedly a bit large due to the slightly different methodological and theoretical concerns of each section, although they all fall under the wider umbrella of how the politics of the past operates in Bristol today. Obviously, as with any ethnographic project, there is much surplus data collected and not included here. However, what is presented here offers a thorough understanding of how heritage actors in Bristol understand and represent the city's relationship with the British Empire.

The next chapter is a conceptual preamble to unpack two key elements of this thesis: Empire and Britishness/Englishness, while also illuminating some of the continuities of Empire in the present. Building on some of the literature discussed in this introduction, this chapter looks at some of the ways in which Empire operates, highlighting relationships as well as the material/stuff and immaterial aspects of Empire as well as some basic assumptions concerning the time and place of the British Empire. The conversation on Britishness and Englishness touches on some of Wemyss and Tyler's analysis of Empire in relation to race and whiteness, but argues for a broader understanding of these concepts and the ways in which these identities are fundamental products of the imperial encounter that have not gone away with time or with formal geopolitical decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter ultimately argues that if the very making of Britishness and Englishness is tied to the Empire, then arguably, the question of *how* this Empire is 'remembered' or thought of 'after' its demise holds the very nature of Britishness and Englishness at stake, making an understanding of this history a high-stakes, politically charged issue.

Understanding that Empire is relational, material, immaterial, and fundamental to the making of Britishness and Englishness, the thesis then shifts to its larger, ethnographically focused chapters. Chapter 2 looks primarily at historical walking tours run by Bristol City Council volunteers through various parts of the city, taking the reader on a composite of one of the tours given each month through Bristol's Old City. The chapter raises a number of themes and issues around Bristol's history, as well as local debates and controversies. It does so primarily through the narrative offered by Council heritage volunteers whilst also taking the materiality of the city



into account. Ultimately, the very materiality of the city complicates the narrative provided, largely because of its excess and the ways in which the cityscape functions as a material archive. Analytically, this chapter considers both terms of haunting and the absent-presence of the past through materiality to argue that the materiality of the city is itself shaped by Bristol's history as an imperial port.

Considering the high stakes involved in narrating Empire, Chapter 3 looks again at the so-called central assumptions around Empire, as well as the ways in which the British Empire is understood today, leaking beyond the frames of memory and forgetting. Returning again to Ann Stoler's work on colonial aphasia, this chapter rather details a framework of aphasia and silence. Looking closely and critically at various museum displays in Bristol City Council Museums, this chapter looks at the ways in which histories of Empire are actually not directly addressed and confronted, but rather, the ways in which they are circumscribed, or talked around in order for the Council to avoid conflict or protest. In this sense, a discussion of slavery is easily conflated with Empire, and the two are then separated from the city's wider history of 'trade.' Likewise, talk of the Commonwealth becomes short-hand for the positives of Empire without having to address the asymmetrical, violent, and displacing history of Empire.

Chapter 4 moves away from Council institutions to look at some of the ways in which non-Council heritage actors address Bristol's controversial history as an imperial port. Looking at public secrets and conspiracy theories in relation to the urban topography of Bristol as a topography of race and privilege, as well as the ways in which place names overlap with these features, this chapter looks at the ways in which these non-Council actors are actually filling in the silences and speaking directly, if subversively of what the Council and its actors working on its behalf will not or cannot say. In this way, while some of the narratives used by the Council's actors fall into assumed patterns of interpretation, allowing for disconnections between Bristol and its imperial history, these non-Council actors operate to generate connections—however uncomfortable—between Bristol and its uncanny history.

The Afterword on Edward Colston then recounts some of the key arguments of this thesis and its analysis through a discussion of the centre of Bristol's historical controversy, the Ghost of Edward Colston.

## Chapter One: Empire with a Metropolitan Focus - Material and Immaterial Relationships, Connections, and Continuities

Carrying on from the Introduction, this chapter continues to explore the topic of Empire in a more conceptual form. In the last chapter, I addressed the concept of ‘Empire is history’, noting the ways in which the British Empire was hardly monolithic in its long history spread across continents (Darwin 2012: xi) and the ways in which Empire functions as both metaphor for many historical episodes and concepts *and* as a form of narrative, following the work of Hayden White (1973, 1978). The history of the British Empire is a heterogenous and immensely complex one which largely involved two ‘different’ Empires (the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic Empire in North America and the Caribbean) and a ‘second’ Empire which developed rapidly from the loss of the American Colonies in the 1780’s and largely consisted of British exploits and occupations in Asia, Australia, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa (for example Armitage 2000:1-3 and Darwin 2012:17-32). As Darwin further reminds us, these structures were driven by various different motivations, ideas, beliefs, interests, foreign interventions, and individual ambitions. And yet, the word Empire is often used to condense all of this diversity and complexity into one word, accompanied by its own powerful connotations.

Considering this complexity, this chapter attempts to consider some of the general characteristics and manifestations of Empire not only historically, but in its continuities and vestiges. Across its heterogeneity, what are some of the ways in which the British Empire operated, and in particular, what are some of the continuities, legacies, and effects we are left with, following the period of rapid political decolonisation in the 1950’s and 1960’s? The aim of this chapter is to establish the relevance of Empire—and its connections—to the issues addressed in Bristol through the following chapters. Pushing back on the ‘central assumption’ discussed in the last chapter—that Empire is widely considered among my informants to have happened a long time ago, somewhere else, over there—one of the key goals in this chapter is to begin framing the conceptual ways in which the British Empire inhabits the present in Britain as well.

Thinking about Empire conceptually—especially in light of its diversity—one can largely frame Empire as a set of flows, transactions, connections and relationships. Following scholars such as Ann Stoler, Jane Burbank, and Frederick Cooper, I consider Empire as a political, social, and economic entity which involves firstly a) a set of relationships which crucially b) constructs categories and a hierarchy of differences (Burbank and Cooper 2010:8; Hall and Rose 2006:5-6; Stoler and Cooper 1997:3). Furthermore, these interactions involved the movement of people

(both at times voluntarily as with settlers and involuntarily in terms of slavery, prisoners, debtors, and other forced migrations of indigenous populations from occupied land), ideas, and material goods such as various crops and commodities. More often than not, these transactions and relationships were highly asymmetrical and exploitative, benefitting the imperial metropole at the expense of the colony and those it ruled, as the wealth of these trades came back to British cities like Bristol and built the grandeur of the city and the nation's infrastructure. Historically in the case of Bristol, the city's involvement with 15<sup>th</sup> century exploration (as with the Cabot expeditions in 1497/8), settlement of plantation colonies in the Caribbean and North America involving the forced displacement of indigenous populations, its crucial role in the transatlantic slave trade and the forced migration of enslaved Africans, the spread and influence of Methodist Christianity, and its industries in tobacco and sugar among other imperial commodities, bear witness to this conceptualisation.

The British Empire, for example, created linkages, connections, and relationships between Britain and groups of people all over the world; yet these relationships were almost always unequal in their operations, with white British settlers or traders asserting power over indigenous people and with the British metropole acquiring most of the wealth and riches of these trades. Violence—whether literal or cultural—was often a key component of Empire. Framing Empire in terms of a) categories of difference and immaterial ideas and concepts, which were often used as the rationale or justification to act upon the world in ways with particular material effects, as well as through b) the lens of relationships allows us to have a more complex, nuanced understanding of what Empire might have meant and what it might continue to mean beyond taking patterns of trade and the movement of goods (or people) for granted. Using this approach of relationship and connection goes beyond simplistic understandings of Empire as exploration, discovery, and adventure, trade, or as conquest involving distant, exotic lands. It also allows us situate Empire not only in a foreign shore, but to also draw attention to its very heart in European metropolises, to look at the points on various trade routes (such as the triangular trades which often involved Bristol) where journeys both began and ended, as nodes within a wider network (Gilroy 1993, Lester 2001 cited in Hall and Rose 2006:6). Seen through this conceptual prism, Empire was not simply a matter of conquering, ruling over, or trading with, disparate lands, but rather it was and is very much about *relationships and connections*, however asymmetrical these may be.

The foci here are some of the conceptual ways in which Empire operated and *continues* to operate, looking not only at arguments about materiality and the trade of material goods (including people via migration and the slave trade), but also looking at some of the underlying

ideas and immaterial *modes operandi* of Empire, for example, national identity (manifest in UK Citizenship law), concepts of race (which interplay with various theological ideas), forms of knowledge (cf. Cohn 1996), and hierarchies of difference. This is hardly to suggest that the material and immaterial are detachable, but rather to suggest what may appear obvious: that although Empire may superficially seem to be about the movement of peoples (whether forced or voluntary), goods (in the form of commodity trade), disseminating technologies (for example, railways), and conquest and exploration in a material sense, Empire functions in much more profound, transformative ways which are also symbolic, immaterial, and/or discursive.

Centrally, this chapter argues that Empire greatly involved, and continues to involve, notions of connection; connection of different and often distant places and people, different and exotic goods (and how the very idea of the “exotic” and its usage through juxtaposition also create the mundane, familiar, a “Western” or “civilised” a la Said’s argument in *Orientalism* (1978)). In making connections both materially and immaterially, Empire also creates (primarily imagined) relationships with material consequences, however asymmetrical, patronising, or parasitic they may be.

There is little doubt that Empire and its processes—whether in the British example or others—involved lasting material changes which profoundly changed the lives of the colonised. Examples include: introducing toilets and discourses of disease and hygiene in the colonial Philippines under American rule (Anderson 1995), transforming islands and bodies through the processes of penal colonies such as the French Devil’s Island of the coast of French Guinea (Redfield 2000), the political and economic shifts which accompanied the material transition from economies of coal to oil (Mitchell 2009), or the role of Coca-Cola in American imperial commercialisation (Foster 2008). One can also consider the presence of American military bases in the Philippines and around the world (Lutz 2006), the American colonial construction of infrastructure such as the Panama Canal (Carse 2014), or the ways in which missionaries not only shared their beliefs but materially re-arranged the ways in which their converts lived (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986, 1991). Small-scale technologies such as sewing machines and bicycles transformed colonial India (Arnold 2013), just as infrastructure such as roads and European styles of clothing transformed not only Indonesian landscapes and bodies but were also used to co-opt the colonial regime and secure claims for independence (Mrazek 2002). All of these demonstrate the ways in which Empire (whether British or otherwise) and its processes involved the material transformation of places colonised. All of these processes and phenomena involve connections

and relationships with various parties of coloniser and colonised, both as groups and consisting of individuals.

In offering these conceptualisations of Empire and breaking the term open to reveal some of the assumptions tied into terms like the British Empire, I invite the reader to explore what seeing the British Empire in this light might reveal—not merely about articulations of Empire, Britishness, and ideas of history—but also what they might reveal to be at stake in the present moment as Britain at the time of Brexit (and arguably in a crisis of identity) seeks to navigate an existential debate about the very meaning and future of Britishness (and Englishness).

While the story of conquest or ‘stuff’ is often associated with Empire in popular usage, this story is often told with a focus in a geographical “elsewhere” in former colonies (Edwards 2016) rather than looking at the material effects of imperialism in metropolises today. And while the perceived pastness of Empire may be linked to the very real political independence of many former colonies via processes of geopolitical decolonisation beginning in the 1940’s and 1950’s, the underlying, immaterial effects and transformations of Empire still linger under-the-surface in the present. Through investigating some of the legacies and vestiges of Empire, the entanglements, connections, and relationships which were the basis of Empire are clearly not so easily untangled or disconnected or relegated to elsewhere. With a focus on the imperial metropole and immaterial transformations of Empire, this chapter also looks at perhaps the most significant immaterial creations of Empire: identities such as Britishness and Englishness themselves.

Conceiving Empire in this way, we are able to consider its space and time with more nuance, noting its effects not merely in the past, but in the present; not merely in places formerly colonised, but its present and enduring effects and vestiges in former metropolitan centres like Britain today. Suggesting that Empire operates relationally and establishes connections in both material ways involving ‘stuff’ as well as immaterially through ideas, the chapter also looks at one of the most important creations of Empire: the formation of British and English identities. If the experience of Empire was fundamental to the making of Britishness and Englishness, then certainly *how* that experience is understood and talked about in the present is an important political matter feeding into notions of identity, and who the British and English *are*. Building on the idea of Empire as narrative in the last chapter, this chapter further develops the suggestion that the story of Empire and the British and English people as people who possessed an Empire is integral to these political entities. Along these lines, if Empire—the making of Britishness, Englishness, and Britain’s greatness—is both perceived as a matter of pastness and distance, then

it is no wonder that British and English identity find themselves at a precarious moment. Not only is greatness past them, it is also elsewhere.

With this in mind, perhaps one place to look at Empire conceptually (in terms of both its material/immaterial nature and its nature as a story of relationships, connections, flows, and transactions) is to examine a wider historical portrayal of Empire. Although there is a host of literature on this topic, one influential, popular, and highly controversial depiction of Empire offers us an entry point to consider some of the common assumptions around the subject of Empire. Niall Ferguson's *Empire* (2003) is often regarded by critics (for example Cooper 2004, Cottrill 2012 in *The New Statesman* or Gopal 2006 in *The Guardian*) as an exemplary apologetic for the British Empire fraught with a particular nostalgia. But for all the work's shortcomings and limitations, Ferguson is an influential historian and who was courted by then Education Secretary Michael Gove in 2010 under the Tory-led Coalition to inform the National Curriculum's proud account of the British Empire (Milne 2010). Considering his influence and popularity (despite controversy surrounding him), Ferguson is one useful figure to consider in this discussion. Ferguson is also typical and illustrative of the fact that many debates about the British Empire centre around the balance of whether or not the Empire was a good or bad thing. According to recent polls, 44% of British respondents in a national survey thought that the Empire was more or less a good thing (Olusoga 2016).

But perhaps one needs to take a step back to question both these terms of debate as well as cracking open some of its own central assumptions; is this even the right question? When the poll question asks about the Empire, it also assumes that the respondent knows what this phenomenon is in the first place. And such a blunt question fails to ask how the respondent understands Empire and what they think of it to be. What does that term 'Empire' mean to various people in Britain? These debates and poll results could be enhanced by ethnographic research which looks at these assumptions through a critical lens. But nevertheless, Ferguson is a useful text to mention here as he is a paradigmatic example operating under these (however limited) terms of debate and uncritical usage of many terms and assumptions around Empire. For Ferguson, the British Empire is a more or less taken for granted term, just like the poll question. But he is also useful as an example, as his account jumps in rather straightforwardly to tell a story of particular British people from history and the ways in which these people went on to forge networks, connections, and relationships with distant lands and different people (at times in unjust and asymmetrical ways) which form the story of Empire.

As an economic historian with a popular following, Ferguson seeks to answer two key questions: the uncritically teleological question 'How did Britain come to rule the world?', and 'Was the Empire 'a good or bad thing'? (2003: xi). He immediately follows this question by scrutinising what he considers the conventional wisdom that it was a bad thing on the whole, noting the British Empire's involvement in slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, while he continues to question and renounce ongoing cases and calls for apologies and reparations for the slave trade, the institution of slavery, and the resulting underdevelopment of the African continent.

From there, he tells a proud story of his Scottish family whose roots have spread all over the Empire geographically through military service, pioneering, and his own childhood of medical work in Kenya. In this sense, Ferguson and his family have been a part of these larger sets of flows, interactions, and global connections between the British people and others throughout the world. However, for a young Ferguson arriving in Oxford to read history in 1982, his rose-tinted vision of the British Empire as an unquestionable positive force to develop and civilise the world was significantly challenged by his colleagues and instructors, and his own account glosses over many of these cases against Empire (Ibid.: xvii).

Although clearly an apologist for Empire, Ferguson still offers some caveats, in one case, refusing to drop many charges against it (2003: xxi). However, the crux of his argument is that on the whole, although the Empire was never efficient or altruistic according to liberal market assumptions, Empire was on the whole, a good thing that gave us globalisation: the free movement of goods, capital, and labour (Ibid.: xxii). In one list of the benefits of Empire, Ferguson notes 'The English language, English forms of land tenure, Scottish and English banking, The Common Law, Protestantism, Team sports, the limited or 'night watchman' state, Representative assemblies, [and] The idea of liberty' as some of the most distinctive features of British society which Empire effectively disseminated to positive effect (Ibid.: xxiii). Another list which seeks to establish the credits of imperial legacy does not just include 'racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance' which Ferguson simply and uncritically states existed before colonialism, but also:

The triumph of capitalism as the optimal system of economic organisation; the Anglicisation of North America and Australasia; the internationalisation of the English language; the enduring influence of the Protestant version of Christianity; and above all the survival of parliamentary institutions, which far worse empires were poised to extinguish in the 1940s (Ibid.: xxvii).

Throughout Ferguson's assessment, he takes for granted that globalisation is a good thing without much scrutiny, and the story is more or less told from the perspective of white, Protestant, middle/upper class men (like Ferguson himself) who have largely benefitted from the unequal structures and relationships of Empire at the expense of many others around the world. Although he does not ignore the role of Britain in the slave trade, he rarely offers much critical attention to the ways in which Empire disrupted the lives of those it colonised and exploited in irretrievable and catastrophic ways (cf. Levine 2013); for Ferguson, the liberal market opportunities created by imperial exchanges and relationships are taken for granted as worthy consolation.

Nevertheless, he offers a readable history which tells a story about the stuff of Empire and processes around trade—such as the annexation of land, or the trade of sugar, tea, tobacco, and other vital imports. He also introduces the pervasive trope of trade as a description of the Empire. Of course, however, Ferguson's discussion of these trades is again, one-sided (especially in the account concerning sugar in Chapter 1) and quite focused on the point of consumption (rather than production and the exploitative conditions of extraction of resources from colonies), focusing instead for example on London's role as a hub for shopping (Ferguson 2003: 12-17). One could argue that such a narrow view of commodity trades and processes of consumption (which omit or at least, postpone to a later chapter, the processes of exploitative production) is a reproduction of a liberal, capitalist outlook which is far less concerned with the means of production rather than its focus on consumption. While Ferguson seems quite aware of some of the more general criticisms of Empire and its injustices (for example, his discussion on Britain's role in the slave trade (Ferguson 2003: 74-84)), he largely follows a Whiggish approach to history wherein the present is the teleological purpose of the past. For Ferguson, the globalised, predominantly capitalist world of the present largely created by the British Empire is ideal for all.

One could easily accuse Ferguson of asking the wrong questions, namely, his attempt to evaluate the Empire as good or bad without giving too much scrutiny as to what entails good or bad or for whom, nor thinking critically about who asks the question. Is this question framed to and by white, middle class Britons? By Black British, or South Asians in Britain? By men or by women? By white immigrants from the former 'dominions' including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand? He further fails to question his own neoliberal assumptions, as well as failing to link the exploitative processes of production and resource extraction to consumption of foreign goods in Britain (both then and now) through imperial processes and connections; a close reading of Ferguson (and what he often fails to say) may suggest the inequality rampant in these relationships. For example, in his discussion of the slave trade, Ferguson rightly makes mention



of relationships by links slavery to sugar production. But while he discusses the figures involving the forced transportation of Africans to British colonies in North America and the Caribbean, he does not make the connection between sugar, slavery, and its critical role in Britain's wealth and political ascension (cf. Mintz 1986). So, while Ferguson spins together a fascinating, well-written narrative, weaving in and out of detail with stories of particular individuals in the making of Empire, he seems to leave out key connections and critical questioning of his own assumptions. Throughout his conclusion, he continuously refers to liberal capitalism as the greatest contribution of the Empire (Ibid.: 366) before turning his last attentions to the United States' role as the heir of Britain's Empire (Ibid.: 377-381). But again, for whom?

Ferguson is used as an example here as he offers one popular discussion of Empire and demonstrates the use of many assumptions which often go unquestioned. For example, the almost solely *historical* focus of his work assumes that the British Empire is a thing of the past: a very common view considering the sheer amount of historical literature on Empire (for example Armitage 2000, Cannadine 2001, Porter 2004, Darwin 2012, Levine 2013 just to name a few). Ferguson is also useful as his apologetics for Empire were also often repeated throughout my fieldwork by those who served in the Empire, or those who are nostalgic for it. He also encapsulates how so many conversations about the Empire today seem to be about either its pros and cons, or which aim to simply tell a supposedly straightforward narrative history of this Empire, or to engage the teleological yet albeit fascinating question of how Britain came to supposedly conquer the world.

But for all his faults, Ferguson is also a worthwhile example as he touches on the idea that Empire involved the movement of goods and of people as per liberal capitalism, whether those goods are sugar or tea, and whether those people are enslaved Africans or white settlers emigrating from Britain. At the same time, he also addresses ideas of culture, religion (especially Christianity) and its role in aiding the Empire and transforming indigenous cultures (see for example Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), and government and legal systems as well as the economic materiality of Empire, while also addressing the many conflicts and conquests of land involved in the process. In this sense, Ferguson's account provides one example that Empire can be conceived in both material and immaterial terms, both in terms of stuff (at times, bodies) and the less tangible such as culture, religion, language, institutions, and ideas. Thus, despite the many valid critiques and shortcomings of Ferguson, he nevertheless offers us a perspective on some of the questions, narratives, and assumptions associated with thinking about the British Empire today.

## **Connections and Relationships: Focusing on the Metropole**

Conceptually, Empire may be considered as a set of connections and relationships which at its core focuses on the construction of categories and within this, a hierarchy of differences (Burbank and Cooper 2010:8, Hall and Rose 2006: 5-6, 24-26, Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue 2007:9-10, Jennings 2011, Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001). In light of conceiving Empire's processes and manifestations as both material and immaterial, one might consider that the two strands are certainly manifest in relationships between coloniser and colonised. For example, a particular imaginary of self and other may take on particular ideas about racial difference and hierarchy and be used as justification for the dominance of one group over another which resulted in the forced enslavement, transportation, and cruel exploitation by white Europeans over enslaved black Africans or various indigenous peoples throughout different colonies. Or perhaps, nuances in these imaginaries may place these different groups into a hierarchy of 'civilisation' which resulted in a different treatment of, for example, the Chinese or various groups within British India over the ways in which other subjugated indigenous populations (whether Maori, Australian Aboriginal, or Native American, for example) were governed, administered, and treated. The point nevertheless is that the material and immaterial strands of Empire, its processes, and its modes of thought, converge in various forms of relationships and connections.

If Empire is about relationships and connections, a vast range of literature takes a primary focus on the ways in which these asymmetrical relationships and connections have adversely affected those colonised, as in the case of Subaltern Studies. To an extent, this focus which looks on the effect of Empire and colonisation throughout the world is rightly justified, and the fields of subaltern studies and postcolonial theory rightly have their place in scholarship. The works of scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (for example, *Empire and Nation* (2010) and in particular Dipesh Chakrabarty's text *Provincializing Europe* (2000) offer a novel perspective to consider the peculiarities of Europe itself, as opposed to taking a European perspective for granted. Taking on Chakrabarty's call, this thesis considers looking at the ways in which Empire is conceived, understood, and remembered in Britain today from an ethnographic perspective, noting the peculiarities with which people in Britain consider their own imperial history, and how the imperial continues to shape, mould, and take hold of British society still today. As such, this section continues to consider the ways that through these connections and relationships, the metropole is also transformed.

In this vein, Hall and Rose et al. (2006) draw attention to the effects of Empire 'At Home' as per the title of their edited volume. Their work is situated within a larger debate on the effects

of Empire in Britain (see for example MacKenzie 1984, Ward et al 2001, and Porter 2004) and marks an effort to shift historical attention to the ways in which Empire had profound impacts on Britain. Although their focus is on the domestic side of Empire, they nevertheless note the tension in which the metropole/colony distinction can serve as a deceptive and illusory binary as the two continuously affect one another in relationship (Hall and Rose 2006: 20, 24-26). Contrary to historians such as Bernard Porter who suggest that Empire itself had minimal impact on Britain itself (Porter 2004; see also Ward 2001:3-4 and his indictment of the 'minimal impact thesis', Hall and Rose 2006:16-17, Kumar 2003:194-195), Empire on the contrary was critical to the development and constitution of Britain. This was the case not only in a political and economic sense, but also a social and cultural sense in terms of ideas of race, whiteness, Britishness, and Englishness. In particular, by calling attention to the ways in which Empire operates and affects what happens 'at home,' scholars such as Hall and Rose et al. and Ward et al. further direct the conversation to consider Empire not merely as far away but as highly significant to Britain itself, as the titles of their volumes *At Home with the Empire* and *British Culture and the End of Empire* respectively suggest (cf. Burton 2000:139 cited in Kumar 2003:195).

This dynamic is further elaborated in Hall and Rose's account of the very use of the term 'home' and the ways in which a binary of home/away is utilised within imperial discourses in the construction of difference. Noting the significance of the narrative of an 'Island Nation' and an 'imagined geography of separation,' Hall and Rose note the role of spatial imaginaries in the constitution of Empire (2006:26). Quoting Doreen Massey, they suggest that the notion of home is linked to both 'a sense of belonging...and an apparently comforting bounded enclosure' which within an imperial nationalist logic 'must maintain an imaginary impervious boundary that distinguishes and distances metropole from colony; home from empire' this logic further 'establish[es] their identity through negative counterposition with the Other beyond the boundaries' (Massey 1994:168-189, quoted in Hall and Rose 2006:26). Within this understanding of 'home' and boundary, they argue that Britain's history and construction is *not* internal, but rather, constituted in interaction with the "*outside*"—a point echoed by Linda Colley below (Hall and Rose 2006:26).

Considering Empire as a set of relationships, Hall and Rose's account also evokes the language of family and kinship which encompasses the language of 'kith and kin' within the Empire, with a particularly preferred status offered to the white settler colonies/Dominions, whereas the 'Crown Colonies are still under parental care' (Hurd 1924:5, quoted in Hall and Rose 2006:27). These various gradations of British imperial rule over its history demonstrate the notion

of inequalities and hierarchies of power and differences at play. The trope of family and the gradations of positions within the family is also discussed by Wendy Webster in her study on popular representations of England and Empire in the media before, during, and after the Second World War (2005).

As Hall and Rose continue, '[t]he trope of family naturalises social hierarchies and helped to foster the domestication of Britain's imperial relations on the home front. In other words, the homely terms of family helped to make empire ordinary and a part of everyday life' (2006:27). And yet, they also convey the significance of not only relationships, but the unequal differentiation and hierarchy between the 'mother country, (white) Dominions, and (non-white) colonies.' Thus, the supremacy of the 'Mother country' and the relative position of the (white) Dominions over the (non-white) colonies becomes ingrained, taken for granted, naturalised, and thus demonstrates a further immaterial change in the imagination of white Britain in its relationship to others.

The metaphor of relationships also gains traction from the work of Paul Gilroy, particularly in his work on the Black Atlantic (1996) which draws attention to Empire not simply as a geopolitical entity, but as a network or system of various nodes and exchanges. This network includes not only Britain, but the slave-trading ports of West Africa and the destination of ships involved with the triangular trade of European manufactured goods, enslaved Africans, and raw commodities. It connected Caribbean ports such as Kingston, St. Kitts and Nevis, and the Eastern Seaboard of North America, sending sugar, tobacco, cotton molasses, and other products to be processed in European mills and factories to then be sold both in Britain and the wider Empire (1996:14-15).

Within these particular relationships and connections, Burbank and Cooper insist that Empire does not merely work as a set of trading relationships, but it also works on categories of difference and further hierarchy of difference (2010). They conceptually define 'empires [as] large political units, expansionist or with a memory of power extended over space, polities that maintain *distinction* and *hierarchy* as they incorporate new people' (Burbank and Cooper 2010:8, emphasis added). Differentiating the political entity of empire from the nation state, they emphasise that 'the empire-state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations' (Ibid.) in a way which is often (but not always) broken down into lines of metropole and colony. Again, this has been historically demonstrated through episodes such as the transatlantic slave trade, or through the exclusion of rights such as self-determination by predominantly non-white colonies as opposed to the originally white Dominions which were predominantly settler colonial

populations. The dichotomy of metropole and colony admittedly has its limitations and these distinctions themselves become muddled during and after geopolitical decolonisation. But nevertheless, there are a number of political tensions which remain and linger over these differences, particularly in light of post-colonial war migration to Europe from throughout the colonies. These tensions fold into contemporary memory and understanding of the history of Empire in Britain.

### **Immaterial Empire: Imperial Logics and Ideas**

Through engaging some of the vast range of anthropological literature on Empire, it becomes apparent that Empire is not merely a spatial, geopolitical phenomenon which represents itself as pink colours on peculiar old maps, or as a temporally historical phenomenon relegated to a distant past and the domain of history. The basic spatial and temporal assumptions which displace Empire into a temporal and/or spatial elsewhere (cf. Edwards 2016) are highly problematic and may actually be a way of relegating the term of Empire from contemporary and metropolitan debate rather than reckoning with its real and enduring continuities, vestiges, and legacies in places like Britain today.

Although Empire involved stuff, it was about and did much more than move goods and people around; it profoundly transformed the lives of the colonised in concrete, material ways, whether that involved violence, forced migration, displacement, exploitation, or through more subtle ways such as the transformation of urban planning and conceptions of space (Comaroff and Comaroff 1986, 1991; Thongchai 1994). But Empire also had profound effects—both material and immaterial on both those who initiated and were involved with processes of colonisation.

Noting that the material and immaterial are not so easily separable in actuality, this section invokes this distinction for an analytical perspective in order to demonstrate the multi-dimensional effects of Empire, and to counter the idea that Empire was ‘simply about trade’ and as Ferguson might claim, that its great offering is a particular brand of global neoliberal capitalism which benefits all. On the contrary, the immaterial modes of operation of Empire—the ideas mobilised through imperial endeavours—have left a lasting legacy on both coloniser and colonised which is not so easily disentangled, and which does not easily allow for claims of a rupture with the past. On the whole, the immaterial forms of Empire and the sorts of relationships and connections construed by imperial processes linger, haunt, and fester through to the present.

One place to begin conceptualising Empire—particularly the British Empire—is to consider its conceptual foundations, as historian David Armitage does in *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2001). Although Armitage notes that the imperial endeavour was crucial to the unification of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland in order to make the United Kingdom, he particularly considers the role of ideas such as Protestantism, the concept of a maritime, commercially focused (instead of a land, conquest-orientated) Empire, and discourses of liberty had in justifying and making the British Empire.

Perhaps one of the most significant and enduring immaterial transformations of Empire is the way in which former colonisers such as the British came to view themselves in light of possessing global Empires, particularly in terms of ideas such as those of the supremacy of the West. Over the long duration and various manifestations of the British Empire, these ideas were profoundly connected to not only ideas of race and differences against the Heathen, non-Christian world, but also theological ideas of supersession, where the British saw themselves as the heirs of the Judeo-Christian God's promise to the people of Israel according to theologian of race Willie James Jennings (2011: 211-214). Jennings' analysis notes the strong relationship between British imperialism and Protestantism, especially as it took on a certain tone in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century as the British Empire began its ascendancy. This idea of a covenant with the Judeo-Christian God and imperial Britain is still present among popular patriotic hymns today, such as the lyrics of 'Rule, Britannia!' written in 1740 and its triumphant chorus that 'Britons never ever will be slaves!' Within this is not only an idea of divine election and chosen-ness among all other nations, but a missionary zeal which infuses the entire imperial endeavour. This is certainly noticeable in the Evangelical and missionary movements of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century England (Walls 1996, Stanley 1990), and which arguably reaches its zenith in the figure of David Livingstone and his zeal for bringing 'Christianity and Commerce' to sub-Saharan Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although a largely and increasingly secular Britain today may not reflect upon the religious aspect of Empire in great detail today, the idea of the Empire as a 'civilising mission'—whether explicitly related to Christian conversion (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), or through discourses of education (Hall on Macauley 2006), hygiene (Burke 1996), and development, certainly give echo to the role of Protestantism and its moral superiority in the imperial endeavour.

And yet this idea of divine election, Jennings argues, changed how the British in turn saw themselves, and it changed the meaning of whiteness in an immaterial, theological, and intellectual sense. As per the title of Jennings' work, *The Christian Imagination*, this belief in divine election, in chosen-ness and covenant by God became very much the basis for however implicit a

white, Protestant (British) supremacy in relation to others, whether they be non-Christian, non-white colonial subjects or rival European (Catholic) Empires. In terms of affecting the imagination of the coloniser, Edward Said (1978) has suggested in his seminal work, *Orientalism*, the construction of 'the Orient' and 'the Other' has not only been a means of de-humanising and invalidating the Other (i.e., the Colonial subject), but it has also been a method of constructing the Western, Occidental Self. Anthropologist Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* makes a similar argument in the ways in which British Orientalists and other British scholars created various means of codifying, rationalising, and understanding not only knowledge itself, but in particular, knowledge of others for the sake of rule (1996). Cohn specifically argues that various modalities of knowledge such as the historiographic, observational/travel, survey, enumerative, museological, and surveillance were created and applied in order to classify, objectify, as subjugate as methods utilised in order to rule British India (1996:3). These endeavours coincide with a post-Enlightenment rationale and an epistemology which focuses on the classification of things and a particular form of empirical, so-called objective ways of knowing the world, and within this, of knowing and therefore producing 'the Other' as distinct from the neutral observer acting in the name of scientific knowledge (Pratt 1992, Poole 1997). And along with these particular makings of knowledge, Thomas Richards argues for the role of the archive and literature in constructing the 'Other' in the British imperial imagination (1993). In a similar vein, Frantz Fanon's discussion of the coloniser and colonised discusses the ways in which these roles which exist in relationship are inculcated into both parties such that they reproduce these respective roles of slave and master (1963). The role of white women's bodies and colonial bodies in sex, intimacy, and gender relations is also referenced by Ann Stoler's work on *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995).

From this range of literature on modes and forms of knowledge and imaginaries and the construction of various categories by which the self and other are further produced and distinguished, beyond the materiality of Empire—the goods traded, the people transported, and the material debris and vestiges left behind—clear immaterial transformations, of perception of self and others tinted through the lenses of history and discourses of race and ethnicity, are perhaps some of the more lasting, powerful, problematic, and enduring legacies of Empire.

In *Imperial Formations* (2007), Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter Perdue offer a frame of analysis for engaging in imperial studies with the aim of expanding analytical conceptions of Empire beyond many of the existing models and basic assumptions which have marked post-colonial studies and comparative analyses of imperial histories. Part of their aim in proposing this

framework is to expand an understanding of Empire beyond an exclusive focus on European Empires which often dominates colonial and post-colonial studies. By positing such a frame, they can expand conversations about the nature of Empire to include non-European Empires such as China, Russia, and the United States. As they argue in the introduction to this volume, the imperial formations which they seek to draw our attention to are marked by a number of commonalities:

Imperial formations are polities of dislocation, processes of dispersion, appropriation, and displacement. They are dependent both on moving categories and populations. Not least, they are dependent on material and discursive postponements and deferrals: the 'civilising mission,' imperial guardianship, and manifest destiny are all promissory notes of transformation [...] Imperial formations are not steady states, but states of becoming, macropolities in states of solution and constant formation. (Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue 2007:8-9)

Furthermore, imperial formations are also reliant on 'gradations of sovereignty and sliding scales of differentiation' (Ibid.:9, cf. Burbank and Cooper 2010:8). They also share in common zones of ambiguity, borders, discourses of exceptionalism, as well as 'inequitable treatment, hierarchical relations, and unequal rule,' and 'domination and exploitation [that goes] beyond economic exploitation and geopolitical domination' (Ibid.:9-10). These imperial formations also play a key role in the organisation and conception of knowledge itself (cf. Cohn 1996), and as Fernando Coronil notes, 'It is a privilege of empires to make their histories appear as History' (2007:245).

Taking this expanded analytical apparatus of Empire into account, I suggest that although their goal is to discuss a wider frame of imperial formations to look beyond the structures of European Empires, this same lens can nevertheless be used to further an understanding of the enduring operations of Empire in European metropolises as well. This is particularly the case in regards to the ways in which various 'gradations of sovereignty and sliding scales of differentiation' operate across imperial spaces, noting the difference between metropole and colony (Stoler et al 2007:9, Stoler and Cooper 1997). By taking this approach, Empire is in one sense, *immaterial* in the ways in which it creates categories of hierarchy and difference, the ways it creates relationships, and also the ways in which it presents its history as History, which is in and of itself a deeply political claim.

In terms of immaterial creations of the British Empire which linger into the present, perhaps the most significant of these are metropolitan identities such as Britishness and Englishness. Various (and at times competing) visions of Britishness and Englishness are arguably a factor in why evaluating and remembering the British Empire is heavily contested and rather ambivalent on the whole. These tensions are also perhaps part of the reason why these topics of Empire and slavery are considered 'sensitive' in many heritage discussions and marked by peculiar



silences and strategies of disconnection and disavowal which will be later explored through the ethnography of this thesis. Furthermore, moments of national crisis—such as the historical ‘Brexit’ vote of June 2016—also reveal not only these differing understandings of Britishness/Englishness, but also these varying understandings of the past. Through conceptualising the very means by which Englishness and Britishness are created in opposition to various ‘Others,’ it becomes clear that exclusion and difference—with particular relation to Empire—have been long at the heart of not only the project of Empire, but the project of *making Britain*.

### **Constructed and Fluid Identities: The Formation of Britishness and Englishness**

Without taking the category of ‘national identity’ for granted, a quick mention of some of the key positions on the literature of nationalism should also be taken into consideration. Numerous scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm (1990) offer a history and theorisation of the origins of nationalism, while Partha Chatterjee (1986, 1993, 2010) prominently discusses nationalism and its relationship to the post-colonial state in his various work on Indian nationalism. However, my concern here is not a wider lens on nationalism at large, but the specific ways in which British and English national identities are formed and constituted, and the relationship of these with Empire.

For our purposes here, I focus on two particular strands of nationalist thought, one which argues for a primordial, ethnic origin of the nation and which alludes towards a more essentialist understanding of nationalism as in the work of Anthony Smith (1986). In other words, this strand argues that there is a particular, fundamental, unchanging ‘essence’ to the nation and its members which is rooted in ethnic groups which Smith refers to as *ethnie* and which pre-exist the modern nation and state.

This sort of primordial, essentialist vision of nationalism contrasts sharply to the sort of nationalism articulated by some of the seminal scholars of the field such as Ernest Gellner (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1983). Rather for them, the concept of the nation is itself a social construct—although the mechanisms and means by which their respective theories of nationalism are constructed vary. While for Gellner, the culture of the nation is largely directed and constructed by elites, Anderson presents a wider view of the nation and the mechanisms of its formation. Noting the importance of print capitalism in fostering a particular shared political imagination, Anderson refers to nations as ‘imagined communities.’ Crucially then, Anderson’s theory of nation is defined ‘as an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign’ (1983:6). Within this, Anderson writes ‘Nationalism is not the awakening

of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist' (Gellner 1983:169 quoted in Anderson 1983:6). But in Anderson's critique of Gellner, he does not claim that these are 'false' and 'fabricated' but rather, 'imagined' and 'created' in a way which does not make a claim of false consciousness or elite fabrication (Anderson 1983:6).

Both strands in nationalist thought are relevant because although this thesis largely accepts the idea of national identity as a social construction, the essentialist idea of the nation still has traction nevertheless, especially in popular expressions and articulations of nationalism. As such, there are admitted limitations to scholarly, theoretical perspectives of nationalism which do not always reflect the various ways in which nation and nationalism operate in an empirical, day-to-day basis (for example Billig 1995, Edensor 2002, Skey 2011).

However, the threads of constructivism in discourses of nationalism allow us to analytically recognise that national identities are constructed, produced, and re-produced. Most importantly, they are also fluid and subject to change rather than being primordial, permanent, fixed, and essential, even if the content and expression of national identities may have particular traction and inertia which may resist change. This assumption is significant for this chapter as it traces various ways by which British and English identities have been, and are continuously being, constructed and re-produced.

In the history of these identities, Empire has been important to the construction of Britishness and Englishness in the past, and it is still relevant to the constitution of these identities today. Although the importance of Empire may be perceived as a waning influence, its significance in the constitution of these identities has not been completely removed, nor is it completely irrelevant. This is not simply demonstrated through the survival of right-wing colonial nostalgia, or a wider ambivalence on how the Empire is looked upon today, but also, as Georgie Wemyss suggests, through the 'invisible legacies' of Empire and colonial discourse in making whiteness and by extension, Britishness and Englishness (2016).

Some historians such as Bernard Porter have argued in the so called 'minimal-impact thesis' that the possession of Empire never made too much of a difference in British cultural, political, and social life at home. However, other historians such as Ward et al (2001), Hall and Rose (2006), and Linda Colley argue that Empire was central to the construction and constitution of Britishness, while sociologist Krishan Kumar takes a particular look at the role of Empire in the making of Englishness. Arguments along similar lines are also made by social scientists such as Georgie Wemyss (2016), Katharine Tyler (2012), Paul Gilroy (1987, 2004, 2005), and Ian Baucom

(1999). As such, debates about the *memory* of Empire in the present are crucial political aspects in understandings of Britishness and Englishness. Furthermore, the current political climate of Brexit and the accompanying existential debates concerning Britain's place in the world and its future directions and relationships, continuously demand more attention to how this history is understood today.

As a historian considering the construction of both the British state (as an agglomeration of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland) and British identity as a unique cultural construct, Linda Colley's *Britons* offers a historical study on the period of Hanoverian ascension occurring in 1707 and through to the end of the House of Hanover in 1834 and the dawn of the Victorian Era. Colley's work is exemplary in the ways that it demonstrates the constructed nature of Britishness through an exploration of early British history after the Act of Union 1707 between Scotland and England (and the Principality of Wales). As she writes, "nations and national identities [are] intrinsically 'fluid, plastic, and internally contested' (2009 [1992]: xv). This is not to say that these constructions are simple, straightforward, monolithic, and uncontested; as she goes on to suggest, "notions of Britain and British identity in this period were constructs 'superimposed on much older allegiances'" (Ibid.).

Colley notes the role of various influences such as Protestantism and the influence of patriotism during a time of continuous conflict against European rivals on the Continent, as well as throughout the globe, in various imperial conflicts such as the Seven Years War from 1756-1763. As Armitage (2000) and Jennings (2011) note, the triumphalist theology of a particular Protestantism and patriotism largely reinforce one another, becoming a contributing factor and justification for not only imperial expansion, but also the missionary movement (Colley 2009 [1992]: xxi, Jennings 2011). Thus, a peculiar pre-existing Protestantism (Colley notes that until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, 90% of England, Wales, and Scotland identified as Protestant with strong exclusions against Catholic 'Others') situated in historical context feeds into and is shaped by what becomes a particular sort of British exceptionalism and notion of Britishness (Colley 2009 [1992]: xxi).

As for the constructive approach to identity, Colley demonstrates that national identity is formed not in isolation as a positive articulation, but, rather, quoting Peter Sahllins, national identity "is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other" (Sahlins 1989:271, quoted in Colley 2009 [1992]:7). In other words, national identity does not often operate in a manner of "I am x" but rather as "I am *not* y." In a later introduction of the text, Colley rephrases this central

argument of her text: 'self-conscious nationalism is largely a matter of asserting an identity *against* someone or something' (Collini 1999:13 quoted in Colley 2009 [1992]: xix, emphasis added). Considering this aspect of national identity, Colley demonstrates that this era is crucial to the formation of British identity as it is forged in conflict with and opposition to "the Other beyond [British] shores" (Colley 2009 [1992]:7).

Colley notes the significance of an "'Other' that as partly real and partly imagined" in the formation of a new British national identity (Colley 2009 [1992]:xix) and she shows how *British* identity is often reinforced and consolidated in times of vulnerability against external threats in times of crisis—whether it be a threat of Napoleonic invasion via Ireland, or the threat of Catholics on the throne, or threats to British dominance and stability in both Europe and abroad at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid.: xxv). This is not to say that Britishness was an exclusive identity which *replaced* local, regional, or national identities within the British Isles (such as Englishness), but rather, it was a novel identity which interacted and co-existed with others as well as super-imposing itself (Ibid.: xxvi-xxvii) in particular moments and contexts.

In the period from 1707-1834, Colley contends that Britain had two oppositional others: a) Continental Europe (often most prominently articulated in opposition to Catholic/Secular France) and b) the colonies and their subject populations. Thus, Britishness has a history of being articulated in opposition to not only Continental Europeans with rival European Empires, but also Britain's own colonial others (Colley 2009 [1992]:7-8). In other words, according to the negative, oppositional logic of national identity, at its core, Britishness is both *not* Continental/French/European and *not* Colonial.

Although Protestantism shaped Britain's global interests during Colley's period of interest, she also notes that the imperial rule of many Catholics and non-Christians had to be appeased (especially domestically in the British Isles) for purposes like conscription of Irish soldiers and the protection of wider political and economic interests such as local alliances with Indian rulers in order to implement policies of indirect rule (Ibid.: xxi-xxii). But over time, a focus on Catholic 'Others' whether French, Spanish, or Irish increasingly gave way to a greater focus on and opposition to a 'Colonial Other' (Ibid.: xxii) with increased attention to Britain's 'Second Empire' from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, particularly turning attention to India, Australia, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa. This 'Colonial Other' in turn, also becomes an 'Other' against which to distinguish non-religious characteristics of Britishness, including the moral and racial superiority of Britons in relation to their colonial subjects, echoing the colonial logic of difference used as a justification for white supremacy, missionisation, and the rhetoric of the 'White Man's burden' to

‘civilise the natives.’ Here, the contrast between Christian Britain and the masses of non-white, colonial Heathen in contemporary rhetoric of Empire as ‘Christianity and Commerce’ to civilise, develop, educate, and convert colonial subjects (for example Levine 2013:110, Stanley 1983) demonstrate some of these differences and imperial ethics, perhaps most prominently articulated through the work of imperial poets such as Rudyard Kipling (who himself authored the phrase of the ‘White Man’s burden’) and embodied in the mythicised missionary figure of David Livingstone.

Within this dynamic, Britishness is fundamentally articulated in a relationship with *both* a European *and* a colonial ‘other’, thereby suggesting the importance of not only Britain’s Continental conflicts, but the crucial role of the Empire as a key strand in the very constitution of Britishness and Britain itself. As Colley writes, “[h]istorians, political scientists, and cultural theorists have become increasingly inclined to emphasise that ‘empire’ and ‘nation’ here were mutually constitutive” (2009 [1992]: xxiii).

In light of processes of decolonisation following 1945, Colley notes that Britishness is subject to change—not merely because it is constructed—but also because “some of the main building blocks of Britishness...have evidently crumbled away. The empire is gone. So substantially has that ‘Protestant underworld’ and thought-world” (Colley 2009 [1992]: xxviii). And with this easily evident ‘Other’ of the Empire abroad, what might have come to replace it? Colley suggests the pressures of post-war immigration from all over the former Empire to Britain since 1945 (Ibid.), and looking at the work of Tyler, Gilroy and Baucom below—it is clear that the logic of defining Britishness in opposition to a Colonial Other has profound consequences today domestically despite the formal political dissolution of Empire. Perhaps the point to take away is the means by which Britishness (as with many identities) is oppositional in nature, and both historically and in the present, ‘Colonial Others’ have long played in informing articulations of Britishness.

It is also worth clarifying two potentially problematic terms in this chapter: the distinction between British and English. Although these two terms are often conflated or elided in popular usage, for the sake of clarity and precision, the nuances of these two terms should be unpacked in more detail.

Despite the British political state consisting of England, Wales, and Scotland, (and in the whole of the UK, Northern Ireland as well), Britishness is hardly a composite identity which is simply a direct, cumulative aggregation of Englishness, Welshness, Scottishness, and Irishness.<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>4</sup> It’s also worth noting the fractures and multiple dimensions of these identities as they intersect with issues such as politics, religion, and geography.

many ways—as scholars of Britishness and Englishness like Linda Colley and Krishan Kumar respectively suggest—Britishness is its own superimposed and co-existing identity with a unique history of its own, just as the four home nations have their own histories of identity and conflict which profoundly shape one another. Yet Kumar nevertheless notes the ways in which these two terms of identity are used in different ways and evoke different registers of feeling, noting that English is more visceral than British (2003:2).

Yet for others—especially in vernacular usage—Britishness is often assumed to be Englishness writ-large, especially the South of England and the Home Counties surrounding London. However, considering the central ethnographic focus of this thesis on Bristol, our concern here is not so much with Scottish, Welsh, or Irish identities, but the two which are more relevant to our focus: British and English. As such, Krishan Kumar’s discussion of the dilemma that the English have in articulating their national identity (instead of simply folding into Britishness) is a particularly complex quandary. Likewise, the relationship that the English have with the term ‘British’ should not be taken for granted as solely their own, freely imposed creation, but it should be taken in a wider context of interaction and co-existence. After all, neither term nor identity exists in a vacuum apart from one another. The main point to take as a preface to what follows is that the usage of ‘British’ and ‘English’ is not simply used in a careless, taken-for-granted way, but rather, these distinct, yet related, identities are highlighted and discussed with intention to note the ways in which these identities not only shape one another, but also the ways in which they are both shaped by the imperial venture.

### **The Peculiarity of Englishness and Empire**

Although some may carelessly assume Britain ‘to be little England writ large’ (Kumar 2003:4), the differences between Englishness and Britishness are perhaps subtler. A number of scholars have debated the origins of Britishness, claiming that Britain itself is the product of a particular ‘internal colonisation’ of the British Isles by England (see Hechter 1999 cited in Kumar 2003:36) which fits into a problematic and limited Anglo-centric view (for a nuanced view of this process, see Levine 2013:1-14). However, as Colley notes, these arguments are not only too selective and teleological, they also exclude the role that Scots and Irish played in wider projects of Britishness and Empire (2009 [1992]: xxiv).

Despite multiple perspectives on the relationship between England and Britain, sociologist of Englishness Krishan Kumar notes the peculiar dilemma and difficulty that the English have in

expressing their nationalism compared to their Celtic neighbours and partners. As he eloquently writes:

It has been common to query English nationalism, even to deny it. Certainly the term sounds odd in English ears. *Other* nations have nationalism; the English, it has been conventional to say, have patriotism, royalism, jingoism, imperialism—but they do not know nationalism (Kumar 2003:18).

Kumar addresses an interesting conundrum in the ways in which English identity is marked by a silence which may easily be mistaken for an absence. But perhaps Kumar illustrates the peculiarity and complexity of English nationalism which requires different theorisation from Britishness or other nationalisms. In his discussion of nationalism, he argues that English nationalism is partly elusive because it does not function or resemble the majority of other nationalisms or identities which are more or less outspoken. Contra these nationalisms (for example see Edensor's 2002 commentary on Celtic nationalisms), English nationalism is not a celebration of *oneself*, but rather, *one's achievements*. English national identity is based upon what Kumar terms "imperial/missionary nationalism"; the English get their "principal identity and sense of belonging in the world from its role as carrier of the imperial mission" and therefore, this formulation of national identity with Empire at its core "helps to explain why questions of national identity have surfaced so urgently in the wake of empire, and why it has been so hard to find convincing answers" (Ibid.:34). Kumar goes on to suggest the English role within the Empire:

'[S]tate-bearing' peoples or *Staatsvolker* [of the Empire] who are reliant on other, non-English, 'British' partners in their imperial project—will be careful not to stress their ethnic identity; rather they will stress the political, cultural, or religious mission to which they have been called (Ibid.).

As a result, English nationalism is not espoused through explicit articulations of what Englishness itself *is*, but rather, it is espoused through pride in what the English have *accomplished, achieved, and done*—perhaps the 'greatest' feat of which was the creation of not one, but two [arguably three] Empires (Ibid.:35).<sup>5</sup> Thus, although British identity can be articulated in opposition to European and Continental Others, *Englishness* is largely constructed through the achievement of creating Britain's larger Empire. In this regard, Englishness is distinct to Britishness and other identities in its nature and its expression.

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<sup>5</sup> Within the historiography of Empire, there is a tendency to describe 'multiple Empires' which were a project of England. Kumar's own point in this discussion refers to firstly, the land Empire which is Britain/the United Kingdom, as well as two overseas Empires: firstly, that of the Americas and Caribbean, and secondly that of Asia, India, and Africa (following Hechter 1999 in Kumar 2003:35).

All of this leads Kumar to a question which unveils the crisis of English identity in the wake of empire: “Who are we when the mission fails, or is aborted? If we have tied ourselves to a star, what happens when the star drops out of the heavens?” (Ibid.). And for our purposes in what is to come in the rest of this thesis, Kumar’s question is valuable because it leads us to a corollary question: What happens to that star itself (the Empire and the memory of it) which the English have hitched themselves to as it falls from the heavens? In other words, how is that star understood or conceived after the fall? If there is indeed an intricate relationship between the star (the Empire) and those that have hitched themselves to it (the English), how is this relationship itself also understood and redefined in the ‘wake of Empire’, when it is perceived (however rightly or wrongly) as a matter of the past?

There are a number of potential implications if Kumar’s theorisation of imperial/missionary nationalism is correct. What are the English to do if their greatest achievement can no longer be celebrated because of its dissolution, let alone changing moral norms by which the achievement becomes tarnished in hindsight? How is that achievement to be looked upon now that it is largely considered to have fallen from the sky, especially when the stakes involve the very nature of what it means to be English?

In this regard, Englishness operates *alongside* (rather than wholly separately and independently from) the projects of Britishness and Empire-building, but it itself is affected by these projects in a way which is different from Colley’s elaboration on the formation of Britishness. In part, it may account for what comes across as a peculiar absence or silence of nationalism, as well as some of the silences and disconnections which are discussed ethnographically in this thesis.

If Englishness is at stake in the ways in which Empire is remembered and looked upon in the present, does this perhaps explain what seems like a silence in English memory of Empire, never mind the sort of silence of English identity compared to Celtic nationalisms? Does it perhaps account for the strategies of disconnection and disavowal which this thesis observes and presents in its ethnographic chapters to follow? Is it representative of the sort of figurative *aphasia*—the disconnections and inability to articulate—discussed by Ann Stoler in her discussion of French imperial histories? (2011). Does this account for the strategies of temporal displacement where Empire can no longer be seen as active in the present, but must be contained to the past if it is discussed at all? Are these perhaps some of the reasons why my friends in Bristol often found themselves defending the imperfections and blemishes of Empire by comparing the British Empire to others with comments of, “Well, at least we weren’t as bad as the



Belgians/French/Germans/Spanish/Portuguese/etc.?”<sup>6</sup> Is this why Empire must be defended and apologised for with talk of the virtues of capitalism, railways, and the English language instead of discussing and pondering upon its imperfections at length? (cf. Ferguson 2003). Or is this why the wartime narrative of a noble British Empire pressed against the evil German Reich has supplanted the history of Empire as the leading story and cause *celebre* in English (and British) collective memory and historical narrative? (Rachman 2017 in the *Financial Times*)

As other examples below illustrate, the logics and mechanisms by which British and English identities are understood and articulated are thoroughly rooted in and shaped by the colonial encounter. Contrary to the sorts of disconnections and silences which this thesis later goes on to discuss in its ethnographic sections, these are not just obsolete artefacts strictly confined to the past; rather, they—just like many of the *material* legacies and leftovers of Empire discussed in the next chapter—reach and leak into the present with profound effect.

### **Empire, The Production of Whiteness, and Logics of Exclusion**

Although Colley and Kumar offer a conceptual approach to British and English identities through historical and historical-sociological lenses, there is also a literature which investigates the relationship between the construction of whiteness and Empire. As a key example of this literature, *Whiteness, Class and the Legacies of Empire* by Katharine Tyler offers an ethnographic perspective on the construction of not only British and English identities, but particularly of the unmarked and invisible role of Whiteness within those identities. Framing her choice of field sites in her native Leicestershire, she notes that her locations of ‘Greenville’, ‘Coalville’, and ‘Streetville’ can be taken as general examples of white, middle class suburbs/rural villages, post-industrial working-class ex-coal mining villages, and the diverse, multi-ethnic and urban neighbourhood of the city, respectively.

Theoretically, Tyler’s argument is heavily rooted in the work of feminist scholar Ruth Frankenberg, whose work looks at the unmarked invisibility of whiteness as a category in and of itself (Tyler 2012:16). As Tyler elaborates, much of this category involves particular forms of colonially produced knowledge of ‘Others’, coinciding with the emergence of “academic

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<sup>6</sup> Admittedly this is not necessarily a new or novel comparison, but one often iterated nevertheless. Works such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* can be seen as an example of this comparison.

disciplines such as anthropology, geography, linguistics and history” (Ibid., cf. Cohn 1996).

Quoting Frankenberg:

Central to this colonial discourse is the notion of the colonized subject as irreducibly Other from the standpoint of the Western self. Equally significant, while discursively generating and marking a range of cultural and racial Others as different from an apparently Western or White self, the Western self is itself produced *as an effect of* the Western discursive production of Others (Frankenberg 1993:17, quoted in Tyler 2012:17, emphasis in original).

Following the theoretical premises elaborated here, it becomes clearer and clearer that the very concepts of British, English, and white selves are thoroughly produced, shaped, and defined through the colonial encounter and the production of the ‘Colonial Other.’ Rather than national identity functioning upon a positive articulation, it is by knowing what one is *not* that one knows what one is. This is reliant on particular constructions of race which are further constructed within the imperial process and exacerbated with post-war migration of imperial subjects to the UK.

Tyler then moves to the theoretical significance of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, noting the ways of being and dispositions of Whiteness and how this involves generalisations, as well as “the rigidly binomial opposition of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’” (Said 1978:227, quoted in Tyler 2012:17). The result of these discursive functions is, according to Frankenberg, “the production of an unmarked, apparently autonomous white/Western self, in contrast with the marked, Other racial and cultural categories with which the racially and culturally dominant category is constructed” (Frankenberg 1993:17, quoted in Tyler 2012:18). Within this, it is worthwhile to note the ways in which these constructed identities are then naturalised to appear essential, biological, and thus, taken for granted.

In Tyler’s ethnography, she describes the various ways in which these differences are described and spoken about particularly in her field site of white, middle-class, rural/suburban ‘Greenville.’ She notes that in the English imaginary with its myths and symbols, the countryside and the rural village are often romanticised to be a ‘last bastion of Englishness’ which explicitly situates the ideas of villageness within an exclusive and bounded notion of Englishness that is categorically White (Tyler 2012:41).

Noting one of the distinctions between Britishness and Englishness, she also notes how descriptions of Leicester as ‘Britain’s Curry Capital’ include and welcome BrAsian<sup>7</sup> cuisine as British, whilst more ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ foods are specifically described as English (Tyler 2012:

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<sup>7</sup> This is a term which Tyler specifically employs to refer to British Asians.

85-87). Noting the tension and boundaries of these respective foods (curry and Stilton and Red Leicester cheeses) and places (city and country), she writes:

This slippage in language between 'English' to describe food produced in the countryside, and 'British' mobilised to signify the national appeal of curry, illustrates the racially inclusive constitution of the idea of Britishness within English vernacular—but the racially exclusive, bounded and Whiteness constitution of Englishness. In this way, Red Leicester cheese, Melton hunt cake, pork pie and Stilton have appeal to a racially inclusive British public, and yet are produced in a racially exclusive, whiteness, purely English setting. This is achieved by invocation of that centuries old, rurality idyllic countryside that stands in stark contrast to the exotica of the city (Tyler 2012:87).

And though British and English may operate in different ways, both still maintain distinct and observable relationships with the colonial Other, even if the connections between Empire and the familiar setting of Leicestershire are not made explicit in the tourist literature that Tyler examines.

From this standpoint, Tyler offers much to our discussion of the relationship between Empire and the making of Britishness and Englishness. Subsequently, the idea of whiteness is also integrated within the two national identities and produced and reproduced through language and notions of place in a domestic, English setting. Thus, it is not only the British state and identity which is constructed by over a century of near-constant conflict and differentiation between European and colonial others (as with Colley's account), or the *Staatsvolker*/imperial nationalism of the English which marks their identity a la Kumar; rather, the very concept of whiteness is also created and re-created.

Colonial logics of othering have clearly been central to the production of Britishness, Englishness and whiteness. While these share much overlap in common, at the same time, they are clearly not coterminous. For example, hybrid and hyphenated identities in Britain are always paired with British, but never English (cf. Tyler 2012:87). Categories like 'Black British' or 'BrAsian' are notably different from categories such as 'Black English' or 'Indian English'; indeed, the latter categories carry an unwieldy awkwardness and are not at all used in articulations of ethnicity among ethnic minorities in Britain (Gilroy 2002 [1987]:46-47). Paul Gilroy makes the point that although "Britain is a multi-racial society, it is still a long way from being a multi-racial nation" (Worsthorne 1982, quoted in Gilroy 2002 [1987]:46). Although a black person may be granted (British) citizenship at birth, they are not considered *English*, as they have "a nation of their own" (Gilroy 2002 [1987]:47). A similarly cynical point on this account is Norman Tebbit's notorious 'cricket test' by which the Conservative Lord suggested that although a person of West Indian or Asian descent may legally be a UK citizen, their nationhood and allegiance was actually reliant on who they supported in the cricket between their 'home nation' (e.g., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,

etc.) and England. The implication of this then is that British may be a fairly inclusive identity which can be reconciled to 'ethnic difference' whereas English cannot be. Echoing Tyler's analysis of the language used to describe food and race, British is relatively racially inclusive, whereas English is racially *exclusive*, bounded, and Whitened (2012:87).

As emerges however, what is central to all of these is a logic of varying degrees of exclusion, again echoing Stoler et al.'s comment about gradations and sliding scales of difference (Stoler et al 2007:9). In the example of Paul Gilroy's seminal work on Britishness, race, and exclusion, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), these logics are not only about the creation of others, they are also about a fundamental logic of *exclusion* as the title of his work suggests. Despite contemporary notions of inclusivity and tolerance as key to notions of Englishness and Britishness (Kelly 2012, Moyn 2014), Gilroy's influential account suggests quite the opposite.

Gilroy writes in referring to the British and English through the use of "Phrases like 'the Island Race' and 'the Bulldog Breed' [which] vividly convey the manner in which this nation is represented in terms which are simultaneously biological and cultural" which are further codified in the Immigration Act of 1968 which was used to exclude black subjects of the empire on account of re-defining national membership on bloodlines wherein a grandparent had to be born in the UK (Gilroy 2002 [1987]:44). Although British immigration policy was opened to the Commonwealth immediately after the Second World War, Wendy Webster illustrates some of the ways in which Britain's attitudes to immigration were shaped from the 1960's onwards, where much of immigration policy has largely been based on a logic of difference and thereby exclusion (2005:149-181). This difference and exclusion is not only present in law, but as Gilroy demonstrates, through everyday language which is normalised and internalised through vernacular usage.

Gilroy notes the language used to describe black settlement through metaphors of invasion and occupation, most clearly demonstrated through the controversial Conservative MP, Enoch Powell and his notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech—a point which is no less relevant in contemporary, present-day conversations about immigration both from the former Empire as well as from Eastern Europe (2002 [1987]:44-45). In 1987 at the time of writing, Gilroy notes the use of dangerous and dehumanising metaphors such as "The enemy within, the unarmed invasion, alien encampments, alien territory and new commonwealth occupation" (Ibid.:45). He also notes that such language demonstrates (and re-produces) a problematic and essentialist conflation between national, racial/ethnic, and cultural boundaries (cf. Stolcke 1995). Noting this use of

violent language, Tyler titles one of her chapters as the “BrAsian ‘Invasion’ of Village Life”, echoing the sort of violent and dangerous tropes which are often applied to Colonial and non-white Others. Considering a more recent example, this language of ‘invasion’ is often used when speaking about Muslim Britons in particular and it draws comparison with the sort of language of ‘swarms of refugees’ used by right-wing tabloids such as the *Daily Mail* as well as right-wing parties such as UKIP.

The correspondence between the racist rhetoric of immigration today and the post-war period onward further suggests the inertia of particular ideas of race, Britishness, and Englishness.<sup>8</sup> But this chapter also suggests that these ideas are more pervasive and deeply rooted than we may want to recognise. These particularly toxic ideas and violent metaphors of invasion or occupation are not only relevant today, but they are also derived from a history of colonialism and the exclusive logics of difference which create the British/English self as well as Colonial, non-White ‘Others.’ Rather than being a relic of the past, these categories of race and principles of exclusion continue to have a profound and problematic impact on the present and contemporary articulations of Britishness and Englishness.

In his search to locate English identity, Ian Baucom (1999) also touches on the logic of exclusion in relation to a history of colonialism and its discursive logic of difference. Looking at the history of British citizenship law, Baucom focusses on what still remains the foundation of citizenship and immigration law in Britain today, the British Nationality Act, 1981 passed under the Thatcher Government (1999:7). According to Baucom, during and shortly after the Second World War, Britishness was tied to the “territory of the nation *and* the empire” in the logic of the British Nationality Bill, 1948 through its creation of the category of ‘citizenship of the United Kingdom-and-colonies’ which itself is an allusion to British subject-hood within the Empire (Ibid.10, emphasis in original). The logic of the 1948 bill makes differentiation of Colonial Others, but it still demonstrates a relative degree of inclusivity and a shared sense of subject-hood and therefore, particular rights within a notion of ‘Britishness’. Indeed, as far as the Windrush generation, it was this law which legally provided for their migration to Britain in the first place.

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<sup>8</sup> At the time of writing, this issue came to the fore in regards to the ‘hostile environment’ created by the Home Office towards non-white populations in the UK. The Windrush Scandal in April 2018 and the treatment of post-war Commonwealth migrants (the majority of whom are non-white and from the Caribbean) in part illustrate the ways in which non-white residents who have spent the majority of their lives in Britain are still subject to an exclusive rhetoric of citizenship based on race. For example, see Slawson 2018 or Muir 2018 in *The Guardian*.

In her ethnography of Leicestershire, Tyler draws similar attention to the constructions of language around BrAsian (British-Asian) populations, particularly in the minds of her white middle-class informants in her field site of 'Greenville,' the rural/suburban village. She notes the ways in which BrAsians in the village are seen as foreign by local, white residents. They are considered to be out of place, from 'over there' instead of belonging in a place like Leicestershire; their intimate relations through the encounter and experience of Empire are not recognised (2012:73). Following Gilroy's logic of exclusion, Tyler's work also seems to suggest that there are particular places where non-white Others are tolerably included (the environment of the city, for example) and others where they are seen to impinge on exclusive spaces of (white) Englishness, such as the countryside, again echoing the gradations of exclusivity between Britishness and Englishness. This is also echoed throughout the work of Baucom and his discussion of the English countryside and the sacred, idyllic village cricket green and a particular vision of the rural as a version of a 'pure' England (1999:150).

This discussion on Britishness, Englishness, race, and logics of exclusion demonstrates the ways in which the possession of Empire and the colonial encounter have been undeniably fundamental in the ways in which these national identities are constructed and presently reiterated in Britain and England. They are also deeply relational, not only with each other, but between coloniser and colonised. Thus, histories of Empire are not distant, detached, and benign in their implications, but they have been central to the making of Britain and the making of England itself in profound ways which go beyond changes in the national diet with the introduction of tea, sugar, and potatoes, or the material wealth accumulated through slave and colonial trades. Rather, the immaterial legacies and vestiges of Empire—particularly a discursive logic of race and identity—are perhaps some of the most notable and problematic continuities of that Empire.

These logics of exclusion are not simply relics of the past. Considering discourses on race and the enshrining of these exclusions in UK citizenship and immigration law, they clearly linger into the present with resounding effect both legally and in the vernacular through the use of language. Therefore, the consequence of Empire on making Britain and making England is not simply a conceptual, theoretical concern for historians, but rather, the implications of this on the vernacular and popular imagination are especially brought to light through Tyler's work. Empire did not simply affect Britain in a historical sense or in material ways, but the very constitution of Britishness (and Englishness) itself is profoundly and continuously shaped by the colonial encounter in a whole range of manners which have been touched upon briefly here.

Considering this, I suggest that at stake in understandings of histories of Empire today are understandings of the constitution of Britishness. Formulations of nationalism are often reliant on a shared history (for example, the work of Ernest Renan [1886]) and these histories and narratives—the stories that a nation tells about itself, its past, and its origins—are articulations of the very nature of the people. They are not only models of, but also, arguably models for the nation (cf. Geertz 1973, Stoler et al 2007:9). However, if attitudes concerning Empire have changed after processes of decolonisation and the emergence of an increasingly normative discourse of Human Rights (which more often than not includes an articulation of self-determination in opposition to polities of Empire), how might these changing political climates affect the ways in which history is narrated? Could these changing attitudes account for what some might consider a sea-change in the ways in which histories of Empire are presented and narrated? Could this account for the ambivalence of the memory of Empire in the present, as well as some of the ‘sensitivity’ of these histories in which—as I will discuss in Chapter 3—these topics are at times tip-toed around and engaged circumspectively? Could these opposing attitudes—and the high stakes involved—also account for the contestation of these histories not merely on the basis of factuality and veracity, but for the sake of present-day political concerns as well?

### **The “Stuff” of Empire: Material Processes of Empire**

The above discussion on the immateriality of Empire and the ideas which drove, and continue to drive, these processes does not discount that material exchanges and movements were key aspects of Empire. Indeed, the material movements and exchanges of Empire—however unequal or oppressive they may have been—are some of the lasting legacies of imperial processes, demonstrated through demographic shifts through both former colonies and metropolises such as the majority white populations of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, or large populations of African descent throughout the Caribbean and the United States, let alone the East Asian, South Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities in various parts of the UK. Another aspect of this has been the histories of settler colonialism and the forced displacement of land and physical violence against various indigenous people around the world (for example Coombes 2006). Differences in consumption patterns and diets were also key material changes caused by Empire, such as the consumption of imperial goods such as tea, coffee, sugar (Mintz 1986), cotton, rubber, tobacco, and oil (Mitchell 2009). But beyond trade, there is also the question of what Empire (as both an entity with ‘real’ consequences in the world, as well

as an imagined entity) left behind—in both former colonies and in our midst in former metropolises today.

Ann Stoler's *Imperial Debris* (2013) offers us a further understanding of this. In her introduction, she opens up further dimensions through which we might understand and conceptualise Empire, particularly the *material* remnants and entanglements of Empire which do not easily fade out of existence with the end of formal geopolitical Empire, but which, in the words of Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, are the 'rot that remains' (2013:2). As such, Empire has not only immaterial forms and attributes, but it also has concrete, material forms which remain and endure, despite processes of decay.

In *Imperial Debris*, Stoler notes the active, procedural, and ongoing nature of the word "ruin" and the various temporalities which may be evoked from the term "ruination" and which she therefore utilises: "To think with ruins of empire is to emphasize less the artefacts of empire as *dead matter* or remnants of a defunct regime than to attend to their reappropriations, neglect, and strategic and *active positioning within the politics of the present*" (2013:11, emphasis added). Here, ruination speaks of the ways in which the process is active and ongoing and not relegated to a temporally distant and ruptured past. By invoking this particular argument, I want to take the material dimensions and her claims about *ongoing* entanglements to argue for the continuing relevance of discussing Empire and the enduring ways in which it persists and does not go away so easily. This will be unpacked in even greater detail through the ethnography of the next chapter to look at the ways in which the presence of Empire's materiality haunts the city of Bristol.

But in contrast to the broad range of literature in specific examples, this analytical thread can also be taken back to imperial metropolises to consider the ways in which the material remnants of Empire linger there too. Furthermore, these material remnants create a haunting presence of Empire in the old metropolises today. Thus, Stoler's argument on imperial debris is not merely relevant to the material "ruins" of Empire beside and among those who live in former colonies, but also to the debris and material remnants of Empire in places just like Bristol. These are not necessarily looked upon with the gaze of ruin or as imperial (Stoler 2013:12-13, Gordillo 2004)—but are nevertheless present in countless places throughout England today. As Chapter 2 addresses through the lens of the historical walking tour, Bristol itself was not only a hub for the transatlantic slave trade, but this trade also supported a number of local businesses, such as glass factories, ironmongers, gunsmiths, sugar mills, and tobacco factories. Thinking about the material landscapes of British cities, the material movement of people and goods was not simply something that happened 'over there' in West Africa, the Caribbean, or the Americas, but the goods and



profits of these colonial relationships had a profound and lasting material effect in cities like Bristol.

This is also the case in other British port cities, such as Liverpool, Glasgow, and London. Questions about the re-appropriation and re-use of various docklands in Bristol, Liverpool, and London can be understood in this light, considering the vast warehouses, docks, and obsolete shipping infrastructure left in central urban areas in places like Bristol's Harbourside, Liverpool's Quayside, and London's Docklands (Wemyss 2016) as these old-fashioned, often Georgian or Victorian Docks were too small to support container shipping. In each of these areas, gentrification and new development—at times involving the destruction of these obsolete yet historic facilities—has been the trend, eradicating some of the largest material traces of Empire. Indeed, one of London's great financial centres at Canary Wharf is situated on the old West India Docks on the Thames (Wemyss 2016). But the built and environment of these cities (as well as the countryside)—grand houses (Dresser and Hahn 2013), mansions, and town halls—are also examples of the leftover materialities of Empire in Britain today. Similarly, the legacy of the Tate family (of Tate and Lyle, the sugar merchants) is significant in both London and Liverpool, perhaps best known to the general public for not only sugar, but in the art world with the eponymous Tate Galleries sponsored by the Tate family's sugar fortune.

The literature strongly suggests that Empire clearly involved a material dimension both in and among the colonised as well as the colonisers. Furthermore, these material interventions were often transformative, and just as they changed the landscapes and people affected by them in former colonies, these material movements of people and of goods also changed metropolitan landscapes and left lasting legacies in terms of material remnants, monuments, and namesakes which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter has not been to recap the entire history of the British Empire, nor has it been to provide an exhaustive review on literature which touches on the concept and idea of Empire. Looking at the material and immaterial dimensions in which Empire has been, and is continuously, manifested, this chapter has aimed to address questions about the space and time of Empire: where was the Empire, and when was/is it? Conceptualising Empire in these analytical dimensions allows us to open up a further discussion on the ways in which Empire, in both its material and immaterial forms, *continues* to entangle both coloniser and colonised in powerful

ways which go beyond popular histories and evaluations of whether or not the British Empire was 'good or bad.'

Again, I stress the importance of Empire as relationship and connection in both material and immaterial senses. This notion of connection is particularly vital as in the coming chapters, understanding of the British Empire is primarily marked by *disconnection*. As discussed in the Introduction, this is not indicative of the sort of amnesia suggested by some commentators. Through the course of my fieldwork and the ethnographic chapters which follow, I am not convinced that anyone has *forgotten* that Britain had an Empire. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which my informants in Bristol recognise the degree of connections between here and there and past and present that the Empire forged.

In emphasising the material dimension of Empire through debris, monuments, and the built landscape as well immaterial aspects of Empire in ideas such as British and English identity, categories of racial difference, forms of knowledge, and the lasting ideational influences of Empire, we are also able to question the very notion of rupture and disconnection which seems to be summed up in the idea of the British Empire as 'a long time ago, over there' and to consider in the following chapter the ways in which Empire and its connections continue to endure and haunt the present through its materiality.



## Chapter Two: Presenting the Past: The City, Its Past, and its Present via Historical Walking Tours, Presence, and Absence

How does a city tell the story of its past? On the one hand, this is a question which concerns the stories that are told about a city; in a basic sense then, there is an aspect of the 'what' of the past. On the other hand, there is also a matter of the 'how' of the past, consisting of a host of different methods and techniques through which that past is engaged, evoked, presented, or revealed, whether through words or through non-verbal means.

If, as the Introduction has argued, history is often considered within the framework of historicism and its assumption of linear temporality (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, Hodges 2013, Palmie and Stewart 2016), what might this actually look like in practice? Are these particular historicist assumptions actually embedded in the ways in which those involved with history and heritage make and disseminate history? Ethnographically, what sort of lived experiences and empirical practices demonstrate the variations of historicities which anthropologists such as Hirsch and Stewart, Hodges, and Palmie encourage us to consider in greater detail?

Granted, there are many historical practices through which one may come to know or experience the past. Although a historicism-laden approach may strictly focus on the work done by the historian and archivist, Trouillot (2015 [1995]) reminds us that the archive is but one site and one aspect in the practice of historical construction. For example, the work of Matt Hodges looks at the ways in which locals in a French village get involved in archaeological digs (2013), or the ways in which another French village narrates its past (2010). In another example, Sharon Macdonald's exemplary ethnography looks at the post 1945 history of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg (2009). Her work considers a host of heritage practices, from the ways in which local non-profit heritage groups provide walking tours through the site, to the museum displays which are installed on the site, and the ways in which locals use and interpret the space. Furthermore, a range of works (Leinaweaver 2017, Macdonald 1998, McAleer 2013 for example) consider the ways in which constructed museum displays are involved with the inherently political practices of historical construction, dissemination, and interpretation.

Within the constellation of history-workers in Bristol (Gordillo 2014), this chapter specifically focuses on just a handful of particular actors: volunteer guides for a Council-sponsored historical walking tour. As they operate out of Council-run museums and wear Bristol City Council volunteer ID cards, they represent one aspect of the Council's interpretation and narration of Bristol's history along with museum displays. While these walking tours aren't the only means of

“official history”<sup>9</sup> and narration on behalf of the Council (and although I am cautious to overstate the significance of these walking tours in heritage construction in Bristol, nor do I wish to present the Council as monolithic) they are nevertheless a component of a Council-sponsored account of history (Macdonald 2006b, 2006c, Samuel 1994). Additionally, they offer insight into different dimensions and dynamics of heritage work in the city beyond purely representational approaches, considering that walking tours are perhaps first of all, physical, embodied, sensory, and social experiences (Lee and Ingold 2006). The tours are thus a particular mode of being-in-the-city, combining a historical gaze towards the past while encountering the materiality of the city in the present.

The historical walking tours presented admittedly rely on a fair amount of historical information in the sense of consulting either archives, history books, or other sources devised under and within the discipline of academic historicism. But on the other hand, they also rely on a variety of other sources which fall outside of those disciplinary codes, such as personal memories (of both the guides and the audience) as well as local legends and oral histories of the city. Considering that these tours are led by volunteers on behalf of Bristol City Council, there is an element of these acting as an “official history” (Samuel 1994), but with a particular hybridity or bricolage involved which gives room for co-production with the audience to share their own insights and memories, and which often get incorporated into future tours. Considering the constructed nature of any historical narrative, it may go without saying that no historical narrative is either uncontested or uncontestable, as will emerge in this chapter and others. Indeed, any narrative of Bristol’s past—especially from a council sponsored perspective—is fraught with internal tensions and delicate complexities, not to mention topics such as the slave trade which have been designated as “sensitive” by the Council.

Considering the embodied and affective nature of a walking tour, the city’s past as presented here is not necessarily one of a chronological, linear temporal narrative, but rather, a complex collage of interactions between past and present, involving tour guides, audiences, and the built environment and materiality of the city itself (cf. Hodges 2013 on affective, non-linear genres of knowing the past). Emphasising the materiality of the city in particular and its multiple temporalities, this chapter illustrates the ways in which the past leaks beyond its containment. This also problematizes a linear, historicist notion of time which assumes rupture between past

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<sup>9</sup> Here, I invoke Ralph Samuel’s distinction between official and unofficial history (1994, Hodges 2013) and suggest that considering the openness to collaboration and input from the audience, as well as the claim by guides that they are ‘not experts by any means’, these tours demonstrate a complex hybridity between official and unofficial history rather than a clear-cut distinction between the two.

and present. These leakages and excesses beyond strategies of containment are specifically discussed within the notion of 'presencing' in the latter part of the chapter.

The paths taken by these tours follow routes through the spaces of the city and tell the story of the city *along the way* instead of by a sort of chronological, temporal priority which might have tours zig-zagging across the city in a rather impractical manner (cf. Azaryahu and Foote 2008, Lee and Ingold 2006). As such, the very materiality of the city and its streetscape plays a fundamental role in guiding and shaping the tours and both their possibilities and constraints. What emerges in the contexts of these walking tours is not merely a story of Bristol's past, but reflection and analysis of a particular historical practice through which that past is presented and known beyond the documentary archive or text alone (Reed 2002).

In many regards, these tours also map onto the wider scholarly literature on walking tours, such as the work of Brin and Noy (2010) who look at the performative aspects of walking tours and the potential of tours to both articulate narratives and to reaffirm particular ideologies or identities, or the work of Aoki and Yoshimizu (2015) who note the ability of the walking tour to resist and disrupt dominant narratives as a matter of poetics and politics, to draw attention to what is often marginalised, silenced, or invisible. Azaryahu and Foote (2008) also note the challenges and variations of narrative strategies in light of spatial and temporal configurations and assumptions. As may seem obvious, all of these authors also note the inherent selectivity of the genre as one of its core limitations (Markwell et al 2004:459-460); there are stories which are both told and untold in every tour as a matter of performance (Brin and Noy 2010), narrative strategy (Azaryahu and Foote 2008), or by intent and design (Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015). Furthermore, as Markwell et al. note, these matters of selectivity can also be enfolded into aspects of positionality of guides and tour designers, and can omit issues of gender, class, and ethnicity in their interpretations (2004:465). Within all of these texts, both the history of cities and the representation and interpretation of these histories are clearly matters of contest, tension, and negotiation, as well as potential sites of power inequalities. Thus, what emerges is the historical walking tour as a useful yet inherently imperfect heritage practice for articulating historical narratives through embodied movement, multisensorial engagement, and verbal narratives. This practice also operates through relations and interactions between guides, audiences, and the materiality of the city itself. Analytically then, the walking tour offers a site of analysis for the ethnographer to consider many of these tensions and issues through what is admittedly the Council's hegemonic narrative of the city's history.

The chapter suggests that the historical walking tour frames the entire city as an archive, complete with particular records of the past, which, despite being created in the past, continue to persist at the present moment and for the foreseeable future. The idea is that the cityscape itself becomes a sort of material archive, a record of the city's history not only from the past, but multi-temporal in that it reaches into the present and exists for a future. Although Crang (1996:430) suggests that Bristol (or any city) can be understood through the lens of palimpsest (noting in particular the ways in which the city is written and re-written while still maintaining traces of the past), this chapter pushes back and nuances that metaphor through the suggestion of archive. Crang is correct to note the ways in which the city is under constant change through seemingly infinite series of accumulations which nevertheless maintain traces of the past and which mark the passage of time. However, this chapter looks at a different angle to understand how people interact with the materiality of the city in a specific practice. Rather than building on Crang's analysis which looks at the ways in which urban spaces are envisioned through photographs, this chapter adds the embodied, multi-sensory element of materiality which exceeds the photograph. Indeed, my informants use photographs in ways similar to Crang's suggestions to demonstrate urban change and the passage of time; however, the affective interactions of the historical walking tour still exceed the capacity of photographs, even if the tour utilises photographs as a memory technique. Considering the ways in which people and materiality of the urban landscape interact, I suggest that the city as archive suggests a particular way in which the city is not only a container of memory, but that it contains an enduring record of the city's past for reference in the present and presumed future.

Instead of focusing through a textual or photographic lens (Crang 1996) or assuming that the materiality of the cityscape is representational or symbolic (Domanska 2006:337), this chapter takes a frame which suggests that particularly guides and participants of walking tours interact with (and are acted upon by) the material "thing-ness" of the city (Ibid.:339-341) with a gaze directed towards the past. Domanska demonstrates this is "both continuous from the present and discontinuous with it, which simultaneously is and is not" (Ibid.:345). Considering this paradoxical simultaneity, she urges us to consider not *presence and absence* in opposition, but rather, the past as either "non-absent (whose absence is manifest) or non-present (whose presence is not manifest)" in a complementary manner. Rather than following a historicist assumption which focuses

around the non-present past, that is, the non-manifest presence of the past (the debate about the possibility of presentifying and representing the past involves the question of

whether it is possible to attain knowledge about something that no longer exists) (Ibid.:346)

Domanska suggests a linkage between the non-present past and the present. Rather, she writes that

the category of the non-absent past (the past whose absence is manifest) ...acquires positive meaning...and avoid[s] the desire to presentify and represent the past, and instead, we turn to a past that is somehow still present, that will not go away, or rather, that of which we cannot rid ourselves. The non-absent past is the ambivalent and liminal space of 'the uncanny'; it is a past that haunts like a phantom and therefore cannot be so easily controlled or subject to a finite interpretation. It is occupied by 'ghostly artifacts' or places that undermine our sense of the familiar and threaten our sense of safety (...) The trace-being—the missing body—possesses a kind of *power of absence*, where I use the word "power" deliberately to refer to the magic and mysterious ness of the past that is not absent (Ibid).

With this framework of presence in mind, this chapter suggests that part of how this dynamic of temporality and presence operates in the context of the historical walking tour is precisely through materiality—through the "ghostly artefacts" and places which undermine our familiarity; through these buildings and places of the foreign country of the past (cf. Lowenthal 1985) which stay with us and endure and project their very quality of pastness into the present. The past as it were, may appear non-present; but through the enduring temporality of its material traces—the urban landscape, buildings, objects, things—it is hardly absent in the present moment. In fact, it is in this very temporal entanglement of presence and absence that the historical walking tour exists.

Domanska's crucial approach for this framework is further founded and reinforced by a range of literature on materiality. Following Domanska, how might we adopt a framework which doesn't assume that a thing stands for something else as symbol of the past, but as a thing in its own right, with a sense of agency, a la Latour (2004, cited in Domanska 2006:337-340)? As she paraphrases from Latour, there is a sense of *public things* which create public spaces around them and gather publics around them as actors (Domanska 2006:340; cf. Massey 1995:183). In the case of the cityscape, although this chapter looks at the Council tour guides as actors, it may also be worth considering the city and its built environment as a kind of actor which those on the tour (whether guides or participants) interact with. How might things within the city (for example statues, buildings, landmarks) act upon the guides and participants and perhaps create a sort of sensory engagement with the past (however simulated this may be) (Reed 2002)? Or how might the cityscape evoke certain memories or affective emotions? How then might the city and the tour participants interact and create a certain sort of historical consciousness or understanding of the past through the historical walking tour?



Although there is an incredibly broad range of anthropological literature on materiality and affect (for example, Gell 1998, Miller 2010, Latour 2005, Tilley 2004), what I wish to focus on here in this theoretical overview is not materiality and affect so much as the relationships between materiality and memory and materiality and time. Among others, the work of Caitlin DeSilvey, Tim Edensor, and Ann Stoler (see also Birth 2006, Lowenthal 1985, Crang and Travlou 2001, Macdonald 2006a, 2006b, 2009, Gordillo 2014) help to frame our approach on materiality, memory, and the past.

Although their work primarily deals with ruins, affect, and processes of decay, the work of DeSilvey (2006) and Edensor (2005, 2013) offer one point of departure into this literature. Perhaps one particularly useful aspect of DeSilvey's piece is to theorise and interpret objects as process (2006:323) instead of simply understanding objects in stasis. Doing so effectively reorientates our understanding of temporality and material things. Her particular focus on decay as a process involves multiple (including non-human) actors, opening up the ability to think about the temporal nature of objects beyond the present moment in which they are observed. Yet she also notes the pattern in conservation and heritage discourses and modes of presentation to assume objects as frozen in time (Ibid.:324).

Likewise, Edensor's discussion of the materiality (and therefore complex temporal nature) of stone in Central Manchester (2012) and of industrial ruins (2005) adds another layer to the theoretical backdrop which frames our discussion of the historical walking tour. Stone, as Macdonald notes (2006a, 2006b, 2009, cf. Tilley 2004) serves as a sort of material par excellence in which architects and designers can build and encode notions of power and endurance. Furthering this understanding of stone, Edensor considers the multiple interactions between past and present, with entangled histories, absence, and presence. These can all be found in the very materiality of a thing such as the stone which is prevalent through the Manchester cityscape just as it is in Bristol and many other British cities. In particular, he notes

Absence is revealed through an intimate engagement with matter, drawing on archives and histories but also by developing an affective, sensual and imaginative sensibility towards materiality so that the absences of other places, networks and connections, distant lives and events, human remains, matter, cultural practices and tastes, environmental conditions and its material effects, historical recognition and matter itself are made present and acknowledged (Edensor 2013: 451).

In a nutshell, the historical walking tour is the perfect example of Edensor's proposed "affective, sensual, and imaginative sensibility towards materiality" (Ibid.). As such, it makes present

(however faintly or consciously) the absences and connections of Bristol's history, in both spatial and temporal terms.

Connecting this framework with histories of Empire and colonialism, Ann Stoler writes of "imperial debris," to think about the materialities of waste, ruins, and remnants of colonial processes throughout formerly colonised places, such as the remains of Fordlandia in the Brazilian Amazon, or remnants of churches in the Argentinian Chaco (Stoler 2008, Stoler 2013; Gordillo 2014). Stoler thus encourages us to think about the ways that those who live in such places continue to deal with or interact with these ruins as a sort of "rot that remains".

Taking this concept of the excesses and remnants of Empire, to what extent could aspects of the Bristol cityscape and its materiality be considered perhaps not so much as "debris" per se, but nevertheless, as present-absences particularly of Empire and its networks and connections? As we will see, this is not the primary lens through which Bristol's history is considered, but I argue that it nevertheless persists in the background, haunting and surrounding the wider picture as a frame. The history of Empire and Bristol's deep, entangled association with the imperial project lingers through the materiality of the city. And even if it often goes unremarked and unrecognised, a lack of recognition or silence around the matter does not necessarily signal absence or forgetting. Rather, as the following chapters reveal in more detail, silence is hardly akin to forgetting.

The historical walking tour is therefore an opportunity to consider how people interact with the materiality of the cityscape in the construction and dissemination of historical narrative. On the one hand, it serves as a means of *presenting* a Council-sponsored narrative of Bristol's past and its history. While on the surface, this can be read in a straightforward manner, the walking tour as a historical practice holds more complexities beneath this. It also serves as a means by which heritage volunteers and actors not only narrate and disseminate knowledge of the past, but it also reveals some of (though not all of) their particular anxieties and concerns about the city. It also exposes a number of their assumptions about how they conceive and understand the past, their relationship to this past, and the history of their city. While the chapter does not so much recreate the entire walking tour in full detail, it introduces particular ethnographic scenes from these exercises to illustrate moments from this narrative. It also serves as an introduction to the Council-sponsored historical narrative which other actors discuss and respond to in a number of ways in Chapter 4.

Structurally, this chapter firstly introduces the M Shed Walking Tours and aspects of a Council-sponsored historical narrative. The aim is not to recreate the tours in their entirety, but to provide an introduction and overview of the practices, their stated aims, and general themes. Afterwards, one particular example of the walking tour is utilised to draw up some of the key themes, tensions, and issues which the guides raise through their stops and narration.

Analytically, however, the historical walking tour as a mode of being-in-the-city complicates and problematises some wider historical assumptions, particularly in relation to notions of historicist, linear time (cf. Azaryahu and Foote 2008). Part of this is inherent in the very temporality of memory—it is an act done in the present with a gaze towards the past. With this gaze towards the past in mind, some of the sensory techniques utilised by the tour guides here are marked under the term of '*presencing*', which involve an interaction with the materiality of the city, its multitemporality, and the experience of walking through the city in the present moment. Following a materiality approach, this chapter suggests that the history of the city is not easily displaced into a remote past, but rather, the enduring materiality of the city affectively makes present a past which is simultaneously absent and present. This echoes Derrida and Freud's notions of haunting and the *unheimlich* nature of the past and the ways in which it escapes strategies of displacement and containment, echoed in Domanska's framework of the non-absent past. As such the past is effectively *made present* through these practices and interactions.

The final part of the chapter then considers materiality, reflecting upon the ethnographic data and the theory on materiality and memory in the beginning of the chapter. There, I present the historical walking tour as a way of engaging the city as a material archive, and thus, another way of knowing the past through the city's material landscape rather than through a textually based, archival model. Thus, this chapter is about a particular method and practice of presence which problematises many of the assumptions embedded in a popular historicist understanding of the past and its assumption of linear temporality.

### **About the M Shed Walking Tours**

As Bristol's principal museum for local history since its opening in 2011,<sup>10</sup> M Shed hosts a series of historical walks each month. Each week hosts a different walk through a different part

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<sup>10</sup> There was a prior museum at the site, the Bristol Industrial Museum, which closed in 2006 and re-opened as the M Shed in 2011 (cf. Otele 2012).

of the city, and each has a specific theme and corresponding route through different neighbourhoods in the central area of the city.

Every walk is led by two Council-sponsored volunteers who are dressed in high-visibility vests, wear official Council volunteer ID badges, and carry binders full of photographs and prints of paintings relevant to the particular tour. Out of the core group of six guides, almost all of them are retired, white men who are mostly Bristol born-and-bred, albeit from a variety of different backgrounds and prior vocations. Colette, who often led the Redcliffe tours on the last Friday of the month is the exception of the group, as she currently works for the Council in another capacity and was the only regular female guide, although other volunteers filled in on occasion. Among those not Bristol born-and-bred, all have nevertheless spent many years in the city. This was the case with Ed who has been in Bristol since the 1970's despite growing up in his native Bolivia. The six guides have worked in a variety of contexts including engineering, working on the Bristol ferries, doing office work for the Council, serving in the Royal Navy and then working as an aviation firefighter, or teaching history in local schools. While none of them claim to be experts—in fact, all of them explicitly deny being “experts”—many of them are involved with various heritage projects throughout the city, and many have pronounced interests in the harbour in particular. One could also argue that although these volunteers do not consider themselves “experts” per se, their kit of high-vis vests and Council ID badges gives them a *sense* of legitimacy as official guides on behalf of the Council.

On the one hand, the walking tours have been designed to promote activity and exercise, as well as to discuss different aspects of the city's history beyond the walls of the museum. But beyond these more obvious motives, whether consciously conceived as such or not by the tour designers and its volunteer guides, these tours are effectively a space of interpretation, presentation, and negotiation of Bristol's past (cf. Macdonald 2006a, 2006b, 2009; Brin and Noy 2010, Aoki and Yoshimizu 2015). Furthermore, at the heart of this is perhaps a bigger question which is mediated through modes of place-making involved through these walking tours (Markwell et al. 2004): *what kind of place, what kind of city is Bristol?*

Regarding the pedagogical value of these tours towards that end, multiple fellow participants have told me on many occasions that they love learning the history of the city for themselves. But furthermore, they also think these walks are great for when they have guests to the city who they can show around and with whom they can share what they learn. Comments like these from participants suggest that although these tours are directly consumed by a relatively small number of people, they are nevertheless central practices in how the city's past is known,

interpreted, and understood by some of its residents and visitors. This effectively creates and shapes a narrative and historical consciousness within the city which has the potential to extend at least a bit further than direct, immediate audiences. In this sense, these historical walking tours become a pedagogical tool for local history. Whether they realise it or not, the volunteer guides at M Shed are surprisingly influential and significant actors involved in shaping and influencing the city's heritage. However, looking at the tours themselves, they also reveal one aspect of the Council's approach towards the city's past, its commemoration, and the assumptions which are involved with these historical and heritage practices. In response to the key question asked above, these tours present the city as one with a rich, complex history. But above all, Bristol is a significant, great centre of trade and business.

### **An Overview of the Various Tours**

The first Tuesday of each month hosts the "Harbourside Walk" with a specific emphasis on Bristol's Harbourside along the south bank of the Floating Harbour, starting at M Shed and working its way west. Much of the north bank has been redeveloped with luxury, waterside flats. This walk is usually led by Dave and Ed, two older, long-time residents of Bristol who are familiar with the harbour: Dave has a background in engineering and is currently involved with a host of different heritage projects throughout Bristol and its harbour, including the Underfall Yard which is a stop along this tour and a heritage organisation I also volunteered for while in the city. Meanwhile, Ed appears not only as one of the guides of this walk, but a key informant who is also involved with a number of other heritage orientated organisations (such as the Bristol Civic Society). Originally from Bolivia, Ed has lived in Bristol since the 1970s. Recognisable in his bright and colourful patterned shirts, Ed has spent decades working on Bristol's ferries throughout the harbour and is a well-known figure by many involved with both heritage and the harbour. After meeting him through these tours, Ed served as a wider guide for me throughout my fieldwork, introducing me to various contacts or providing me with more extensive context of other heritage actors and activities.

The "Bedminster Walk" takes place on the second Wednesday of each month and explores the industrial, working-class neighbourhood of Bedminster, culminating in the neighbourhood's Victoria Park. Much of this tour explores the industrial heritage of the neighbourhood, explaining the evolution of many of the neighbourhood's once key industries such as tanneries and tobacco. One of the featured stops on this tour is the well-known Wills Tobacco

Factory, which has partly been re-developed as a supermarket, while another part of it is currently vacant. Although Ed is often present for this walk as a long-time Bedminster resident, the walk is also led by Nic, another one of the M Shed guides with Bristol roots.

On the third Thursday of each month, Jon and Steve usually lead the walk through Bristol's "Old City," discussing a great deal of Bristol's commercial growth and development. This tour includes many sites in the mediaeval quarter of the city, including Bristol Bridge—the site from which Bristol, derived from the Anglo-Saxon word "Brigstowe," or "place of the bridge" derives its name. Jon is a native Bristolian of a privileged upbringing, having gone to the city's prestigious and exclusive Clifton College before working as a history teacher in local Bristol schools. Steve, also a native Bristolian, has formerly served in the Royal Navy, serving in what he once described to me as "Britain's last colonial war" (the Falklands) before moving onto a career in aviation firefighting at Bristol Airport for a number of years. He has long had an interest in local history—with an admittedly marked interest in seedier bits of the city such as red-light districts—and recently decided to volunteer on these walks after retiring. As they feature in this chapter and I developed a friendship with both of them (especially Steve) through these walking tours, the two of them emerged throughout my fieldwork as two of my main informants.

The fourth Friday of each month takes a walk through Redcliffe, once a commercial centre for the city, particularly for the wool trade with the European Continent which was once key to Bristol's development prior to the triangular, colonial based trades in the late 17<sup>th</sup>, early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Situated on one side of the Avon, the neighbourhood is home to two of Bristol's most renowned landmarks: the church of St. Mary Redcliffe with its landmark spire, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and famously visited by Elizabeth I in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is also home to Temple Meads Station, the terminus of the Great Western Railway built and designed by local hero Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The walk also passes by the ruins of Temple Church, allegedly founded by the Knights Templar and now a bombed-out ruin which is now a war memorial. Its bell tower is known as the "Leaning Tower of Bristol" due to particular design flaws. This walk is usually led by Nic, although on a number of occasions, it was also led by Colette, a middle-aged woman who works for the Council in another capacity. On occasion, Ed and Steve have also led this tour.

During my fieldwork, Steve also piloted a new walking tour focusing on the 1831 Riots in Bristol, centred on the electoral controversies and class divisions which led to the historically significant 1832 Reform Act that expanded the electorate. Pilots of this tour ran a few times during the summer of my fieldwork and it has since been placed on the rota of walking tours one Sunday every month.

In the summer months of 2015, Ed and Steve also led another pilot walking tour out of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery coupled with a temporary exhibition of the works of William Hogarth under the banner of the “18<sup>th</sup> Century Bristol Walk”. This tour explored the history of Georgian Bristol, the city’s development at the time towards the area of the city now known as Clifton (one of Bristol’s most affluent neighbourhoods, with many Georgian and 19<sup>th</sup> century villas, as well as some of the city’s larger greenspaces, parks, and boutique shopping areas) and some of the mercantile conditions which created Bristol’s wealth—most notably the transatlantic slave trade. While making a brief, non-guided stop at the Georgian House Museum (the museum itself is addressed in more depth in the following chapter), this tour culminates at the former St. Nicholas Church in the Old City, a desanctified Anglican Church in the centre of the old city (now the offices of a historic preservation group), which features a large triptych of Christ, painted by Hogarth as the altarpiece for St. Mary Redcliffe in 1755.

As becomes clear, much of the content of these tours takes an 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century focus, an era of Bristol’s industrial growth and the expansion of the city’s harbour, coinciding with a wider global frame of imperial conquest and colonial trade. Yet, in what follows it is worth considering what of this imperial context is directly addressed, implied, or omitted.

### **The Old City Walking Tour**

In what follows, I draw extensively from a detailed composite of one of the walking tours, as many of the tours when led by the same guides were almost identical with the exception of questions and comments made by tour participants. On occasion, a few temporary changes in the cityscape were present (such as the installation of statues of popular cartoon characters for a charity fundraiser). Although there was no written script which the guides memorised, I had come to find that Jon and Steve had given this tour enough times that they were impressively consistent with their descriptions each month. In all, I had attended 26 tours, including 4 instances of this particular tour.

I have chosen the Old City tour as it offers the greatest breadth of the four main tours, and therefore, the broadest narrative of the city’s history, both temporally and topically. Although the entire detail of the walk cannot be discussed exhaustively, I draw on some of the key points from their explanation of the city’s history, introducing certain tensions which will be discussed below. In the theoretical section on presencing, I draw from this and other tours to suggest the

various methods and techniques used by guides to evoke and create a particular relationship between the audience, the city, its materiality, the past, and the present.

“One thing we’re trying to do,” Steve says to the group of us (often numbering a dozen or so, depending on the weather) gathered, “is take you through 1000 years of Bristol maritime history.” Indeed, the remit of the walk as advertised through promotional material claims that

Our expert leaders will point out locations which saw the birth of the city, its growth, and later decline as a major seaport and centre of commerce. Discover some of the events, people, and places that earned the city a place in national history, culture, and arts (Bristol City Council 2015).

Yet in many ways, these history walks are far more than simple history walks consumed for leisure or historical curiosity. Whether recognised as such by their guides or not, they are pedagogical tools used to construct and shape a particular sort of historical consciousness in terms of raising awareness of certain historical facts. But they also constitute a method of making history itself within the larger framework of particular historicities. The guides create a particular awareness and not necessarily ruptured relationship between past and present which is not always demonstrative of a clear linearity. In this regard, they also map onto a wider practice of “place-making” as Sarah Pink discusses in her work on walking tours in Mold in Flintshire, Wales (2008), albeit in a different way. Lee and Ingold (2006) also discuss the ways in which this place-making is both embodied and social, with the social aspect between the walker and the city as a manner of walkers “imprinting” their presence on the city, however ephemeral this may be.

In terms of presenting the historical facts of the city on a walking tour, this resembles Sharon Macdonald’s discussion of walking tours in Nuremberg and her analytical focus on “encoding” following the work of Stuart Hall (Macdonald 2006b, 2009). In her discussion of walking tours of the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, Macdonald notes that the tour guides and the group responsible for the tours takes extra caution in approaching the sensitive topic of the Nazi past, especially because of overtly politically, legally, and morally unacceptable alternative interpretations of the site (e.g., pro-Nazi sentiments). As such, guides on her tours are especially trained to ensure that their tour participants are given correct (i.e., morally acceptable) interpretations and information on the site. To a limited degree, the material on presentation in the first half of this chapter can be approached with this conceptual lens; the Bristol guides are indeed encoding/imprinting a particular interpretation of history onto the landscape and materiality of the city.



However, notable contextual differences between Nuremberg and Bristol suggest that in Bristol, this encoding takes less of an emphasis than it does in Nuremberg. M Shed guides openly invite comment and personal insight on their tours, and there is a wider contextual difference at stake in these tours. For one, the Nuremberg site falls into what Macdonald labels as a “site of perpetration” (citing Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996 in Macdonald 2006b:128). As such, the Nazi Party Rally Grounds are an overtly political and morally charged site considering their relationship with the Nazis. As Macdonald demonstrates, the site was *built* with a particular and pronounced Nazi encoding into the site and the architecture. The site in Nuremberg was explicitly built by the Nazis for their propaganda, to convey certain ideologies in architecture via architect Albert Speer’s concept of “words in stone” (Macdonald 2006b, 2009:25-33). Nazis also have a certain political connotation where nostalgia for the Nazi past is morally unacceptable and illegal, raising the stakes in Nuremberg so that guides must prioritise encoding the site appropriately.

Although Bristol has its fair share of debates concerning its past, the conditions which Macdonald describes in Nuremberg are clearly absent in Bristol. For starters, German law legally forbids the celebration of the Nazi past, especially in sites like Nuremberg. But furthermore, the legacy of Empire is itself far more ambivalent in a place Bristol, leaving a range of available interpretations depending on one’s positionality in terms of ethnicity, class, and political orientation. Thus, guides are more concerned with raising awareness of the city’s past than they are of interpreting through one particular lens or providing one correct interpretation, though this may be subject to debate. Around more “sensitive” issues presented below, they often steer towards presenting a supposedly objective account based on “historical facts and evidence” in line with a more academic historical approach, which itself may be presumed to be correct.

At the same time, they also take an open, invitational approach to allow for audiences to contribute their own insight, knowledge, and personal memories in a mode of co-production. This invitation of input during these tours is quite fitting with much of the Council’s approach in not only the openness of these tours, but also with a recently launched (at the time of fieldwork) initiative called “Know Your Place”, which featured a website with an interactive map of the city. Anyone could place a pin on the map and upload a photo and written text about the significance of the site or the contents of the photo, etc. Although the site is moderated by Council employees—including Pete Insole, an archaeologist at the Council who is responsible for this and other projects—the rationale behind this inclusive, crowdsourced history is that the city’s local residents constitute a rich database of local history, memory, and stories that escapes the attention of professional and academic historians and historical texts. The result is a project which

guides often mention as a source for tour participants to learn more, as well as a source that they occasionally use to gather more information for the tours.

This openness for audience interpretation is also reinforced by the ways in which guides talk about controversies concerning the slave trade. Where guides may feel an obligation to talk about the transatlantic slave trade and Bristol's role in it, they openly invite the audience to come to their own opinions on what should be done with the legacies and wealth from the trade as opposed to suggesting a preferred reading of what should be done with vestiges of this past in the present. This also illustrates another contextual difference around the political overtness of the tours; in Macdonald's case, there is an overt recognition of the importance of politics in interpretations used during the Nuremberg tours. Although there may be an inherent political aspect to *any* historical interpretation, the political aspects of these tours are certainly not overtly recognised or pronounced in this case. Rather, guides make a conscious effort to *not* engage in political debates. In these instances of debate or conflict, guides always revert to a stance of presumed neutrality concerned with "objectivity" and presenting "historical facts" rather than taking a pronounced side or explicitly subjective interpretation.

### **Presenting the Past: A Narrative of Bristol's History and its Tensions, Disconnect, and Decline**

At the very beginning of the tour, after the mandatory health and safety instructions, Steve asks the tour audience a question about Bristol, its location, and the view in front of us: "Why are we here?" He pulls a printed painting from a notebook of the spot we're standing on which he suggests dates to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The scene is of rural meadows and marshlands looking up river towards a busy, industrial port. It is a distant cry from the post-industrial scene where we now stand, with quays and old warehouses now filled with restaurants and bars, despite maintaining their old names, such as the V Shed and the Watershed. Yet the view of the quay is unmistakable; the site in the painting is not far from where we now stand. Steve emphasises the tidal aspect of the River Avon (which flows through Bristol)—the second highest in the world—was fundamental to Bristol's origins as a port for coastal and European trading in the city's early days.

Taking turns presenting, Jon explains that the river's tide would sweep ships into the Harbour up river to present day Bristol. Over centuries, the port developed to become the second most important port in the country after London, with Bristol having long been viewed as the second city in Britain. According to Jon, Bristol's origins date not to the Romans, but to a Saxon

settlement in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century which featured a bridge across the river, hence the original name of the city, “Brigstowe” which translates to “place of the bridge.”

Following the arrival of the Normans in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the guides build upon Bristol’s emergence to this “second city” status, a point returned to throughout the tour. Before we move onto the first stop, Jon points out the river in front of the museum. He says that the rerouting of one of Bristol’s rivers (the Frome) and the building of Bristol Castle (which was supposedly the second largest in England after the Tower of London; although by their own admission, no evidence exists to accurately support this claim) constituted the largest known engineering project in Britain until the Victorian Era projects to build canals and railways linked during the Industrial Revolution.

After introducing the significance of the Avon, Jon leads us along the quay, where we make the first stop in front of a small plaque on the brick wall of the museum, no more than a yard long. It has an inscription which reads:

IN MEMORY OF THE COUNTLESS AFRICAN MEN, WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN WHOSE ENSLAVEMENT AND EXPLOITATION  
BROUGHT SO MUCH PROSPERITY TO BRISTOL  
THROUGH THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

UNVEILED ON 12 DECEMBER 1997  
DURING EUROPEAN YEAR AGAINST RACISM

BY IAN WHITE  
MEMBER OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOR BRISTOL  
AND PHILIPPA GREGORY  
AUTHOR OF ‘A RESPECTABLE TRADE’

Stopping in front of the plaque, one can hear the emotion in Jon’s voice as he tells us that this is one of the few places in the city where one can actually see an explicit reference to this trade. In later instances of the tour, he alludes to a recent BBC documentary (*Britain’s Forgotten Slave Owners*, produced with a team of historians at University College, London and premiered in July 2015) on the slave trade and its economic effects in Britain, especially in terms of compensation given to slave owners for their “lost property” --a figure amounting to £17 billion in today’s money. As a visual aid of this presentation, Steve pulls out an illustrated map of the triangular trade from his binder while Jon explains the system. Bristol’s central role as the origin of these journeys is clear: Bristol ships and crews were financed on Bristol capital, departing Bristol Harbour stocked with Bristol produced goods (glassware, iron, guns, ammunition, wine) and sent to West Africa where the ships were loaded with African slaves. With a clearly disturbed and

passionate tone in his voice, Jon laments that the Africans were treated as subhuman. These enslaved Africans were then taken to the Americas and the West Indies where they were sold and ships were cleaned and loaded with commodities to take back to Bristol, including sugar, tobacco, cotton, molasses, and rum. We are told that this trade was so lucrative and profitable that the route was also known locally as “the Golden Triangle.” It is said that one successful complete journey would make enough money for a Bristol merchant to retire for life.

Jon continues to explain that many names of places in Bristol allude to the slave trade, its key figures and related industries. Many on the tour nod in agreement as Jon references the local historical controversies around Edward Colston (1636-1721), a notable philanthropist who allegedly made much of his money through the slave trade and the related sugar industry. As a member of the London-based Royal African Company prior to the 1698 breaking of its monopoly on “the African (or Guinea) trade”, we are told that Colston was also supposedly a figure involved with bringing the trade to Bristol, where it was incredibly successful. Jon notes the public controversy and debate exists today over the names of schools which bear his name, as well as the name of the city’s main concert hall and a statue of him in a prominent, central location in the city centre.

Jon pensively suggests that attitudes were certainly different 300 years ago than they are to now, and he makes it explicit that he and Steve are not here to moralise, nor are they there to take a stance on what should be done with the Colston statue or Colston Hall. However, they both articulate that they feel part of their role is to present this aspect of Bristol's history in an objective and factual manner, confronting audiences with this historical fact while allowing them to make their own interpretations of it. Without fail, Jon makes it a point to stop in front of this plaque on each tour to spend some time talking, thinking, and reflecting about this aspect of Bristol’s past. Other guides on other tours do not always, and indeed, some consistently walk past it without mention or reference.

Walking along the wharf by M Shed, the tour goes another 30 metres or so from the Slave Trade Plaque, where Steve points to another plaque on the side of the museum, about 15 feet high. We are told that this plaque is dedicated as the building site of the SS Great Western, the first great ship built by one of Bristol’s heroes, Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859). Brunel is best known locally for his engineering projects around the harbour including the preserved SS Great Britain, Temple Meads Station and the Great Western Railway, and the Clifton Suspension Bridge. In his Bristolian accent, Steve asks us to “Imagine that 200 years ago, this site was a shipyard and there was a massive slipway where we’re standing.” We’re encouraged to imagine

the busyness of the scene, the massive dry dock and slipway and the sounds and smells of a working shipyard—even if we are unsure about these sensations. Although the spot where we're standing is clearly in the Harbour, the modern roads, development, and urban landscape make the possibility of shipyard with all of its busyness difficult to imagine. But Steve goes on to explain that the Great Western was a part of Brunel's grand scheme to connect England with the Americas through a comprehensive rail and ship network. Providing an illustration of this plan, Jon shares a story about how the Great Western was the first steamship to cross the Atlantic fully intact. Although the Great Western technically lost a race with a Liverpool based ship, Jon tells us that the Bristol ship only lost because the Liverpool based Sirius had to burn its decking and furniture to make it to New York in good speed.

Moving along, we cross the Princes Street Drawbridge, where Jon quickly points out a small coffee kiosk on the side of a larger brick building. He notes that the larger brick building is the old Docks Labour Board, where casual workers would show up every day looking for work around the Harbour. Next to it, he notes, the small kiosk used to be a chlorination plant for the sanitation of the Floating Harbour. Invoking some of the older participants' local memories, he asks, "Do you remember how Bedminster used to smell in the 60s and 70s? How all of the industry and the tanneries just made it stink, especially on a hot, summer day?" While many of the older participants who were in Bristol then nod in agreement, Jon continues that during parts the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Floating Harbour was first built, sanitation was a major issue. The water would quickly go stagnant and polluted with all of sewage dumped into it. In response, the Harbour's engineers built this chlorination plant to sanitise the Harbour and reduce its smell.

From there, we walk back along the wharf, past the Arnolfini gallery which we are told was a former warehouse for storing tea. At the corner of the wharf, we stop in front of a large, hulking, eye level statue of another significant figure. Just a few yards away, a statue of the local cartoon figure Shaun the Sheep was temporarily installed as one of about 50 for a charity fundraiser in the summer, and being a warm, sunny day, a lengthy queue of parents and small children is assembling to take a photo with a shiny Shaun.

Stopping, Jon asks Steve in reference to the hulking statue, "Do you want to tell us about your hero?"

"Oh, alright!" he replies. "So, one of the things we're doing here is taking you through a thousand times of Bristol maritime history. And in that time, a lot of things happen." He tells us for example, in Bristol, "the word merchant' has become a bit toxic", so much so that locals will remember there was a big row over plans a few years ago to name a new shopping mall

“Merchant’s Quarter.” But this was so controversial to some people, they went with calling it “Cabot Circus” instead.

“So, this man right here, John Cabot, is our hero in Bristol.”

Steve continues to give some biographical detail about what is known about Cabot: his Venetian origin, his work in Spain around the Harbour which exposed him to Bristol, his constant fleeing from debtors across the Mediterranean. Steve talks of Cabot’s journey from Bristol in 1497 to allegedly discover present-day Newfoundland, and his subsequent fate where he disappeared on a later journey. Steve notes that Cabot was commissioned by King Henry VII and was lauded as a hero upon his return from his first voyage. However, Steve also tells us that there are various accounts of Cabot’s history, as few details are confirmed about him. He notes that in his research, Spanish accounts of Cabot and his fate (noting the number of times Cabot fled debtors in the Spanish cities of Valencia and Sevilla) is less celebratory, without going into any further detail beyond the debts.

Jon and Steve also tell us that Bristol has gone to great length to commemorate Cabot’s expedition at significant anniversaries, building a prominent memorial tower in 1897, and a 1997 replica of his ship *The Matthew*, which is moored outside of M Shed. Admittedly, however, the ship is a replica not of the exact ship Cabot sailed on, but of the type of ship (a Portuguese style caravel) Cabot sailed on and models of what these ships looked like (cf. Auslander 2013). According to our guides, no actual representation of the original ship survives, and the large replica moored in the Harbour suggests a blend of imaginary license within acceptable codes of historical practice and code.

Returning to the sculpture of Cabot, Jon offers us a brief history of this particular statue, installed in the 1980s. Done by a local sculptor who wanted the statue to be tactile and at eye level, Jon tells us that the sculptor aimed to do something different, arguing that “Bristol doesn’t need another old geezer on a pedestal!” He notes that the statue is based on the artist’s imagination of what Cabot looked like, as no portrait or record exists of his appearance. He is shaven in the sculpture, with the artist remarking that there was a record of a barber on the ship. However, the reception of the statue has been quite mixed, as Jon notes that the locally well-known journalist Reece Winston once remarked that the statue was “a monstrosity! A portrait of Piltown man!”

Quite ironically after discussing Cabot as Bristol’s hero, one of the girls waiting in the Shaun the Sheep queue a few yards away gets impatient and starts climbing onto Cabot. She asks

her father, “Who is that man, daddy?” to which her father replies, “I don’t know, but anyway, we’re here to see Shaun the Sheep!”

From Cabot’s statue, we walk along the quay, almost opposite from where we started the tour at M Shed, moving towards the Old City. Coming across a hotel, Steve points out that the Bristol Hotel on the Harbourside faces the wrong direction: its entrance is not on the quay, but on the other side of the building. Its architects designed the building with the expectation that the back of the building would face a motorway instead of the waterfront, in accordance with city planning at the time. Steve then jokes about how city planners in the 1970’s and 1980’s planned to fill in the Harbour and expand the M32 (the local motorway) through the heart of the city because their vision at the time was to “make Bristol look more like Birmingham!” After hearty laughter all around, many on the tour express their approval that this didn’t happen, some of them struggling to imagine the possibility of having a motorway replacing some of the most scenic parts of the city along the waterfront.

Behind us, Steve points out Pero’s Bridge, built in 1999 and named after Pero Jones, an enslaved African brought over from the Caribbean as a house servant by local Merchant John Pinney. Steve points out a few things about the bridge, such as the large horns used as a counterweight to stop the bridge from blowing away. He also notes that a Ghanaian woman on a recent tour suggested to him that the horns were reminiscent after Ashanti hunting horns as a tribute to Pero’s West African origin. Jon also takes this opportunity to mention that although many people claim that Bristol was physically built by the labour of enslaved Africans, he adamantly denies this claim, suggesting with increased tempo and fervour in his speech that there is little to no factual, historical evidence to support this point. He tells us that Pero and his sister were some of the very few slaves that were brought to Bristol, and that although Pinney was known for being a humane Master, Pero tragically died at a young age due to alcoholism. He notes with emotion in his voice that despite Pinney’s humane treatment, Pero was never given his freedom by the Pinneys, and reflects on the tragic difference between dying free and dying a slave.

Jon also takes this moment to dismiss a lot of what he considers “apocryphal tales” about Bristol’s history, clarifying a few points about well-known place names in Bristol. He specifically mentions Whiteladies Road which apparently was the site of a convent where the nuns wore white habits, similar to friaries such as Greyfriars and Blackfriars in London. Meanwhile, he suggests another notoriously named place, Black Boy Hill was named after James II who was known as “the Black Boy because of his swarthy skin.” He goes on to tell us that “Bristol is full of these local myths,

many based on ignorance, but there's just little if any historical evidence to suggest that they might be true, and that's one of the dangers of oral histories."

Along this quay, Steve pulls out a print of an old painting from his binder of images. The scene portrayed is a busy one of a harbour front but based on some of the landmarks in the images (namely church spires), one can see that the scene depicted is taken from the perspective of where we now stand. Different crates, barrels, and various wares are being pulled not on carts, but on sledges—a point Steve highlights—as city ordinance prohibited carts in the city so as to not disrupt or wear the city streets and disturb the cellars below. Another point made by Jon and Steve is that the quay is busy and on the waterfront all the way up to a church spire which is no longer on the waterfront today. We are told that as the harbour declined, that area was filled in during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From this stop, we cut through an alley just off the Harbour called Farr's Lane, which, Jon points out, is one of Bristol's many subtle references to its slave trade past in street and place names. He notes briefly that Thomas Farr and family were prominent slave traders. From there, we cross into Queen Square, where Jon points out what he considers an eyesore of a building on the southwest corner of the 18<sup>th</sup> century square. Clearly a modernist, post-war building, he points out the derelict building which once housed the Seaman's Mission, a Christian organisation which provided sailors an alternative from vices and for which his father volunteered.

Entering the 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian Queen Square, Jon and Steve talk about this area once being marshland before being reclaimed, and Steve pulls out an overhead aerial photograph taken by the RAF in the 1930s where one can see what the area once looked like before bomb damage from the war changed its north side. Although we are told the area was once more or less a sewer before reclamation, Queen Square became a prestigious and desirable location for merchants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, due to its proximity to the harbour. We also make a stop in front of one of the white Georgian facades, where Steve points out a plaque that commemorates the site of the first American consulate, founded in 1793 after American independence. Beaming with pride, Jon excitedly points out, "Not Liverpool or London! But *Bristol!*"

On one tour, an elderly gentleman asks, "Didn't there used to be a road coming through here? I remember about 20 or so years ago, this was a busy road..." and indeed, as Steve explains, a dual carriageway ran from the northwest to southeast corner of the square, going around the statue of King William along the course of one of the foot paths. "Yes," the man says, "I remember I used to catch a bus at a bus stop here on Queen Square every day, but I don't see it anymore!" Today the square's layout reflects its original design, with a massive statue of William III in the



centre with a number of footpaths radiating from the statue. According to the elderly gentleman's recollections, the dual carriageway cut diagonally through the square, going slightly around the statue without moving it.

At the northwest corner of the square, Steve draws our attention to a dark, quiet street just over the road, resembling a bit of an urban canyon of multi-story buildings of 10+ stories between the Radisson Hotel and other office tower blocks. "I want you to imagine a small, medieval lane for me. And in this lane, there are 37 licensed pubs and bars. There are people everywhere, having a good time, there are some 'notorious women' about, loads of sailors. And ladies and gentlemen, I give you Marsh Street!" Back in the day, this was one of Bristol's Red-Light districts (these are a historical interest of his), and it was so notorious that when the abolitionist and minister Thomas Clarkson came to Bristol to do research on the slave trade in the late 1700s, this was one of the focuses of his research since it was where all the sailors were hanging out. Steve reads us a quote:

These houses were in Marsh Street and most of them were kept by Irishmen. The scenes witnessed in these houses were truly distressing to me... music, dancing, rioting, drunkenness and profane swearing were kept up from night to night.

Jon interjects with a cheeky grin on his face as he says with laughter, "If you ask me, it sounds like a normal Saturday night in Bristol!" But Steve continues to explain the nature of Clarkson's work and the angle taken in his research: at the time of the research, much of public opinion throughout England was rather lukewarm towards abolition in terms of the treatment of slaves. Bristol being a key port for the slave trade, Clarkson was not a popular or welcome man and he had to work undercover. Some of the merchants even supposedly put a bounty on his head. However, one of the pub landlords on Marsh Street and another one at the Seven Stars in St. Thomas Street (featured in another tour in Chapter 4) gave him access to do his work. Eventually, he got a hold of some of the ships' registers and was able to prove that the slave trade wasn't just bad for the slaves, it was also bad for sailors in that the conditions in which they had to live and work were quite miserable, and somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of Bristol sailors involved in the slave trade didn't come home either due to disease or mistreatment leading to desertion in the West Indies or in America. Since many in England didn't care much about slaves since they were often seen as subhuman, Clarkson had to make his case to the public by demonstrating how white, English sailors were treated in this business. This was a key point in changing public opinion towards abolition of the trade in 1807 as opposed to progressive beliefs in Africans as humans.

At the foot of Marsh Street is a modern office building now occupied by British Telecom. Jon tells us this was once the site of the old Merchants Hall as Steve pulls out a drawing of the old building which was destroyed in the war from his binder. In many ways, he notes that the Merchants have been painted with a rather negative image (as mentioned by Steve in front of the Cabot statue in reference to the “toxicity of the word merchant”). To counter this and to appear generous and magnanimous, Jon explains, they built, among other charitable projects, the adjacent alms-houses (half of which were bombed out during the war) to house retired sailors. These were once a square two-story complex with a garden in the middle, and now they are notable for their bright pink façade. Now private flats, the alms-house complex still bears some marks of its past, including a poem “spoken on behalf of grateful sailors” painted for passers-by to read and the Merchants' crest on one side of the building.

Going east and walking along the old cobbles of King Street, Steve points out a Chinese restaurant. This was once the old Bristol Free Library, one of the first in the nation which was frequented by members such as Humphrey Davey, Robert Southey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Along King Street, we stop in front of No. 35, an ornate building with three colours of bricks and brick archways built into its façade. It also seems quite strange as it seems to have two sets of entrance doors on both the first and ground floor instead of only the ground level. Jon explains that this is an example of an architectural style known as “Bristol Byzantium” which on the one hand, sought to express the city's wealth. On the other hand, this style also attempted to make industrial buildings and warehouses more aesthetically pleasing. At a later stop on the tour, he suggests that it perhaps may also be a statement about the wealth of Bristol (as multi-coloured bricks were not cheap), as well as its connections to places like Istanbul and the Middle East where some of these architectural features were more commonplace. Considering industrial aesthetics, Jon tells us that this building was once a warehouse for Portuguese cork, which was a key commodity for the city due to its involvement in the wine trade with Porto, Bordeaux, and Sevilla.

Across the street, Jon points out the pub ironically called “The Famous Royal Navy Volunteer.” The name is ironic because of the practice of impressment (where sailors were effectively kidnapped into forced service) addressed throughout many points in the tour including Marsh Street and the Hole in the Wall. The pub itself has a Tudor-style timber frame façade and its sign displays a child in a sailor's uniform, perhaps a powder monkey from the days of sail.

Adjacent to this building, Jon also points out a building with a hideous orange concrete façade. “You wouldn't know it by looking at it, but that building is actually a Grade II listed building on English Heritage's register.” Many in the audience are shocked and appalled. “How? Why?”

“Well,” he explains, “underneath that hideous modern façade that the owner must have put on years ago is one of the few remaining actual timber frames dating back to the Tudor era in Bristol. So, if you look up Bristol on the register, you’ll actually see No. 16 King Street—that building—on there. It’s hard to believe that one of the last bits of Bristol’s Tudor history is hidden in that building, because you sure can’t see it!”

Further down King Street, we stop in front of the ornate entrance to the Old Vic theatre, former site of the Cooper's Hall. We are told that the Coopers Guild made a tremendous amount of money and built this building because of their wealth from barrel making. Next to it is the theatre office, a postwar brown brick building with the Royal Seal suggesting the importance of the building.

Steve explains that “we gave the world Shakespeare” but theatre has long had a checkered history in Britain, especially due to Cromwellian and puritanical influences which saw theatre as wicked and profane. Nevertheless, a theatre company was set up in Hotwells to cater to 18<sup>th</sup> century spa-goers before being shut down. However, a desire for the arts had longstanding currency, and eventually, the Theatre Royal was set up, eventually becoming the Old Vic Theatre Company. In order to finance the theatre, according to a local story, 50 local merchants each paid £50 and were given silver tokens as free admission for life. One part of the building's frontage was covered with bricks in the 1960s, but Steve mentions plans to match the Georgian façade next to it, a statement met with positive reaction from the crowd.

As we turn north at Queen Charlotte Street, Jon points out a building on the right which consists of a tower of student flats atop a multi storey car park. He jokes, playing on a distaste for modernist architecture and English Heritage's desire to maintain some of these buildings, “We're fairly sure that they'll be listed sometime in the near future!”

As we cross Baldwin Street, Jon points out the shrapnel damage on the church tower of St. Nicholas from the Blitz. Climbing up some stairs and cutting through an alleyway of market stalls, we approach The Exchange, the impressive work of the architect John Wood. Jon stops in front of a pair of two different drain pipes, noting that he “love[s] pointing out the little things people don't notice. He [Steve] loves his John Cabot, I love these drain pipes.” He explains that one of them is from the 18th century, protruding from off the wall, while the other is from the 19th century. Architects later realised that with all the sledges around town, the protruding drain pipes were often ruptured or ripped off the wall, so they built pipes which are indented into the wall to prevent that damage. “If you imagine all those animals, you can also imagine that you'd

have horse poo everywhere. So, you had these scrapers next to the door, in order to wipe the poo off your boots before coming into the Exchange.” On the tour with us this time is a boy of about 10 or 11, and Jon asks him to demonstrate for us how these scrapers work as they have built-in spikes to serve as scrapers.

Before entering the Corn Exchange, Steve encourages us to note the frieze inside, particularly the sculpted 18th century stereotypes of America, Africa, and India, “where Bristol did much of its trade overseas. They're quite backwards and racist,” he notes, “but then again, you have to remember that this is all from a different time.”

Today, the Exchange is filled with a lot of independent retailers, selling hats, incense, novelty t-shirts with local Bristolian sayings, and souvenirs. Walking through without stopping to not interrupt business, we exit the Exchange through the main entrance on Corn Street. Jon explains that this is Bristol’s equivalent of Lombard Street in London with its banks, insurance firms, and financial services.

On Corn Street, Steve points out that one of the banks was the South Wales Bank, with the building modelled in Portland stone after the San Savino Library in Venice (which he holds up a photo of, noting the extremely elegant and delicate stonework and carvings adorning the frieze of the building). Apparently, this incredibly expensive, ornate work was supposed to be symbolic of the bank's strength and durability and security. Yet ironically, shortly after its opening, the bank went bust in 1874 and was bought by Lloyds.

Crossing the pedestrianised street, Jon then points to four iron pillars that seem to hold up tables. These are known collectively as “The Nails” because these were the places where merchants used to exchange money for goods, hence the expression, “paying on the nail.” The nails supposedly predate the building itself by centuries and are adorned with Latin inscriptions around the rims.

Adjacent to the San Savino Library replica is the classical Old Council House, now the Bristol Register Office where civil weddings are performed, and once the site of City Hall. On the right side of the building is a silver plaque, noting the 600th anniversary of Bristol's High Cross, marking this as the spot where the cross once stood. Jon notes that this plaque is the only memorial to the High Cross being there, built in 1373 to mark the conferment of County Status to Bristol as a reward for their support to the Crown during the Hundred Years' War against the French. Jon heatedly explains, “Bristol is its own city as well as its own *county*, which is why I get

quite annoyed by those online forms that tell me that Bristol is in County Avon! What is that, County Avon? It doesn't even exist anymore! *I live in Bristol in the **County** of Bristol!*"

Emphasising what matters most to Bristolians, Jon continues: "Because Bristolians have a tendency to put trade first, they felt that the High Cross was getting in the way of their sledges and their business. This actually was once a really busy intersection between Broad, Corn, High, and Wynd Streets, and the High Cross marked the centre of the city." But because it was in the way of trade, they moved it to in front of the Cathedral at College Green until another problem emerged.

"Back in the 19th century," Steve explains, "people use to come to Hotwells for the spa, and they used to promenade down the street 7 to 8 across, linked arm and arm (Steve and Jon humorously imitate this) and they felt that the High Cross got in the way of their promenade. So, in order to deal with this, the Dean of the Cathedral sold the High Cross to his mate to put in his estate at Stourhead in Wiltshire." Quite irked by this, Jon exclaims, "So they have *OUR* High Cross, which is one of the only surviving pieces of Bristol's medieval history!"

Across the street lies the site of another treasured remnant of Bristol's history, though no material traces of it remain. Where the now derelict Bank of England (built in the 1950s) sits, the Dutch House once stood. The Dutch House was a beloved 16<sup>th</sup> century Bristol icon (as suggested by the sentimental groans of some of the older Bristolians on the tour). According to Jon, it was slightly damaged by a German bomb during the Blitz. They didn't have to knock it down, he explains, but because it was damaged, they razed it. But it was in such good shape and so well built that it took them two weeks to knock it down. He continues, "It's obviously such a shame since it was such a beloved building, and even though we lament it now, it's easy for us to forget that apparently, heritage didn't exist back then as we know it today."

Walking alone Wine Street, we stop in Castle Park, a large green space which was once home to Bristol Castle. This was the commercial heart of the city before it was bombed by the Germans in 1940/1941 and so heavily damaged that the city decided to level it. A few ruins remain however, and we stop in front of a bombed-out church ruin. We stop for a quiet moment to look at plaques listing the hundreds of names of all civilians and auxiliaries killed in Bristol during the Second World War. Jon explains that the Council felt it appropriate to leave this church ruin as a memorial.

We walk down some steps, past a brightly coloured plaque which an audience member notices and asks about. We are told this was dedicated to Bristolians who fought against Franco

in the Spanish Civil War. Facing another ruin about 80 metres away, Steve pulls out an artist's drawing of Bristol Castle.

“We don't really know what the Castle looked like, but this is an artist's representation of what they think it might've looked like based on some written descriptions. We know that it was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by William I, and we know that after the White Tower at the Tower of London, it was the second biggest keep in England.”

“Sometimes, you'll notice, Bristolians don't always make the best decisions,” jokes Steve with a chuckle. During the Civil War, Bristol started out supporting Cromwell, but when the Royalists started doing a bit better, the city decided to switch sides and fight for the Crown. Cromwell didn't take too well to this, and so when he came to Bristol, he planned the siege of Bristol Castle in a place called Wickham Glen over in Stapleton—there's a little cottage with a plaque dedicating the site—and with his general, Thomas Fairfax, he planned the siege and razing of Bristol Castle. “As you can see, he and his troops completely levelled the Castle so that to this day, nothing remains of it except for bits of the dungeons and the moat.”

One participant in the tour is absolutely astounded, remarking, “Isn't it amazing to think that it's such a big building...and nothing of it remains!”

We start to turn back towards M Shed, along what was once Bridge Street, the main shopping street in the city before the war. Steve pulls out another picture of it shortly after the war, a scene of complete devastation with a street of bombed out buildings along the street. Many of the older members of the tour gather and look at the photo with fond memories, naming some of the shops that used to be there. At another point across the river, a new property re-development called Finzel's Reach is refurbishing some old industrial buildings. Steve points this out and tells us that Conrad Finzel was a sugar magnate who was responsible for developing a process for granulating sugar, since before this invention, sugar was often sold in loaves and was difficult to use.

Walking along the river after this point, we go about 60 metres before stopping at Bristol Bridge, the *raison d'être* and namesake of the city. Steve pulls out another drawing of a bridge built in 1239, explaining that this bridge was once the busy centre of the city and its most valuable real estate. The depiction is a of a bridge covered with buildings, including a chapel and some of the city's most prominent shops because of all the traffic. It had buildings with houses on the bridge, so one could imagine that was some pretty prime property.

Jon jumps in, "Yeah, but you had to be careful if you were using the loo in one of those houses over the river, because you know, a ship might come by and... (he gestures with his finger)" and many of us laugh.

"It's a shame that people back then didn't care much about heritage and tourism back then like we do now," Steve says, "because in 1768, they tore down this bridge and decided to build a new one, hiring an American architect called James Bridges, ironically enough, to redesign the bridge." Part of the condition for this new bridge though was that in order to pay for it, the City Corporation put a toll on it which they said they would only impose for 25 years. But kind of like the Council these days, he jokes, they're not always true to their word, and in 1793, they kept the toll. "And as Bristol people tend to take matters into their own hands and don't want to pay more tax than they had to, they ended up rioting and burning down parts of the city, including of course, the tollbooth." The current bridge, we are told, is a widened version of the 1768 with extra added support to account for motor traffic.

With a cheeky grin on his face, Jon jokes, "It's often said that the people of Bristol are revolting!"

As we get back to King Street which we passed earlier, we stop at the Llandoger Trow, a white 3 story pub with black Tudor framing dating back to 1664 named after a Welsh town. Jon mentions that, whether deserving or not, it's probably the most famous pub in Bristol. He suggests that it's either the Anchor or the Admiral Benbow Inn from Treasure Island, according to some of the local legends. Jon confesses that this is quite strange, considering that Robert Louis Stevenson never actually ever came to Bristol. "Another apocryphal tale about this place," he continues, "is that supposedly, this is where Alexander Selkirk, the inspiration for *Robinson Crusoe* met Daniel Defoe and told him his story. Again, whether it's true or not...I don't think there's any evidence for it at all, but it sure does make for a nice little story. Although I'm sure if you went on the pirate tour, they would tell you that it's 100% all true!" He winks and smiles.

Crossing through Queen Square, Jon points out another site of "apocryphal tales": The Hole in the Wall pub. It supposedly had a little room on the side where lookouts could warn sailors on a night out if press gangs were approaching. Sailors would then be led through secret passageways to escape the Navy. "Again," Jon notes with caution, "is it historically true? Maybe, but it's one of those nice apocryphal tales, myths if you will, in the city, and it makes for a nice little story."

Across the river stands the grand, majestic spire of Saint Mary Redcliffe, which Elizabeth I once considered “the godliest, fairest, and most famous parish church in all of England” on a visit to Bristol. Steve pulls out a painting depicting the narrow lanes which led to the church, a far cry from the major roundabout in front of us. Jon explains that before cars, most of the views in Bristol looked like that painting than things do now. He also notes that as many locals may know, Elizabeth made her comment about the church when it was without its spire. He tells us that the spire “was struck down by lightning in 1446 and rebuilt in 1872, which means the church went for what is that, 426 years? without a spire!” From there, often pressed for time on these tours, Jon and Steve would lead us back along the river, pointing to the last stop: a modern ship turned nightclub along the way called the Thekla. We are told the Thekla was a sample for scale of the last ships used in Bristol harbour, and site of a mural by Banksy, the world-famous Bristolian street artist. From there, the tour officially ends and the group exchanges goodbyes before parting ways, with the guides returning back to M Shed.

### **Analysing the Old City Tour**

Clearly, the above tour contains a number of points of analysis based on its vast amount of detail. Furthermore, the above vignette is a composite of one of four tours that run out of M Shed every month. But for the sake of analysis and the wider argument, I focus on specific elements of the narrative constructed to ask: What kind of historical narrative is being created here? and within this narrative: What kind of place *is* Bristol according to the Council and these volunteers acting on its behalf?

#### *Bristol: England's Second City*

Walking through the medieval part of the city for this walk with all of its temporal depth (cf. Crang 1996 on palimpsest) seems to imply that Bristol has a sort of historical prominence which surpasses all but London. The potential motivations for this seem understandable: though by far the centre of the Southwest, Bristol doesn't quite have the demographic size or political and economic importance today of Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, or perhaps even its old rival port, Liverpool. By claiming this historical significance in the construction of this narrative, our guides (as proud, native Bristolians) are establishing the city's position within a certain political-economic hierarchy of English cities, asserting their claim that Bristol mattered and still matters.



Yet, it is worth pondering what sort of conditions and historical events made Bristol England's "second city." This status was not simply a matter of Bristol's geography, but rather, the historical events and conditions which capitalised (quite literally) on this geography. For Bristol (as with Liverpool), this undoubtedly includes both the transatlantic slave trade as well as the wider frames of imperial trade and networks upon which Bristol commerce and merchants relied upon for centuries. By presenting the city's history in relation to trade and the slave trade, the (perhaps) central tension in Bristol's history is revealed: how does a city like Bristol, whose fame, fortune, and status owe much to what is now "sensitive" and morally contentious, understand and present its past? What then does a city like Bristol do (if anything) not only with this history, but with the relics of this history, both immediate and discrete, both material and immaterial?

Through celebrating Bristol's achievements throughout this tour and introducing some of its key historical figures and their links to the city (particularly Bristol's heroes Isambard Kingdom Brunel and John Cabot—neither of whom, ironically, are native sons of the city), what kind of work is being done? Indirectly placing Bristol within a hierarchy of prestige is embedded into the narrative as well: Bristol's past is one to be celebrated and proud of, as a centre of exploration, trade, and innovation.

### *Narrative Tensions and Heroes*

Yet this clearly isn't a past which always can be celebrated. Take the first stop at the slave trade plaque and Jon's deliberate choice to stop there. Considering Jon's invocation of a "moral obligation" to stop here, a moral norm is suggested: a need to address the wrongs of the past—even if that might only be limited to episodes such as the slave trade. And this is the case, even if prescriptions on *how* that might take place (or what should be done with material vestiges of these episodes of the past) are not explicitly made.

These tensions and themes concerning Bristol's past and its relationship to the slave trade are particularly acute on this themed tour despite not being its stated emphasis. This plaque is not the only stop on the tour in which this history is referred to. The plaque is, however strikingly, the only *explicit* artefact acknowledging the slave trade itself and its financial benefits to Bristol along this tour. The well-rehearsed controversies and debates around Edward Colston are intentionally avoided in all of these tours, and none of the tours pass by either his statue or landmarks which bear his name.

This memory of Bristol's role in the slave trade is *the* central controversy in Bristol's historical consciousness. A narrative which seeks to celebrate the city cannot do so without encountering some difficulties and problematic chapters which do not fit into celebration or a set of contemporary moral values. Jon and Steve may not consider themselves as moralising actors in this conversation. Yet one may argue that actually, through the temporal assumptions and suggestions of displacement and rupture ("that attitudes were different *back then*") involved in their statements, the narrative presented creates a relationship between present day Bristolians and the city's past. This relationship suggests a rupture with the past following the basic assumption of the separation between past and present (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:263).

However, in the first few stops, there is a temporal muddling at play. According to our guides, the slave trade was part of "a different time and era." But just moments later, they move to Brunel, who, as one of Bristol's heroes is not detached in the same way. By this account, Brunel is simply a figure in Bristol's history to be celebrated, and the spatial proximity between these two plaques is interesting.<sup>11</sup> On the surface, it makes sense that since this was an important part of the Harbour during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there are many layers of historical events worthy of commemoration on this particular site.

Read differently, the spatial proximity of these two plaques can also be linked to the temporal proximity between Brunel and the slave trade. Whether by design or not, what isn't elaborated about Brunel is the *lack* of temporal distance between Brunel and Bristol's connection with slavery: Brunel was born a year before the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act and according to local stories, he arrived in Bristol in 1828, 5 years before the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. Considering Brunel's known place in Bristol high society and that society's constitution of members of the Society of Merchant Venturers<sup>12</sup> involved in Bristol's triangular trade, it is noteworthy that despite their temporal proximity and overlap, Brunel is so cleanly dissociated

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<sup>11</sup> Quite curiously, if one wanted to note the key figures in this historical narrative of Bristol, one needn't leave 50 metres from the entrance of M Shed to notice them: Cabot's ship, *The Matthew*, is just a few metres west of the front door, moored in front of the cafe. Colston Tower (a 1960s/70s tower block) looms directly in front and the plaque dedicated to the victims of the slave trade is along the wall leading to the main entrance. And around the corner from that, 15 feet high, is a plaque dedicated to one of Brunel's great projects.

<sup>12</sup> The Society of Merchant Venturers, issued a royal charter in 1552 is an extremely divisive group in Bristol which historically consisted of the city's mercantile elite. Today, the Merchants (as they are colloquially known) are a charity which consists of many of the city's civic and business leaders. Indeed, the current elected Mayor during the time of fieldwork, George Ferguson, was a Merchant but resigned from the Society before taking office. They are also responsible for administering certain schools throughout the city, including some of the schools which bear Edward Colston's name. Much more will be said about them, perhaps during the chapter on 'secret histories.'

from slavery and the money accumulated from related colonial trades. Brunel, as a local hero, is not spoken of as from a different time and era as a problematic historical episode like slavery despite the temporal overlap.

While he may not have had any direct interaction with the slave trade itself, it would be difficult to argue that he was unaware of it, nor that his financial investors would not have had any involvement in it. Yet in the narrative, as one of Bristol's heroes, Brunel is often hagiographically separated and placed above the context of his time, arguably perhaps as a figure who exists 'beyond history.' Curiously, where the controversial Colston as a slave trader was "a man of his time", Brunel is almost a transcendent figure, held immune to the historical controversies which were central to and heavily contested in Bristol in his time.

### *Nostalgia, Melancholia, and Decline: Towards Affective Histories of Bristol*

Despite Bristol's given second city status, another evident aspect of this narrative seems to suggest that Bristol's best days are not in the present or future, but in the past. In the promotional material about the tour, Bristol has experienced a decline from its role as a major seaport and commercial centre. With this in mind, much of the gaze or focus of the historical walking tour is obviously directed towards the past. A pervading sense of nostalgia accompanies this, an invocation to imagine things "as they were." With this presumably comes attention drawn to what is absent or no longer present. This echoes Doreen Massey's comment that not only is there a sense of disruption (or perhaps change or decline) in relation to the past and present of a place; "the past is seen in some sense to embody the *real* character of the place" (1995:183, emphasis added).

In actuality however, decline is quite exaggerated. In relation to other key seaports like Liverpool, Bristol has managed to avoid the same scale of post-industrial decline seen by many old industrial cities throughout Britain, despite the transformation of its industrial neighbourhoods such as Bedminster. Bristol is currently a centre for banking (Lloyds Bank have a substantial presence on the Harbourside) and aerospace engineering (Airbus is one of the most prominent employers in the city, having developed Concorde in Bristol). Many of the city's residents who moved to Bristol from elsewhere in the country laud it as an extremely desirable (if at times expensive) place to live. And although the city docks have closed, Bristol's two modern ports, Avonmouth and Royal Portbury—a few miles downstream at the mouth of the River Avon, on the Bristol Channel—are still major shipping centres.

Perhaps most notably though, this sense of decline and melancholia feeds into a historical consciousness which does not valorise and celebrate the present, but rather has a nostalgic longing for the past. There is a clear presentist emphasis in the context in which this narrative is created (note how “sensitive” histories such as the slave trade must be addressed in ways which are mindful of present demographic and political contexts). However, a narrative of lament and decline—in statements about how many of the banks in the city have now gone, or how the port has been closed for 40 years for example—challenges assumptions about presentist interests and agendas of memory and history which are uncritically celebratory of the present. Take for example these two vignettes from other fieldwork experiences:

*On one episode of another tour, the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bristol Tour, a participant pulls me aside and asks me a question. “You see that there?” asks Edith, a woman in her 80s dressed in a long, purple coat who has lived in Bristol for the better part of her life. “That’s Corn Street. That used to be the heart and soul and the financial centre of my city. There used to be 6 banks and dozens of insurance firms linked to the shipping on that street. And since the 70s and 80s, they’re gone. All gone. That’s what **Europe** has done to my city!” Later, she tells me that she’s a proud UKIP supporter in staunch opposition to the European Union, and her late husband was an Army officer. She also found herself quite irritated throughout that tour, especially during its stop at the Georgian House Museum, telling me that “all we ever talk about in this city’s history is the slave trade. It’s just too much!”*

*On another occasion, following a Bristol Civic Society (non-Council) sponsored guided walking tour of Arnos Vale—one of the city’s main cemeteries, where many of the city’s “great and good” have been buried since it opened in the 1830s—I am on a bus going back to city centre with many other tour participants. After making brief introductions about my research, one middle-aged woman notes, “It’s amazing looking at the graves of so many great people in Bristol’s history. But it had me thinking, could you imagine anyone in Bristol today being buried and remembered like that? I certainly can’t think of anyone who would merit that!”*

While these comments are particularly memorable and notable for suggesting that the city’s best days are long gone, they articulate these sentiments of decline and nostalgia for the past, particularly a past linked to Bristol’s day as an industrial centre and as a port for trade—factors which are both linked to its prominence as a node of imperial trade. Many of these comments were also noticeably made by informants and interlocutors past middle age, some of them as old as their 80s or 90s in some cases. However, even if this nostalgia and melancholy is particularly prevalent amongst older informants, their sentiments are not irrelevant.

For the purposes of argument, it is perhaps worth noting that nostalgia is above all, an *affective* condition. Its roots date back to 17<sup>th</sup> century Swiss physician Johannes Hofer’s conception of a sort of psychological and physiological homesickness, with the Greek roots of the word *nostos* “to return home” and *algia* “a painful condition or longing” (Davis 1977:414, 1979:1,

Boym 2001, 2007:7). In Fred Davis' view, nostalgia is not merely affective, but it is positive as opposed to a neutral, non-effective recollection (1977:418; 1979:14); in its orientation, it is an adoration and uncritical glorification of the past juxtaposed with a disillusion with the present. Svetlana Boym furthermore notes that due to the sort of spatial and temporal reconfigurations of modernity, nostalgia is one of the inherent conditions in an age of modernity (2007:12). Comments made by both tour guides and participants certainly suggest that nostalgia—and a lament of decline from a great past to a mediocre present as well as a longing for what is absent and irretrievable—certainly lingers in the tours, even if not the active or conscious intent of the guides.

Yet this isn't to say that tour participants are nostalgic for *everything* about the past. With examples concerning the slave trade, there are certain pasts which so violate a contemporary morality that return to them is both an impossibility and morally unacceptable. There are indeed nuances of the nostalgia and narrative of decline present in these tours, as there are also undesirable pasts such as of recent decades. Thus, the nostalgia presented here is not a blanket nostalgia for *all things past*, but rather, *certain* pasts, certain epochs.

The most acute nostalgia present in these tours points to an idealised time before the Second World War and its mass destruction in Bristol where tens of thousands of buildings were destroyed and over 1000 lives were lost in the city. What is longed for is the city and the country before the war, which is arguably a wider trend throughout Great Britain as a whole (Kumar 2003). However, it might also be worth considering (as Kumar does) that this pre-war Britain is also an Imperial Britain, before Britain allegedly lost its greatness during decolonisation. If this is true, is it possible then that the object of much of this nostalgia and its longing are of the times when Britain had an Empire, regardless of whether or not informants explicitly recognise this imperial context, and regardless of whether or not they are explicitly in favour of imperialism? In other words, could it be that the Bristol and the Britain which are longed for were only possible under the conditions of Empire? If this is the case, it is even more worthwhile to note how rarely the context and condition of Empire—which serves as a wider frame of Bristol and Britain's history—is actually mentioned in these tours.

Of course, much of the nostalgia observed in these tours isn't simply about decline, but it is also facilitated through materiality, and in this sense, presence, absence, and affect (Navaro-Yashin 2009, Domanska 2006, Birth 2006). Indeed, this nostalgia seems to have two components: a devaluation of the recent present and a disregard and disapproval for its present material vestiges, combined with longing for what is materially absent. The above example of the Dutch House and its replacement in situ, the Bank of England is a prime example of these dual

components. One theme that emerges from these comments about modernist buildings is not merely a derision of post-modern aesthetics, but the materiality and presence of these buildings also produces an affective (often negative) response. These buildings also notably serve as containers and reminders of a more recent past which is perceived with less value than a bygone and romanticised era of Bristol as a busy and thriving port city with its rarely mentioned colonial trades.

### **Presencing through Sense and Materiality: Making the (Absent) Past Present**

The tours demonstrate the notable tension between presence and absence of the past. For example, neither the Dutch House or the High Cross are actually materially present; but their sites in the urban landscape, a commemorative plaque, the use of photographs on the tour, combined with the narrative provided by Jon and Steve, make reference and direct our attention, our imagination, and our senses to the presence of an absence: a much-loved building or an iconic and historically relevant landmark.

This section looks not only at these techniques of narration, imagination, and sense used on the tour, but it attempts to navigate the complex relationship between presence, absence, materiality, and thus, the relationship between past and present. I suggest that the materiality of the city contains and indexes both past and present, presence and absence in a way which cannot easily be separated or ruptured according to a linear, historicist notion of time. The material city is a sort of archive—a depository of a material substance (stone and brick rather than paper) which contains a presently existing record of what *was* in order to inform both the present and imagined future. As a record of the past in the present, the materiality of the city is not only a reference for points along the tour, but it also references the past and its absence in a manner which interacts with and yet *exceeds* the narrative of the historical walking tour. As such, materiality has the potentiality to leak beyond its perceived function as a container of the past. If the past is immanent (Birth 2006) and if the past operates in a non-absent manner (Domanska 2006), then by serving as both a reminder and repository of that past, the city's materiality possesses the ability to make present both those pasts which are desired and longed for, as well as those pasts and aspects of history which are uncanny, awkward, uncomfortable. As such, the materiality of the city problematises the notion of linear historicist time and refutes the claim of certain histories (such as those of Empire) as irrelevant and thus justifiably relegated to a distant, ruptured past because they happened a long time ago and because the past is past.

If one assumes a notion of linear progressive time, that the past seems temporally distant from the present may simply often be taken by informants as a foregone conclusion. Yet a historical walk such as this one offers an interesting challenge to such a basic conceptualisation of time. Walking through an urban, material space in the present with the aim to consistently refer to the past creates a temporal muddle. There is a complex spatial-temporal dynamic at play here where in the present and in current spaces, the past is paradoxically constantly immanent (Birth 2006), non-absent (Domanska 2006) and yet seemingly distant and foreign (Lowenthal 1985).

As embodied participants, the tour audience is caught in a state of heightened awareness of the space in between these temporal conceptions. While these designations might be conceived as dichotomous poles in a larger debate (Ingold 1996), the conceptions of time demonstrated and revealed through these walking tours is muddled and nuanced, if not at times seemingly contradictory. In fact, the materiality of the cityscape and one's guided journey through it demonstrates both the pastness of the material landscape and its temporality in the present. In this light, the historical buildings on the Harbourside, or Queen Square, or the Old City in Bristol are both of the past and the present, and as such, express both presence and absence at the same time.

To open this section, I consider some of the sensory aspects (particularly touch, smell, sound, and sight) and various techniques that Jon and Steve use to evoke biographical memories throughout the tour and draw out the affective properties of various sites in the city (cf. Pink 2008, Lee and Ingold 2006). These sensory techniques and references—which are used in relation to the materiality of the city—are important to the relationship between presence and absence, past and present. While these interactions occur in the present, they tap into the past and precisely the sights, touches, smells, and sounds which are absent yet can be affectively evoked and imagined through being embodied in the city with a gaze which is consciously and actively directed toward the past (Reed 2002:131). The effect is the sort of historical experience which philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit refers to as a “short but ecstatic kiss” (2005:121), where “observer and objects [are drawn] into proximity, like an act of caressing” (cf. Reed 2002:133).

The goal here is not so much a turn to phenomenology in a Merleau-Pontian frame, as attention to embodiment and sense may suggest. Rather, the aim is to illustrate that these walking tours involve a qualitatively different sort of encounter with the past than the historian in the documentary archive, or even the curator (or visitor) to a museum. The historical walking tour is itself its own kind of inherently embodied experience, replete with sensory interactions, with being-in-the-world in this place. One has a gaze not just towards things as they are in the present,

but also with a concern of how they once were at specific points in time. This operates in relation to buildings which are materially present, as well as those which are materially absent. In many senses, this also echoes Adam Reed's discussion about his London walking guides' emphasis on "paying attention to detail" and the "plural time-spaces" which collapse distance through sensory experiences and imagining that which is materially absent (2002:132).

### *Images of the Past: Presence and Absence in Paintings and Photographs*

Jon tells every group he leads at the very beginning, "One thing we hope to do today is to show you something you've never seen before, even if you've lived in Bristol your whole life." Despite an explicit emphasis on sight, the narrative that he and Steve present on this tour does not only operate only in terms of seeing. It evokes other senses as well, and the tour involves positioning and interaction of one's whole body by the act of walking through the city. Although seeing and language of "*showing* you around" is foregrounded in these tours, other sensory dynamics also draw upon personal, autobiographical memories to incorporate the supposedly distant and detached past into the present and into our experiences of these tours.

Particular techniques of remembering include the use of analogy and imagination in narrating, interpreting, and drawing forth the past. One also positions oneself in relationship with this past through this gaze, revealing temporal assumptions about distance embedded into a walk such as this. But this also reveals a temporal complexity which exceeds these assumptions: during a walk like this—where past and present inhabit the same material spaces—their temporal distance reveals itself enfolded (like a piece of paper, perhaps) into the landscape, buildings, and stuff of the city. This is not to say that the temporalities completely collapse and become the same, but they are arguably not so distant with one another, almost adjacent. What results is actually a notion of temporality which differs from conventional notions of Western historicism (Hirsch and Stewart 2005:263).

From the outset of the tour when the guides speak about the tides, Steve shows a painting of a rural scene in Bristol harbour from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in a technique that clearly marks this relationship between past and present, absence, and presence. Looking at the confluence of the rivers, it is unmistakable that this painting represents a view from the same site on which we are then standing, despite the vast differences in the materially built environment (or lack thereof). Where the painted scene is filled with rural, pastoral scenes, the live scene before us is of a well-developed quayside, complete with former warehouses now turned into bars, restaurants, and



cafes—just as another photograph could reveal that scene as one of warehouses and a busy wharf. We are clearly shown a rural scene which is absent in our contemporary present, and from the outset of the tour, we are brought into this tension between what is simultaneously absent and present.

This usage of photographs and paintings of absent pasts and materialities (buildings, streetscapes, stuff) are used throughout the tours, and in this episode, few uses are more poignant amongst our group of older Bristolians than photographs shown once we arrive at Castle Park on Bridge Street. This was once the commercial heart of the city and no longer exists except in name, on maps, and in memory. During the Blitz (in which Bristol was heavily targeted because of its status as a port and industrial centre, resulting in the destruction of thousands of buildings and over 1000 killed), Bridge Street—once home to Bristol's department stores—was devastated by German bombs. Instead of saving the buildings after the war, the Council decided to raze the buildings and create a greenspace (present day Castle Park), where Steve shows us a set of photos. When Steve pulls out a photo demonstrating the bomb damage shortly after one particular raid, many of the older members on the tour (some in their 80s and who lived through the war) gather around, pointing at different sites in the photo. They share emotive, personal memories of the shops which used to be on the street and their memories of buying sweets or going shopping with their parents. Gathering around, they point at different ruins in the photo and try to piece together which shops used to be where. What we see here is another demonstration of the ways in which photos are used to mediate these tensions between presence and absence (Crang 1996). Here, we stand in a park where a few bombed out ruins of churches remain as war memorials, and yet our gaze is fixed on what is absent in this present space.

The war plays a particularly pronounced role in not only the history of the city and the narrative presented by Jon and Steve, but also in both the landscape of the city and the memory of many tour participants. This is partly because of the affective and traumatic nature of the war, which itself seems to be an event which understandably indexes and epochalises time in Bristol (and indeed Britain). The sensory, biographical memories from childhood evoked among many of my older informants whom I've met on these tours (and indeed, other older informants in other contexts such as the Commonwealth Society and Civic Society) often seem to mention the war, suggesting its importance to memory.

Materially speaking, the continued presence of shrapnel marks in many buildings in Bristol city centre (such as St. Nicholas' Church on this tour) serve alongside the ruins of some of Bristol's bombed out churches (such as Temple Church and St. Peter's Church in Castle Park) as

intentionally consecrated, prominent, and enduring material reminders of those lost in the war. In this sense, some scars of the war are literally still present, even if there are notable absences of department stores and other bombed out ruins.

Along the tour, we stop at the war memorial at St. Peter's Church in Castle Park in a sombre moment, gathering around a series of plaques dedicated to the civilians and auxiliary members who died during the war. While the stone walls and frame of the church still stand, its inside is locked up and empty, a consecrated ruin in memoriam. The same holds true for nearby Temple Church, another war memorial featured on another one of M Shed's walking tours through the neighbourhood of Redcliffe. On that tour, outside of the landmark church of St. Mary Redcliffe, a story is told about a piece of the tramline that was scattered into the churchyard by a Luftwaffe bomb. The spike of the tramline projects a few metres out of the ground, with supposedly another few metres still buried below. The materiality of war debris is not only a notable set of objects with which to narrate Bristol's history and epochalise time, but these materialities also have strong affective effects and draw attention to prominent and significant absences (Navaro-Yashin 2009).

#### *Smells, Memories, Presence, Absence*

In the context of these tours, these absent-present pasts are encountered in the present not only through materiality or through the stimulation of photographs, shrapnel, and bombed out churches. An appeal to participants' own biographical memories and sensory perceptions is also often used. Some of these are imagined through analogy, others are invoked through memory. Early in the walk, Jon points out a kiosk café which once housed the Council's chlorination plant to assist with sewage control in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He explains that before the Floating Harbour was built in 1809 and the Avon was tidal, sewage and waste would go out daily. But after the Floating Harbour was built to maintain a constant water level, it effectively became an open sewer in its early years since the tide no longer swept out the city's waste. "And you can imagine," he exhorts us, "how that must've smelled! If some of you remember how Bedminster [an industrial neighbourhood which was once home to many manufacturing industries, especially tanneries] used to smell...it must've been so much worse than that!" As some of the tour's older participants laugh, nod, and acknowledge with comments like "Oh! that was such a horrible smell!" both a sensorial and autobiographical, personal memory is evoked to draw a distant past into the present moment. In this present moment, there are no distinct smells in the summer air;

however, we are directed to imagine certain aromas which are absent: chlorine, sewage, the “smell of Bedminster in the past.” This technique of evoking the sense of smell is especially repeated in another walking tour featuring the history of Bedminster, that industrial neighbourhood especially known for its aromatic tobacco factories and the stench of the tanneries.

On the walking tour of Bedminster, photos and maps are shown marking the various industries throughout the neighbourhood, demonstrating not only the industrial diversity of the area, but also the density of industry. Although the old Wills Tobacco Factories are well-known landmarks in this area, tanneries were also an important industry, and the guides on this tour are not hesitant to describe the vulgarity of the tanning process. In order to remove the hair from animal hides, faeces were slathered onto the hide and washed off, creating a pungent, offensive stench which marked the neighbourhood. Throughout this tour, guides emphasise the pollution that industries such as tanneries produced as well as the challenges of industrialisation for health, sanitation, and hygiene during the Victorian era in particular. The narrative of this neighbourhood clearly demonstrates the sort of struggle that working-class Bristolians in Bedminster faced during the days of heavy industry. But it also presents some of the ways in which the Council addressed these challenges, such as the construction of schools (one of the early stops on the tour is at one of the area’s first primary schools, now refurbished as an office building) and of the neighbourhood’s Victoria Park, which offered greenspaces for cleaner air and opportunities for recreation in the neighbourhood. At Victoria Park, we are also shown old photographs of the park before the war of places where we now stood, showing features such as fountains or bandstands which are no longer present.

This memory technique invoking smell is also pronounced as we leave Castle Park and Steve points out some buildings across the river with the words “George’s Brewery, Bristol” inscribed in the stone. Presently, the brewery has closed, and although the shell of the building remains, its old site is now occupied by luxury flats and lofts. On many tours, Steve and Jon share their divided attitudes about the smell of yeast in the air once they approach the brewery. Likewise, many of our participants reminisce over the aroma of yeast with mixed feelings, some loving the smell, others remembering how much they hated it. Still others mourn that George’s, once Bristol’s main brewery, has since shut down as a sign of decay. As with the chlorine plant or the sewage, the smell of yeast is physically absent, and yet, in referencing the old brewery, we are invited to imagine and ‘make present’ this particular absence.

In one particular episode of the Old City tour, a tour participant in his 80s (perhaps 90s) called Arthur pulls me aside with a glow on his face. We have spoken at various points in the tour about my research and my interests, and he gleefully offers little bits and pieces of information along the way—especially pertaining to street and place names in Bristol. Shortly after Steve speaks about the brewery, Arthur points at a red brick building across Bristol Bridge which must only be a few decades old (it is distinctively post-war, architecturally brutalist). He reminisces riding his bicycle across Bristol Bridge for his first day of work at the telephone exchange, aged 17. He speaks not only of his excitement, but of how, looking at George’s Brewery, he can still smell the yeast in the air from that day.

Curiously, walking past the brewery or seeing its stone sign seems to have a poignant ability to evoke these personal memories as well as the aroma of brewing (cf. Reed 2002:135). And yet, physically, in that moment, the smell of yeast in the air isn’t there on the tour; it is one I can refer to having been on various brewery tours in the past, or by walking past a local brewery in Edinburgh. But the absence of any odour of yeast is nevertheless evident to me, just as the most I can do is imagine 17-year-old Arthur cycling across the bridge on his first day to work. In a way, while those with biographical memories of this sensory experience feel ‘taken back’ into that time and place, others of us are left on the embankment across the river, unable to position ourselves there except through a sense of imagination of what it might have been like. We—and indeed, that includes many of us on the tour, even Jon and Steve themselves—are left on the outside of this memory. For some of us the memory is quite literally foreign, also demonstrating a sort of exclusivity of memory at play in these tours.

*Imagining Marsh Street: Just like a Saturday Night! ...but in the 1790’s*

Looking above at Steve’s description of Marsh Street about halfway through the tour, the techniques used to invoke the senses and to use analogy to compare past and present serve as a prime example. The contrasts of presence and absence could not be more severe; the absence we are encouraged to imagine might occur on the same street, but the raucous scene, the smell of drink, the sound of music, laughter, and merriment, this calamitous setting is a far cry from a dark, quiet city street. All of these multisensory references create a compelling encounter with that absent past, echoing Ingold’s invocation of *taskscape* (1993). In a sense, it marks it as a past which we can relate to, perhaps even *should* relate to as Bristolians consider their own nights out,

especially considering Jon's cheeky comment about the wild scenes on a Saturday night on nearby Bristol streets.

These techniques used by Jon and Steve seemingly do a number of things and reveal multiple tensions not least of all past and present, absence and presence. Firstly, they place tour participants *in the city* in a manner that produces or enhances one's knowledge and relationship with Bristol—both as it was in certain historical moments, and as it is now. Even though for those of us who are not native Bristolians with autobiographical memories to draw upon, the use of generalised analogies creates a sort of familiarity with Bristol. At the same time, because we can make and understand these analogies, Bristol is just like many other places. And as we are in the midst of the material nature of the cityscape, we ourselves are also experiencing a sort of presence in the contemporary moment through an embodied engagement with the materiality of the city. Albeit, we do so in the present with our gaze and attention directed to that which is materially absent.

Yet despite being fixed on absences, we are clearly not actually *in the past* ourselves. Rather, we are invited and encouraged to notice these absences from the present, and we do so largely through the present materiality of the urban landscape of buildings, statues, and streets. To an extent, we also engage and imagine this past and focus upon these absences through media such as photographs and paintings. Combined with particular narrations, we are given an experience and presentation of Bristol's past which takes us beyond history books, historical photographs, or museum displays. As such, the historical walking tour is a unique and effective pedagogical experience.

In many respects, these walking tours resemble Frank Ankersmit's conception of "historical experience" wherein he discusses Johan Huizinga's elaboration of "historical sensation." Ankersmit does this in reference to contact with the past "provoked by a line from a chronicle, by an engraving, a few sounds from an old song...which does not present itself to us as a re-living, but as an understanding that is closely akin to the understanding of music, or, rather of the world *by* music (Ankersmit 2005:120-121). However, what is different between Huizinga and Ankersmit's embodied historical sensations and experiences and the historical walking tour is not the matter of sensory stimulation, but particularly of *embodied presence*. The physical presence in and of itself of the city's materiality and one's embodied physical presence in those same spaces together produce a poignant and affective response which is different from that triggered by the immateriality of a text or the sounds of a song. Where Ankersmit goes on to write of the perceived collapsing of temporalities of past and present in historical experience as in "a

short but ecstatic kiss” (Ibid.:121), the encounter with an enduring, material presence—of the shrapnel marks in an old church tower, or in the bombed-out ruins of another church—leave one with a more lasting encounter than a short but ecstatic kiss. One is actually left with something with not only more emotive potential, but with arguably a more profound, lasting encounter to which one can easily return.

Rather, perhaps more in line with Domanska’s aforementioned framework, Eelco Runia’s suggestion of “the presence of the past as a ‘presence in absence’” (Runia 2006:1, Froeyman 2012:393) more aptly captures what is going on here. Runia defines presence as “being in touch—either literally or figuratively with people, things, events, and feelings that made you into the person you are” (2006:5). He argues that while many scholars of the past, of memory, and of commemoration are concerned with meaning and transfer of meaning, he suggests that what in fact is far more significant is a *notion* of presence (Ibid.; cf. Domanska 2006:337) which moves beyond this semantic, representational framework. By stressing the notion of presence, we can move beyond Ankersmit’s “short but ecstatic kiss” to note the enduring moment of this temporal encounter; longer in duration than kiss, this is more of an entanglement resembling Stoler’s invocation of “imperial debris” and its corresponding entanglements (2013). This matter of entangled, enduring material presence is particularly valid in analysing monuments and statues like that of Edward Colston or Edmund Burke. Runia argues that “Monuments are *Fremdkoerper* (things that are out of place) that make past events present on the plane of the present, fistulae that connect and juxtapose those events to there here and now” (Runia 2006:17). As modern monuments are concerned not on a transfer of meaning, but of presence (Ibid.)—including the war memorial or even the statue—they encompass and draw our attention to the multitemporal entanglements of past and present in the context of the material encounter of the historical walking tour.

Additionally, these techniques potentially reveal insight on the relationship between present and past and how they are conceived and experienced on these tours. Namely, they violate a sense of historicist linear time, revealing an entanglement wherein the seemingly distant past and the present simultaneously inhabit the contemporary spaces of the city of Bristol.

Through discussing the ethnographic material as well as notions of historical sensation and presence, I suggest the term *presencing* to regard the encounter between materiality and embodiment which creates a certain temporal relationship between the tour participants and the city. It is the negotiated, tense space between presence and absence, where *absence becomes present through entanglement*.

## Imagining the City as a Material Archive

The historical walking tour demonstrates the ways that materiality not only indexes the past, but ‘contains’ the past and evidence of its pastness as testimony to its multi-temporal entanglements. As Sharon Macdonald suggests through the term multitemporality (2013), material things can be both present (and of the present) and yet notably of the past at the same time. This is perhaps clearest in the bombed-out churches converted into war memorials and preserved ruins, the buildings pocked by shrapnel marks, and other processes of decay. While these buildings have a kind of presence in the present, their material scars also give them the quality of pastness and are of those particular moments as well (Holtorf 2013). Beyond the fact that the war itself was a traumatic experience for Bristolians and marks an epochal moment in British history, perhaps these material scars which are legible on the urban landscape also reinforce this historical significance and provide this sense of being noteworthy never mind noticeable. If the material scars of the past—of those nights in 1940 and 1941—still distinctly mark the urban landscape in the present, the dual temporality of both the building (or ruin) and the scar (for example, the shrapnel), they serve as a constant presence and a physical reminder of what is absent. Indeed, as intentionally preserved memorials, they aim to do precisely that.

If we think about the city’s material landscape as a sort of archive—a container of the past preserved to document it for the present and imagined future—then what might that container of pastness *do* and what might it tell us? The material archive doesn’t merely tell us of the *longue durée* of Bristol’s history, or ideas of conservation and the regimes of value which it accords to certain pasts. It also marks significant moments in that history as an index.

Throughout the walks, among these significant epochs is the prevalence of 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian architecture when the city underwent extensive expansion that accompanied industrialisation and migration from the countryside to the city, all of which was undergirded by the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economies of British colonialism (Mintz 1986). While the Second World War and the ways in which the Luftwaffe (described by one guide as “Hitler’s Renovation Team” transformed the material landscape rapidly and extensively is one often mentioned epoch, it is one of many. And though these are but two epochs in Bristol’s history, they are nevertheless relevant ones which often stand out in historical narratives—even if the imperial context which envelops both time periods serves as a “hidden frame” (Arendt 1951:267) which is rarely, if ever remarked upon yet contains the story which is foregrounded.

Yet the idea of the material landscape of the city as a sort of archive also accounts in part for the selectivity of the guides in these tours. Just as the historian searches through the archives for the time periods or themes which interest them, so our guides have the capacity to do so as well. However, the other side of this is that the material and documentary archive have the capacity to both contain history, as well as to allow for accounts of the past which leak beyond the narrations of tour guides as well as historians. This once again reveals the obviously constructed and inherently selective nature of historical practices. Yet at the same time, the enduring presence of the absent past, of what is overlooked, unspoken, or even unspeakable through materiality has the potential to disrupt or exceed these constructed narratives, just as Derrida's spectre (1994:5) and its uncanny, *unheimlich* character.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter on Bristol City Council's historical walking tours has tried to shed light on several issues: firstly, it has served as an opportunity to present aspects of this narrative of the city. As such, it touches on a number of historical figures, places, themes, issues, and tensions which are significant for my history-worker informants and their construction of an "official" narrative of the city's history. However, from a theoretical standpoint, it also illustrates some of the tensions between time and materiality, and the notions of presence/absence, past/present and the ways in which they relate to each other through the stuff—the buildings, the urban landscape, street names, and statues among other things—throughout the city. It also illustrates the techniques evoking the senses which tour guides use to draw out and illustrate the tense relationship between presence and absence.

Here we return to some of the theoretical positions above where we started, namely, Eva Domanska's exploration of the relationship between presence and absence in light of the materialities of the Bristolian cityscape. Although the presence/absence framework has its limitations, the concepts nevertheless seem to simultaneously exist in the context of the historical walking tour, just as Derrida's notion of the spectre is both flesh and spirit; possessing a sort of hybridity which haunts, due to its peculiarity and ability to transgress our neat delineations (2006 [1994]:5). Where Domanska speaks of the ways in which the non-absent past permeates the present, similar to Kevin Birth's discussion of the "immanent past" (2006), the historical walking tour demonstrates the entangled and simultaneous absence and presence of the past in the contemporary present. Through material presences and their enduring temporality, they both



“contain” the past in a manner which transcends and exceeds both linear, historicist notions of time (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, Palmié and Stewart 2016). This is also the case with the historical narratives which are presented through both these walking tours as well as the museum displays and representations present in the following chapter.

Considering the multi-temporal nature of the city’s materiality, I have suggested that one way to conceptualise the material landscape of the city is through the notion of archive. The archive—a material presence, which is also a depository which ‘contains’ a reference of events past for the sake of the present and imagined future—is used by academic historians in order to construct historical narratives of the past, often infused with the sort of presentist biases which Lowenthal (1985) notes. However, rather than being of a text-based nature, the materiality of the city also functions as an archive which contains a sort of documentary record for tour guides to selectively construct their own narratives of the city’s past. This idea of selectivity and the production of history—and the silences of what is often left out of historical narratives—is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter Three: Silences of Circumscription: 'Silence,' Displacing, and Disconnecting Empire

"So as a historian, do you spend a lot of time in the archives?" one fellow walking tour participant asked me on a sunny Spring day. After explaining to my middle-aged, white, English acquaintance from these tours that I wasn't a historian, but rather, an anthropologist, another participant asked, "You're an anthropologist?! So what are you doing here in Bristol!? Shouldn't you be somewhere that was actually *in* the Empire like India, Africa, or Hong Kong if you're going to research Empire?"

These questions were typical throughout my fieldwork, especially in the context of the M Shed walking tours discussed in the last chapter. At the start of each tour, the guides would often invite me to introduce myself and explain why I carried a notebook around with me. On the one hand, these initial responses reveal particular assumptions about contemporary understandings of imperialism and how a city like Bristol might (or might not) fit into a larger picture of Empire. The assertion that I was a historian who should be working in the archives also reveals temporal assumptions—namely, that the British Empire is strictly a thing of the past, reserved for the domain of the documentary archive, history and the attention of academic historians. But there is also a spatial assumption betrayed: that the British Empire was/is not here in a place like Bristol or anywhere in England. Rather the anthropologist interested in the British Empire belongs somewhere over there like India, Hong Kong, Singapore, etc. where the Empire *really* happened.

These comments echo the words of Whiskey Sisodia, one of Salman Rushdie's characters from *The Satanic Verses* who says, "The trouble with the Engenglish is that their hiss-hiss history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means" (Rushdie 1988:343). These assumptions also index the binary understanding of Empire in the academic discipline of history, splitting British and imperial history as separate such that never the twain shall meet, as addressed by Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (2006:5, 36; Armitage 2000:3).

With this in mind, my work aims to unpack and move beyond some of these central assumptions of the Empire as a long time ago, somewhere over there. This chapter specifically engages contemporary understandings and representations of Bristol's historical relationship with Empire and considers how these core assumptions are embedded in heritage discourses and social memory.

Sentiments of intrigue and fascination by many informants suggested that the lack of understanding in Bristol about the city's imperial connections and past was reminiscent of fog in the harbour waiting to be lifted. During one of my first meetings, Mariateresa, an Italian woman and longstanding resident in Bristol interested in heritage and preservation activism (and who at the time was serving on the Bristol Civic Society's Heritage Committee) approached my research with genuine enthusiasm. Pondering the ways in which Bristol presents and deals with this history, she said:

It's very interesting. Because here in Bristol, it's almost as if this history has been whitewashed. Although there's a lot of talk about the slave trade, you're right that there is little said about the wider empire and how they fit together. As an Italian, I find the way in which imperialism is talked about in England is very strange...*it's as if they don't really talk about it*, whereas in Italy, we speak of our history very differently (in regards to topics like fascism).

Mariateresa's claim of "whitewashing" was also echoed by many other informants as well, although the frame of concealment invoked here is perhaps too blunt to capture the complexities of what is going on. However, the lack of speech and 'very little said' may offer some more precision to analyse the situation.

Over the course of my research, "We don't really talk about it" emerged as a theme. As part of my research, I spent a few months with the Underfall Yard as an oral history volunteer for this project on the maritime history of the local Harbour and its maintenance. After one event, the overall project manager asked, "Alex, I know you've been hanging out with us a lot and I'm very grateful for the work you've done for us. But I'm a bit curious: what exactly is your research about?" I replied with more or less the standard line of my interest in how imperialism and empire are understood and talked about in Bristol today, and how I was interested in local history and heritage projects and how this history was engaged. "Wow!" she replied. "I mean, *do* we even talk about it?!" she asked. "That's *really* interesting and quite fascinating, because the more I think about it, it's just not the sort of thing that's really spoken of, but you're right that it's important in our history."

At a Commonwealth conference in London in November 2014, I met John, a senior official at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office who asked what I did and what brought me to the conference. Upon giving a brief summary of my research, he responded with astonishment:

I suppose if I had to tell you anything about it, perhaps—and you've probably realised this—it's that we don't really talk about it. Perhaps it's because we as Englishmen don't know *how* we *should* talk about it, so we just don't.

He went on to explain the awkwardness of working in his particular Whitehall department, reminding me that the FCO was once the Foreign and *Colonial* Office. He then remarked, “You would think of all the departments in Whitehall, we would be the one who knows how to talk about it since it’s such an integral part of our history, but we don’t really talk much about it because we don’t know how.”

While John’s rank and position at the FCO made his comments stand out, the bewilderment of my research was hardly unique among many of my informants. Many fellow members of the Bristol Commonwealth Society shared similar sentiments and concerns for the difficulty of my research—after all, how could I research something that just wasn’t really talked about?

Yet this is not exactly an absolute silence. As suggested in the previous chapter, discussing historical narratives in Bristol, one of the most debated and engaged topics in Bristol’s maritime and imperial history is the issue of the slave trade and Bristol’s central role in it. Bristol was also connected to other slave-labour intensive trades such as the sugar and tobacco industries throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as part of the British Empire. While rarely ever speaking of these industries and trade relationships as “imperial” or “colonial”, the slave trade is widely acknowledged both academically and publicly (for example Dresser 2007 [2001], Chivallon 2001, Casbeard 2010). It is also openly addressed by heritage professionals, heritage volunteers, and Bristol residents. They widely acknowledge that much of Bristol’s wealth—most concretely manifested in the grandeur of the neighbourhood of Clifton—came from the slave trade and these related industries. The discussion became even more prominent following the release of a BBC documentary based on new research from a team of historians at University College London in summer 2015 entitled *Britain’s Forgotten Slave Owners*. The documentary suggested that as compensation for the 1833 Abolition Act, 70 Bristol residents received £829,205 in compensation, amounting to £71.1 million in 2015 money for loss of their property. This was addressed in both the local paper (Pavid in the Bristol Evening Post, 14 July 2015) and subsequent council-sponsored walking tours based out of the M Shed museum.

Considering the ways in which narratives of Empire are handled in Bristol museum displays and historical walking tours, I argue along with Edwards and Mead (2013) that explicit address of the Empire is at best marginal. For the most part, the history of Empire is not integrated into the city’s historical narrative. It is largely absent, which Edwards and Mead attribute as an active form of disavowal.

These heritage practices of historical walking tours or in the genre or remit of local history museums and heritage projects admittedly have a focus on creating a sense of the local. Perhaps understandably, this production of the local may not take ‘the Other’ into account in its historical narratives, and this may be especially true of the distant (whether temporal or spatial) ‘Others’ of Empire. But there is nevertheless a tension between the making of the local and telling the story of a city, emphasising its maritime history, its focus on trade with distant lands, and its position as a global city. The city’s coat of arms, displaying a ship and a castle as the prominent icons of the city, suggests that Bristol has hardly ever been or seen itself as an isolated locality.

Additionally, under public pressure, Bristol *has* taken steps to discuss its uncomfortable history with the slave trade though not so much the wider frame of Empire, thus marking a difference from Wemyss’ notion of the “Invisible Empire” which conceals episodes of white violence (2016 [2009]). As we will see in the museum displays below, although these museums are involved with making the local (especially M Shed, Bristol’s local history museum), this locality does not exist in a vacuum, and curators certainly take ‘Others’ into account through narratives about slavery and trade, for example.

This chapter argues that heritage organisations in Bristol engage the city’s imperial history and its role as a node within the network of the British Empire largely through a peculiar sort of silence (as opposed to the concept of invisibility suggested by Edwards and Mead (2013) and Wemyss (2016 [2009])) or as a sort of amnesia or forgetting suggested in Katharine Tyler’s work (2012). This silence is combined with and reinforced by a practice of marginalisation or compartmentalisation where this history is put off to the side. The effect is a form of disconnection and displacement, and through this thesis, I argue that these techniques and heritage practices of displacement embed and reproduce the temporal and spatial assumptions of Empire being a long time ago, over there. While in some ways, my proposed concept resembles Georgie Wemyss’ discussion of the “Invisible Empire” (2016 [2009]) which conceals episodes of white violence and what Tyler (2012:9) refers to as a “sanitised version of colonial history,” it develops these concepts through its engagement within a wider framework of silence. Furthermore, the ethnographic attention to Bristol museum displays below *does* pay particular attention to Bristol’s history as a slaving port—a key example of white violence.

At times, there is a physical, literal silence. As John from the FCO and others above have suggested, “We don’t really talk about it at all.” But at other times, this manifests as what I term ‘silences of circumscription.’ By this, I refer to the ways in which Empire and Bristol’s role in it are often ‘talked around’ principally (though not exclusively) through two main concepts: the slave

trade (and the trope of trade more generally) and the Commonwealth. In this vein, I argue that the slave trade is exemplary of a bad notion of Empire involving atrocities of violence, dehumanisation, and exploitation while the Commonwealth is often framed as a good version of imperialism which brought schools, hospitals, railroads, and the English language to many parts of the world. But as silences of circumscription, I discuss the slave trade and Commonwealth and the way in which they are spoken of and presented throughout the ethnography. Granted, there are temporal complexities and differences in two concepts of slave trade and Commonwealth. They are also often handled with differing temporal assumptions: the slave trade was a long, long time ago while the Commonwealth still has an enduring, albeit marginal and only faintly visible presence in the city today through the Bristol Commonwealth Society.

The issue of silence further highlights some tensions between norm and practice in Jeffrey Olick's "politics of regret" around historical responsibility (2007). These silences of circumscription and the assumptions of spatial and temporal compartmentalisation, embedded in and reinforced by heritage practices concerning imperialism in Bristol, effectively displace the history of Empire. The result is that the history of Empire and Bristol's role in it *beyond* slave trade and Commonwealth is either deemed irrelevant or in the past, effectively putting this debate into abeyance, and postponing any broader, further debate on Empire to an indeterminate point in the future. The choice of the term abeyance (and its implication of suspended debt, whether monetary or moral) is acute and poignant considering concerns for reparations discussed by other world leaders such as Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller during a visit to Jamaica by then UK Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 (for example Mason 2015 in *The Guardian*), scholars such as Hilary Beckles, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies (2013) (cf. Tibbles 2008:300-301), and some of my informants.

The intertemporality of these debates and its consequences reaches into both past and future beyond the present moment. This was demonstrated by comments made by Ros, a Black social worker turned key activist among Bristol's Black community and the Countering Colston movement which campaigned to see changes made to landmarks bearing Edward Colston's name. Chatting in her kitchen, Ros articulated her work in this campaign as "seeking justice for my ancestors" who were affected by slave trade and Empire. For Ros, she felt that the weight and grief of the injustice her ancestors suffered was very much with her and guided her to be involved with conversations about this history. Working with schools and other educational activities throughout the city, much of her concern is with how future generations might come to

understand not only Bristol's history, but the wider history of the British Empire and what it means.

However, before turning to these ethnographic examples of heritage practices in Bristol, I turn to some of the literature on silence and memory.

### **Silence and the Past**

A fairly wide body of literature discusses silence, historiography, memory, and history. Some of this has been mentioned in the Introduction and much will also be elaborated below to situate the concept proposed in this chapter of circumscriptive silence. Rather than engaging the whole corpus, I want to hone in on a very peculiar sort of silence in heritage discussions and practice and with a particular emphasis on a notion of metropolitan post-colonial memory, looking at how imperialism is understood today in the former metropolises of Empire (De L'Estoile 2008). This section assembles a few theoretical threads about the politics of silence and memory before going on to question the equation between silence and forgetting which is often made through comments about historical amnesia (Tyler 2012) in relation to Empire.

In this case, the common binary of memory and forgetting is overly simplistic and inappropriate (cf. Bijl 2012:443); many of those involved in history and heritage in Bristol are entirely aware of Britain's imperial past and Bristol's role within it—especially concerning the transatlantic slave trade. As Syano, a Kenyan PhD student at Bristol University suggested in a public forum I hosted with the Bristol Civic Society:

It's not a matter of remembering or forgetting; many of us know that Britain had an Empire. What we don't know about it are accurate details of what happened because most of the information and presentation on Empire is often biased or watered down to be entertaining or it's just not very good.

To be fair, Syano's words refer to a wider trend of misinformation about Empire as projected through nostalgic sources in popular media (MacKenzie 1986, Ward 2001, Webster 2005). However, there are accurate historical and historiographical accounts available, such as Philippa Levine's *The British Empire* (2013), or the work extensive work of John Darwin (for example, 2012).

But where historical accuracy may be Syano's concern, I wish to move beyond his comment about popular representation of Empire and concerns about accuracy as well as concerns over memory and forgetting. Here, the work of Ann Laura Stoler on aphasia provides a useful analytical framework (2011). Among her extensive writing on the subject of colonialism,

Stoler notes a sort of silence within French collective memory and academic discourse through what she conceptualises as a form of “colonial aphasia”. As Kristen Ross notes, within French historiography, there was a tendency of “keeping two stories apart” (that of modern France and that of colonialism) as “another name for forgetting one of the stories or for relegating it to a different time frame” (1995, cited in Stoler 2011:124). Noting the shortcomings of terms such as “colonial amnesia” and its invocation of forgetting, Stoler suggests that such terms are inappropriate and rather, she proposes *aphasia* as a more descript term for the phenomenon observed. She writes that aphasia

[C]aptures not only the nature of that blockage but also the feature of loss...it emphasis[es] both loss of access and active dissociation. In aphasia, an occlusion of knowledge is the issue. It is not a matter of ignorance or absence. Aphasia is a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and conceptions with appropriate things. Aphasia in its many forms describes a difficulty retrieving both conceptual and lexical vocabularies and, most important, a difficulty comprehending what is spoken (Stoler 2011:125).

She continues, observing that some of the most prevalent changes in French society over the previous decades make the issue of colonial history prevalent, including the notion that

[H]istory is thought to matter to people’s present choices, future possibilities, and contemporary politics. What is being rethought is where the social policies of systematic exclusions are located in the grammar of republican values and thus how centrally the imperial entailments of national history are framed (Stoler 2011:126).

In other words, French academic and political discourse has an internal tension concerning the central role of Empire in making a Republic which cannot own the reality of this past. This point translates quite directly to the English circumstance as well. She also notes the absence of French colonialism in the national curriculum, arguing that “It has been assiduously circumvented, systematically excluded from the pedagogic map” (Stoler 2011:126.). This too has been an issue of contestation and ambiguity both locally in Bristol as well as nationally in England and the rest of the UK and there have been debates on how the history of Empire is engaged in school history curriculum (see for example Milne 2013 in *The Guardian*, Ferguson 2013 in *The Guardian*).

Stoler offers an overview of the political history of France, particularly the tendency to separate metropolitan France (and political episodes within it) from the larger frame of colonial discourse. This includes the racial formations at the heart of French history and the colonial discourse within both politics and academic discourse (cf. Hall and Rose 2006, Trouillot 2015 [1995]:100-102, Armitage 2000:3). Indeed, problematic episodes in French history such as compliance with the Vichy government and the atrocities of Algeria and other French colonies are “understood not as central features of the republic but as its very negation” (Stoler 2011:142, cf.



Bijl 2012, Balkenhol 2010). Similarly, both slavery/Empire are presented as an aberration in Bristolian/English history as opposed to the centrality of it. As suggested in Chapter 1, the possession of Empire has always been central to the construction of England and Britain, whether as a national identity, economically, or as a state. Furthermore, when certain historical episodes are discussed in both the French and British/English examples, they are engaged because “they are finished acts that can be relegated to the *passé composé* (past tense)”, and this temporal compartmentalisation is what makes certain colonial episodes “safe” to discuss, while effectively creating disconnection from wider historical, colonial narratives (Stoler 2011:144).

Critical to Stoler’s piece, she contends again that forgetting is an insufficient frame for understanding this issue in France, noting that aphasia in particular does better to address

[T]he irretrievability of vocabulary, a limited access to it, a simultaneous presence of a thing and its absence, a presence and the misrecognition of it. As Roman Jakobson (1971) reminds us, in aphasia, the “context is the indispensable and decisive factor” (Stoler 2011: 145, quote in original).

As an example of this decontextualized disconnection, she notes that Pierre Nora’s only colonial reference in his famous *Lieux de memoire* did not address perspectives from the colonies. Rather, his sole reference was the 1931 Exposition Coloniale; when asked about this by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Nora explains the absence of colonial *lieux de mémoire* in his volumes by suggesting “that there were none.” (quoted in Stoler 2011:147) Rather than forgetting, Stoler suggests this is an intentional dissociation on Nora’s part, partly due to his social positioning, political context, and French historical discourse and its understandings of Frenchness (Stoler 2011:147-148). This does not suggest that transparency is a simple solution considering that concept’s complex history with French intellectualism (Geroulanos 2017).

However, what merits more attention is how silences operate, disconnections are formed, and connections can be remade as part of the politics of the past within the present. Considering the patterns of Empires and imperial formations to fragment and fracture, separate and dissociate in order to serve their own purposes, Fernando Coronil notes that Empires “make their histories appear as History...predicated on dissociations that separate relational histories” (2007:245, quoted in Stoler 2011:155). In the ethnography that follows, Stoler’s discussion of French historiography in relation to its colonial past is just as relevant in exploring the metropolitan post-colonial problematic in Bristol’s heritage discourses.

As an example illustrating the ways in which memory and forgetting are limited analytical frames here, following the Civic Society forum, many in attendance gave feedback suggesting that

while of course they knew in a general sense that Britain had an Empire, they had either not known or really thought about how Bristol was connected to that wider Empire *beyond* the slave trade. The audience at that event consisted of a diverse group of about 50 people ranging from attendees in their mid-20's to community leaders from Bristol's Black community as well as older informants from the Commonwealth and Civic Societies. Yet on the whole, these comments about a general sense of disconnection between Bristol and Empire beyond the slave trade and general ignorance seemed to reinforce a wider trend I'd observed throughout my fieldwork, and these sentiments were especially true among the younger attendees at the discussion.

In order to move beyond the limited binary of memory and forgetting, I take on Stoler's approach and look at theoretical conceptualisations of silence and history. However, I am apprehensive of falling into the overtly intentionalist/instrumental claims of some of this literature. From there, the chapter closes in on a specific discussion on silences relating to colonial pasts based on Stoler's framework.

### **A Core Assumption for Framing Silence: The Politics of Regret and the Moral Imperative of Speech**

In *The Politics of Regret* (2007), Jeffrey Olick posits that a politics of regret is vital to political legitimacy and features centrally in contemporary political cultures and discourses. By this, he suggests that a regretful, mournful stance over the mistakes of a state's past have taken up a central role in providing political legitimacy through a framework of historical responsibility. This discourse involves intricate ethics of political legitimacy relating historical responsibility with remembrance and acts of speech. As a result of this apparent norm, forgetting and silence are seen as immoral and unethical (Rieff 2016:59).

Perhaps the most notable feature of this political and moral landscape is the emergence of a discourse of Universal Human Rights following the atrocities of the Second World War and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For Olick, this discourse on human rights ties into "a politics of regret because its advocates believe that only gestures of reparation, apology, and acknowledgement can restore the dignity of history's victims and can deter new outbreaks of inhumanity" (2007:126). Within this, he suggests "a postmodern demise of legitimating narratives" such as the celebration of the nation-state once perpetuated by elites and others in power; rather, he observes the emergence of alternative narratives calling for the righting of historical wrongs (ibid.129).

Yet, as David Rieff points out in his polemical *In Praise of Forgetting*, there are times when George Santayana's maxim that "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" needs to be questioned and scrutinised (2016). In tracing some of the flaws of excesses of memory (let alone its impossibility), forgetting is at times a useful, necessary option, citing particular longstanding violent conflicts such as those in Palestine, Ireland, or the Balkans. Rieff also questions the ways in which commemoration is often active resistance to forgetting, which he suggests is a more natural and inevitable process. In this sense, forgetting can be useful if not necessary for reconciliation, let alone, moving on. Rieff's point is not to forget everything and remember nothing (2016:119); rather, that there are certain (if rare) political circumstances where "remembering does an injustice to the present" (2016:121).

While Rieff's commentary on forgetting provides a valuable intervention against the oft unquestioned norm of memory, it does have its limitations. The call to forget can perhaps be misinterpreted, as Rieff's notion does not sufficiently consider issues of power and questions of *who* is able to move on. This is especially pertinent when understandings of the past in the present are used as tools to explain longstanding and structural inequalities. For many descendants of enslaved Africans in the Americas and Caribbean, this is particularly the case. Those in power may call to forget histories of slavery and institutional oppression, but those who live with the consequences of slavery and displacement cannot forget so easily. Although Rieff's account is notable for its suggestion of forgetting as an option, the moral norm of memory and speech nevertheless remains pervasive. These norms are especially important among those who feel as though they still live under hierarchies of oppression and marginalisation, who cannot forget the past; they live in its present and call for accountability for these inequalities in the hope of justice in the future.

Further nuancing the centrality of regimes of Human Rights, Samuel Moyn (2014) provides a closer reading to the emergence of Human Rights, offering critical readings of a number of scholars on the subject. Moyn illustrates that the contemporary notion we now have of Human Rights discourse with its emphasis of the rights of the individual does *not* originate with the 1948 UDHR framework. This notion was based upon an existing framework of nation-states focused on developing social democracy (2014:74) as its *modus operandi*. Furthermore, this interpretation is a consolation prize to the promises of self-determination and decolonisation made and later retracted in the Atlantic Charter of 1940 (see Darwin 1988:38). Moyn suggests that the understanding of Human Rights as "individual protection against the state extended by some

authority above it” only emerged in the 1960s through the advocacy of groups like Amnesty International (2014:80).

While Olick’s argument focuses on the German case, he also expands his argument of the politics of regret to a wider, more general setting, invoking cosmopolitan memory and South African Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. But, if contemporary political discourse is in some measure rooted in this politics of regret, a tension emerges concerning the politics of memory surrounding historical episodes such as imperial conquest and slavery—episodes which stand as antithetical to a discourse on Human Rights. Yet these have also historically been central to the nation-state and its particular emergence concurrently with projects of Empire (Colley 2009 [1992], Armitage 2000, Mintz 1986). In this light, the politics of metropolitan post-colonial memory—and how these memories are constructed, presented, and dealt with—offers an interesting new problematic to these wider discourses.

How then does a city which sees itself as progressive within a nation which claims to champion human rights reconcile the historical events of an imperial past with the present? This illustrates an awkward tension that problematises a straightforward, heroic narrative (cf. Bijl 2012, Balkenhol 2010 on similar discourses in the Netherlands). Moyn (2014:35, 59) further suggests that British anti-slavery stances in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were actually mobilised as a *justification* for imperial rule, including invasions and colonial expansion due to a perceived British moral superiority. Toby Kelly also discusses the complexity of British historical narratives justifying the imperial endeavour through the language of human rights, particularly against practices such as torture (2011) or sati (Mani 1987). Kelly shows that this British self-articulation of identity opposed to torture operates to displace Britain’s own responsibility with the use of torture in both contemporary neo-colonial exploits and in histories of Empire as well. Celebratory historical narratives rely on elements of forgetting and ignorance to be sure; but is it possible for a nation to more or less ignore one of the most constitutive elements of its modern history, as *Financial Times* writer Gideon Rachman (2017) writes about Britain’s “amnesia” about its Empire in the wake of the 2016 Brexit vote?

The practical outworking of a politics of regret is also highly contingent on speech and acknowledgement. Moral norms of speech and acknowledgement echoing practices of confession range in the literature from memory of the Holocaust in Germany to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in places like South Africa and Rwanda (for example, Olick 2005, 2007; Macdonald 2009; Bell 2006). However, the problematic of metropolitan post-colonial memory asks what happens when this speech act recognising atrocity *does not* explicitly occur. In other words, what

happens when injustice is *not* spoken of because of the possibility that it is not widely or clearly recognised as injustice, perhaps because the victims are not easily recognised as victims (cf. Kelly 2011:4, Butler 2009, Bijl 2012)?

Or what if the incident in question is not recognised as one of violence or injustice? As one informant (an older, white Englishman who had worked a career in engineering and had an interest in Bristol's local history of tobacco) asked, "The British Empire was just about trade. What's wrong about trade?" In this sense, Robert's words fail to recognise the British Empire as problematic or unjust; in this formulation, motifs of trade conceal and displace inequality and responsibility.

In cases such as German memory of the Holocaust and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions as examples of this politics of regret, the act of speaking and of recognition of atrocity is seen as a moral necessity. Inversely, therefore, silence (or lack of speech or absence of confession) is often presumed as the result of either being oppressed as a victim, or as a moral abdication or failure (Zerubavel 2006). Perhaps this is why Jon (the walking tour guide in the previous chapter) makes it a point to stop and point out the plaque alluding to the slave trade on the side of M Shed. In his own words, he insists he perceives it as a moral duty to stop and discuss this chapter of Bristol's history and source of its wealth.

In examining this literature on silence, Eviatar Zerubavel and his assumptions on the moral normativity of speech and Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger's proposals on the productivity of silence also contribute to developing a theorisation on what work silences effectively *perform*. Taking this approach moves beyond the assumption that a lack of speech is indicative of moral failure to examine the possibility that perhaps silence can be deemed necessary or useful (cf. Rieff 2016 on forgetting). What if in fact, silence is one of the ways in which societies attempt to supposedly 'deal with' these problematic histories, however inchoate or unsatisfactory that strategy may be to some? While Rieff and some of my informants may advocate moving on and forgetting, this is not considered feasible or just to others, such as Ros, who along with her ancestors has been greatly affected by the colonial encounter and histories of enslavement.

With this in mind, this chapter explores the literature on silence and empirical data on commemoration of Empire, slave trade, and Commonwealth among heritage organisations in Bristol via contemporary ethnography. I do not merely suggest that a practice of 'silence of

circumscription' is what is often being done, but I also seek to explore what work these silences and statements effectively *do*.

### ***Conceptualising Silence***

#### *Silence and Historical Production*

Silence is widely understood in the context of a binary between present acts of speech/sound and the absence of speech/sound. The two main definitions in Oxford English Dictionary define silence as “The fact of abstaining or forbearing from speech or utterance (sometimes with reference to a particular matter); the state or condition resulting from this; muteness, reticence, taciturnity” or as “The state or condition when nothing is audible; absence of all sound or noise; complete quietness or stillness; noiselessness.” (OED N.d.). Both of these core definitions notably relate to the presence or absence of sound or speech. As Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger note, this is particularly true in relation among collective memory, narration, and speech (2010:1103).

However, this section conceptualises silence beyond a denotative definition and the literal absence of sound to look more figuratively at the various forms silence may take. I also consider what kind of political work these figurative silences might perform. Looking at some of the wider literature on silence in relation to history and social memory, this section looks at some of the tensions in various theorisations of silence including questions of agency as well as the relationship among silence, memory, and forgetting. Throughout this section, examples from Paul Connerton’s typology and plurality of silences (2011) are put into dialogue with some of the relevant literature in order to construct an analytical framework and introduce a theoretical problematic for the ethnography below.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s classic in exploring the relationship between history and silence, *Silencing the Past* (2015 [1995]), takes an in-depth look at the production of history. Trouillot takes a critical approach to consider how history works through investigating the process of historical production. His analysis considers the ways in which silences are woven into the making of history at four distinct moments: the moment of fact creation (making sources); the moment of fact assembly (making archives); the moment of fact retrieval (making narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (making *history* in the final instance) (2015 [1995]:26).

Trouillot critically demonstrates that silences are part of the very fabric of history as a social construction. Furthermore, these silences are often linked to power and its uneven distribution both politically and intellectually. History, as the saying goes, is written by the victors after all. In Trouillot's example, he illustrates the ways in which French (and Western) historiography has intentionally constructed a history of the Haitian Revolution which is effectively silenced, disabled, and marginalised. Trouillot shows the ways in which inequalities of power are woven into historical production at all four stages. From the very impossibility of the Haitian Revolution according to French intellectuals and the ways in which it was discursively marginalised and silenced as it happened; to the ways in which archival evidence and historical narratives added their own silence from French historians; to the ways in which the history of the Haitian Revolution is understood and conceived today with a retrospective stance, Trouillot traces the link between power and silence in the construction of history.

Yet Trouillot also highlights the relationship between colonialism, silence, and history for us. As Trouillot notes, for many French observers at the time and historians since, the Haitian Revolution was impossible; a non-event. Although most of Trouillot's work is written with a specific focus on the Haitian Revolution in mind, his work could also be useful for a wider analysis of the ways in which certain topics and themes in historical discourse are effectively silenced. For example, he illustrates that during the construction of archives and the late 18<sup>th</sup> century context of the Haitian Revolution, the seeming impossibility of the Revolution within intellectual discourse was one reason this historical episode has been effectively silenced.

In a sense, Trouillot's account echoes Paul Connerton's terminological silences left by "the refusal or inability to reconstruct certain narratives," resulting in things which "are consigned to the sphere of the 'not-said'" (2011:76-77). This also overlaps Connerton's narrative silences which "signify the refusal or inability to *tell* certain narratives" (2011:73, emphasis added) as in Stalinist Russia or Franco's Spain. As Connerton writes:

History, indeed, is drenched in such narrative silences. No mention was ever made in Eastern Europe after the Second World War of the sufferings of national, ethnic or religious minorities, whether at the hands of the Russians, Germans or the local population (2011: 76).

Connerton offers other examples such as the omission of Trotsky in Soviet histories, the silence of Turkish historians concerning the Armenian genocide, the place of Russian history before Peter the Great in European discourse, and Spanish historians' omitting of acts of genocide while writing about colonial conquests in Mexico and Peru. He also notes African historians' simultaneous recognition of European exploitation of their ancestors and omission of the violence inflicted upon

them by Arabs (Connerton 2011:76). Both these concepts of terminological and narrative silences also play into the wider framework of colonial aphasia discussed by Ann Stoler and further elaborated by Paul Bijl and Elizabeth Edwards. The ethnography of museum displays in this chapter and the proposed *silences of circumscription* map onto this notion of aphasia as a *narrative silence* which considers historical practices that have the potential to displace and disconnect narratives of Empire.

Trouillot also notes the presence of two other strategies for producing silence in the final moment of historical production (the moment of retrospective significance) in the present. One strategy operates at a general level, resulting in a more or less overt silence and erasure (an absence altogether from history textbooks, for example). The second is a more precise and detailed practice, a decontextualization of facts wherein they become trivial and banal (2015 [1995]:96). But he also portrays the silencing of the Haitian Revolution as part of a wider trend in Western historiography where racism, slavery, and colonialism are relegated and marginalised historical topics, despite their prevalence and central significance in the historical formation of Western nations such as France (Trouillot 2015 [1995]:98, 100-102, cf. Stoler 2011)

Questions of power also tie in with inequalities of agency and what Connerton considers as the contrast between intentional and imposed silences, or as he suggests, “silence and silencing” (2011:56). For Connerton, intentional silences are to an extent, voluntary, as in his discussion of silences of resistance (Ibid.:67) or tactful silences (Ibid.:69) where those who practice the silence do so without any forceful imposition. However, imposed silences are involuntary silences, often marked by issues of power and inequality manifested in the ability of one party to decree and enforce silence over others as in the narrative or terminological silences above. As Trouillot’s example of French/Western historiography of the Haitian Revolution clearly suggests, these involuntary, imposed silences demonstrate how silences are imposed by those who have the ability to exert power over others.

Along these inequalities of power, Eviatar Zerubavel links silence and denial in his conceptual account, *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life* (2006). For Zerubavel, historical silence is largely a matter of an imposed conspiracy of denial, where those in power establish a taboo regarding open secrets (cf. Olick 2007:40-42). Using examples of parables such as the Emperor’s New Clothes or the monkeys who “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil,” his account fails to empirically consider what other functions silence may have and some of the other ways it may operate beyond an elite, instrumentalist conspiracy of denial. As Connerton suggests, silences are not simply imposed by those in power, but they can also be intentional and



voluntary. Silences can be noisy and can do more complex work than denial alone, and they can operate in politically complex manners. Yet by quickly equating silence and denial, Zeruvabel seems to assume the moral imperative of speech a bit too hastily without enough nuance to consider other strategic uses of silence beyond outright denial or conspiracy.

One way to consider these accusations of intentionalist conspiracies more carefully is through Paul Bijl's work (2012). Bijl notes the continued presence of claims in the Netherlands of "amnesia" and "forgetting" of the colonial past which are allegedly an intentionalist conspiracy by groups such as Dutch migrants from the Indies, the media, government, or historians (2012:443, 445). However, Bijl dismisses the claim of conspiracies to deny or conceal Dutch colonial history from the Dutch public. Rather, he argues that structural and discursive forces make Dutch colonial history "unmemorable:" the Dutch colonial past does not fit into a frame or narrative of Dutch history. Bijl cites a large range of photographic evidence of Dutch colonial atrocities to also deny the intentionalist claim, arguing that "critics of Dutch colonial memory...overlook the fact that the traces of colonial atrocities had always already been available to the Dutch" (Bijl 2012:446). According to Bijl, if a conspiracy were at hand to conceal the evidence and one party were responsible for 'hiding' this past, surely this issue would be solved by now.

While power undoubtedly plays a role in the construction, dissemination, and interpretation of history, simply equating silence and denial is limited, despite the supposed moral norm. A more complex, empirically based framework is needed to consider some of the potential causes of silence as well as some of the nuanced and at times paradoxical manifestations and aims of silence. The rest of this section considers some of these aspects, while claims of conspiracy—and considering what these claims might *do* in and of themselves, even if they are problematic or false—will be discussed in the next chapter.

### *Paradoxes of Silence and Memory/Forgetting*

In terms of memory and silence, we have explored the basic assumption that speech equals remembrance, while silence equals forgetting. "Collective memory is generally understood to entail the narration and representation of the past, while collective forgetting is antithetically thought to be a silencing and muting of that past" (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger 2010:1103). Within this, "Commemoration seems to amount--at least in its beginning stages--to words, narratives, and much talk. In other words, speech, narrative and text seem to be perceived as necessary--if not sufficient--for ensuring collective memory" (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010:1103.).

However, this assumption cannot account for the numerous empirical complexities and apparent paradoxes at hand. Paul Connerton illustrates the limitation of these binaries in his discussion on war commemoration throughout Europe and how the phrase “Lest we forget” and the minute’s silence constitute both an act of remembrance through focusing attention on the war dead *and* an act of forgetting of the survivors of the war such as the maimed, disabled, and traumatised. In this context, there is a sense in which the forgetting of survivors is an active process, as many in the years after the First World War were considered a social liability due to their inability to work in factories, and in their claims for compensation (Connerton 2011:48).

Yet another example of a paradoxical silence is what Connerton refers to as the Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae*: a means of defacing the memory of certain figures such as Brutus or Cassius through speaking about them in roundabout ways as “tyrants” or “those who assassinated my relative” (Connerton 2011:72). However, a central paradox reveals itself if one equates silence with forgetting:

To attempt to forget something consciously, by not referring to it, requires that one think of the thing, and to think of the thing is the opposite of forgetting it. If one must continually remember not to mention a person, then one is not forgetting that person. When we are told to remember to forget, we are in effect being told to remember what is supposedly forgotten. *Damnatio memoriae* produced significant silences, particularly powerful and resonant signs. It works to preserve rather than to annihilate; it does not so much *destroy* memories as *dishonour* them (Ibid., emphasis in original).

This coincides with Luisa Passerini’s “paradox of forgetting”; we need to at least partially remember that which we ought to forget (2003 cited in Bijl 2012:442). This paradox also recalls Ernest Renan’s famous words about the need of every Frenchman to have forgotten massacres in the Midi and St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre as the Edict of Nantes decreed forgetting (Renan 1990 [1882]). Benedict Anderson points out the paradox in that all Frenchman should have forgotten what Renan suggests they are aware of (Anderson 2006 [1983]:49). As Bijl suggests, this is a sort of “Orwellian doublethink” of holding and accepting two contradictory beliefs (2012:442).

These examples demonstrate that speech/memory and silence/forgetting are far more complex than these paired binaries. Taking this a step further, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger use empirical examples of Israeli commemoration of assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to demonstrate how silence can be used in the service of *both* memory and forgetting. According to them, *speech* can be used in the service of forgetting (as with *damnatio memoriae*), or what Heidegger refers to as *gerede* as a form of empty talk (Dhawan 2007). Tying Olick’s politics

of regret to the tensions between speech/silence and memory/forgetting, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger ask:

How then do groups and/or nations that wish to forget the past, or at the very least not to talk about it, do so in an era where this is less and less acceptable (and, in some cases, where they are legislatively forced to 'remember')? Furthermore, how do groups that do wish to remember the past do so while minimalizing conflict with other groups that do not wish to recollect its shameful aspects? (2010:1104-5)

Note however, that they already assume an active *intent* of wishing to forget or to remain silent; however, in cases like Bristol's relationship with its colonial past below, I contend that this matter of intent is rather ambiguous.

In their typology, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger illustrate how literal silences can be used to remember as in a commemorative moment of silence, or to forget by simply keeping an apathetic, pervasive silence. However, what is more relevant to my framework is their concept of *covert* silences which are not about literal absences of sound, but are about empty or vacuous content, again echoing Heidegger's *gerede* (Dhawan 2007). In their formulation, a covert silence of remembering is a "bland commemoration" which often removes politically charged context in order to make the narrative more palatable to a wider audience (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 2010:1111-1114). Yet, there is also another silence: a "cacophonous commemoration" where the object of commemoration is blurred with other events, figures, or issues in a "covert silence of forgetting" (Ibid.). Considering the example of ultra-Orthodox Israeli communities (where Rabin's assassin was based), Israeli law mandates a commemoration of Rabin such that he cannot be denied; however, these communities also commemorate other figures in order to marginalise Rabin's memory as one among others, including Rachel (the Jewish matriarch) and quite randomly, rain. For the purposes of our framework, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger illustrate clear political motives empirically exercised by various communities through covert, non-literal, and noisy silences.

### *Silence and Colonial Aphasia*

The problem of political intent becomes a bit more muddled considering Britain's ambivalent relationship with its colonial past. There is a small but highly relevant stream of literature which focuses on European metropolises and their imperial histories, working to explain the matter in a far more productive manner than claims of denial or intentionalist conspiracy. As

Bijl (2012) shows how these silences which are often mistaken as a matter of forgetting are discursively produced, he builds on Ann Laura Stoler's aforementioned work.

Dutch scholar Paul Bijl investigates notions of colonial memory and forgetting in the Netherlands and in Indonesia (2012). In his particular analysis of the Netherlands, Bijl moves past the binary of memory and forgetting while also dispelling claims of intentionalist conspiracy. Noting the problematic assumption of equating forgetting with absence (or perhaps in this case, silence), Bijl moves past an optic of visibility/invisibility in relation to memory/forgetting, suggesting instead a concept of memorability based on Judith Butler's work on recognisability (Butler 2009 cited in Bijl 2012:444). Bijl's memorability pertains to "the degree to which the past is memorable, easy to remember" and fits into existing frameworks and national narratives (Bijl 2012:444).

Bijl's central claim is that the issue with Dutch colonialism in the present is not so much a matter of remembering or forgetting in the Netherlands. Rather, the issue can be approached through Stoler's framework of aphasia, noting trends of disconnection and displacement which do not allow colonialism to fit into Dutch auto-narratives of history. This, he contests, is "not as stemming from an absence of traces caused by a conspiracy, but as the result of dominant discourses which do not produce the dead of the Indies as belonging to Dutch national history and Dutch national cultural memory" (2012:450). He suggests that this also maps onto a historical consciousness which treats the Dutch nation and Dutch Empire as separate via a method of compartmentalisation (2012:450-451). Dutch aphasia of the colonial past effectively "produces an inability to see the nation as the former metropolis of a colonial empire and to acknowledge the lasting racial hierarchies stemming from this past, leading to a structural inhibition of the memorability of colonial violence" (2012:451).

In an English context, Elizabeth Edwards and Matt Mead (2013) also work with aphasia and explore the role of colonial era photos in various UK museums. Their paper specifically explores the visibility and invisibility of photographs of the colonial encounter in various museum contexts. They too note a colonial aphasia present in England which disavows problematic, difficult, and yet constitutive chapters of Britain's history and its present. Through exploring colonial photographs in multiple museums throughout England, they note the poignant absence of a narrative which incorporates the colonial past beyond the transatlantic slave trade.

Our research suggested that it was possible for museums to tell the story of cities like Birmingham, Leicester, and Liverpool, in which, with the exception of a safely distanced and morally certain address of slavery, there is little or no acknowledgement of sets of

colonial relationships on which their industries and later their populations were built (2013:30).

Edwards and Mead admittedly acknowledge some of the challenges and constraints that museums face in presenting a difficult history such as that of Empire—particularly as inclusive spaces for a multicultural public. Primarily, they note a wider political *disavowal* of the colonial past within museum displays marked through invisibility, absence, and silence. However, they note the potentiality of photographs to cut through this silence, analysing what work photographs can both potentially do as well as what they do in museum practice.

As they argue, current museum practices effectively silence, marginalise, and disavow the colonial past, removing it as part of a wider historical narrative (Edwards and Mead 2013:32). The effect is that these practices of separation foreclose any debate and dialogue through which multicultural societies can come to terms with the colonial past and its continuities. Their work also echoes the work of Georgie Wemyss in her ethnography of Canary Wharf in East London, where she argues that problematic histories of slavery and the site's history as the former West India Docks are effectively rendered “invisible” (2016 [2009]) through various narrative techniques which conceal episodes of white violence (cf. Dresser 2007 [2001]).

Writing of the colonial archive and the ways in which it is imagined at home, Edwards later notes that its contents have a dystopian potential to disrupt utopian narratives both of the time of Empire, as well as present-day narratives of inclusion and multiculturalism (2016). Due to its disruptive potentiality, she notes that conceptually, the colonial itself is displaced to an “elsewhere” temporally, spatially, and disciplinarily (specifically within the realm of Anthropology and Ethnography) in a way that echoes the wider perception of Empire as a long time ago, over there (2016:56-59). Or perhaps, in Edwards' formulation, not now, not here. As Edwards notes, this elsewhere “is a relegation or a distancing to a ‘safe place’ where dynamic and relevance is denied—part of that ‘syntax of forgetting’” (2016:54). The effect is that “the colonial becomes a history removed from the body politic, and decoupled from majority histories, a process that denies a synchronic existence of the colonial past with other narratives” (Ibid.). Yet at the same time, Edwards suggests that this displacement—particularly to the “historical elsewhere” is both “unconscious and pragmatic” on the part of institutions and actors (2016:56).

Edwards' analysis also moves to problematise the notion of this treatment of the colonial as a case of either amnesia or disavowal, and rather more accurately resonates with Ann Stoler's framework of colonial aphasia (2016:60). As Edwards writes, “placing the colonial ‘elsewhere’ avoids the necessity of ‘speaking’ because it can be separated from the utopian and celebratory

narration of nation” (2016:61). Specifically arguing about the photographic archive, she then suggests that its invisibility is crucial because of the dangerous ability of the photographic archive to destabilise the current state of aphasia and the containment of the colonial within an elsewhere. This is because photographs are traces of the colonial which are inherently semiotically unstable in that they do not have inherent meanings or inherently encoded interpretations, thus allowing photographs to speak and disrupt the process of aphasic dislocation (2016:60-61).

### **Heritage of Slavery and Empire in Bristol**

#### *Silence and the Slave Trade: A Bristolian Context before and after Abolition* 200

Discussing silence and the slave trade in Bristol is not entirely new; this section explores some of the literature on recent memory of the slave trade in Bristol and a breaking of the silence in the last two decades. This also coincides with commemoration of the slave trade which has expanded the literature since the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act 1807 in 2007 (Tibbles 2008, Dresser 2009, Dresser 2007 [2001], McAleer 2013, Smith et al 2010, Oldfield and Kaplan 2010). Although the slave trade has been foregrounded over the last two decades in heritage discourse, the larger frame of *colonialism* is either conflated with slavery, or, more problematically, largely ignored altogether. In a sense then, while this section explores slave trade heritage, we must also be mindful of the relationship between colonialism and the slave trade (cf. Edwards and Mead 2013). These are not co-terminous; although they are intricately related, one could argue that the formation of Empire as a set of political, social, and economic ideas is a wider frame which includes but is not solely constitutive of slavery and plantation colonialism (Levine 2013).

Addressing the slave trade has been a prominent issue in Bristol for over twenty years, starting with an observation that “the city’s chosen posture until [the mid-1990’s] could be described as one of silence” (Dresser 1998 quoted in Chivallon 2001:352). However, these authors note a breaking of the silence in the late 1990s centring on controversy and outrage over the Council’s lack of recognition of Bristol’s historical role in the slave trade. Since the late 1990’s this controversy has quickly and most poignantly shifted to the figure of Edward Colston, his statue in the city centre, and the number of schools and concert hall which bear his name. The effect of this is that Colston as a focal point has become a flashpoint for these debates and controversies, and his name has almost become a metonym in Bristol for this wider history of the slave trade.

Although accounts of Colston in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were unashamedly hagiographic, Madge Dresser notes that this changed during the interwar period. By the centenary of the Emancipation Act in 1933, Dresser writes that mention of Colston in official guides to Bristol had disappeared, perhaps due to a 1920 pamphlet linking Colston to the Royal African Company, and thus the slave trade (Dresser 2009.:227).

Yet as Dresser suggests, it would be naïve to suggest that Bristol has always been *silent* about its past involvement in the slave trade. While she notes the “artful distancing if not outright silence” of Victorian Tories in the city, there was nevertheless a historically discernible “liberal/radical” discourse on slavery in the city dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dresser 2009:226). Considering Bristol’s trade interests with the Caribbean in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (centred on bananas and sugar), the 1907 centenary of abolition was rather unrecognised in Bristol, though when it was, it was presented “as a historical curiosity firmly fixed in the past” (Dresser 2009:226). However, Dresser observes at least some mention of Bristol as a slaving port in an official 1907 guide to the city (Dresser 2009:227). She also highlights the 1939 work of Bristol University historian Charles MacInnes as the first “sustained and documented” academic account of Bristol’s role in the slave trade (Ibid). From a similar standpoint in 2001, Christine Chivallon’s recent history from 1997 onward also accounts for a shift in public consciousness and awareness of these problematic histories. Most notably, she accounts for a change in the gaze in how people interpret the spaces of the city with these historical meanings related to the slave trade and the ways in which observers view the city differently with this history in mind.

However, Chivallon also mentions that silence in relation to the slave trade is often interpreted with an intent to forget (Chivallon 2001:347). As Chivallon and some of my informants suggest, there was a notable shift in discourse following a 1994 UNESCO project called “The Slave Road” which was a response to the silence surrounding the history of the transatlantic slave trade (Chivallon 2001:347) Tracing the actions of various organisations and actors in Bristol, Chivallon also employs a moral tone concerning silence and the moral obligation to break it: “It is as though the very posture of avowal in the place of silence called for a mark *in situ* attesting a true coming to light, and into sight, of a buried history” (Chivallon 2001:348). Considering Olick’s politics of regret as central to political legitimacy and moral discourse in contemporary politics, it is perhaps unsurprising that the politics of memory in the city have changed and that more attention (centred on speech and revelation) has been drawn to the slave trade in recent decades.

According to one of the curators at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery who has been a key figure of the Council in these debates, Sue Giles, debate over Bristol’s role in the transatlantic

slave trade and its commemoration stemmed from public protests in the Harbourside during the 1996 Festival of the Sea. This event was intended as a national celebration of Britain's maritime heritage, with tall ships in Bristol Harbour and other nautical themed events (Chivallon 2001:352, Dresser 2009:229, Otele 2012:156). The city harbour was the focal point of this event due to Bristol's historical significance as a major port. However, a furore emerged over the lack of acknowledgement of Bristol's key role in the transatlantic slave trade, especially considering the significance of the slave trade as part of Bristol's maritime history. In response, the city created the Bristol Slave Trade Action Group consisting of academics, museum curators, politicians, and various members of the Black community and other heritage activists—a group which a number of my informants were members of at one time or another (Chivallon 2001:352; Dresser 2009:229).

In the late 1990's, Chivallon notes three particular Council-sponsored/involved responses to some of the protests and tensions involving the 1996 Festival of the Sea and the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Cabot's journey in 1997 (cf. Otele 2012:159). Firstly, the Georgian House (discussed below) was re-opened with a room about John Pinney's role in the slave trade and the related sugar industry in Nevis (Chivallon 2001:353). Secondly, the Council created a self-guided Slave Trade Trail throughout the city, consisting of a map and written guide detailing remaining buildings and sites of interest involved in the slave trade as well as its abolition. This trail is not marked on the cityscape itself with plaques or other markers, but maps are available for purchase at Council-run museums. Thirdly, the Council set up a temporary exhibition at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery for 6 months in 1999 entitled "A Respectable Trade? Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery", named after the popular Philippa Gregory novel and accompanying BBC One series set in Bristol around the slave trade (Chivallon 2001:354; Dresser 2009:229-230). The exhibition was attended by over 160,000 visitors, 79% more than standard visitor numbers (Dresser 2009:230). Some of the key pieces from this exhibition were then moved to the Bristol Industrial Museum for permanent display (Ibid., Otele 2012:159).

Private citizens also responded with the establishment of the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum next to Temple Meads Station, the city's main train station. Founded in 2002 the Empire and Commonwealth Museum (BECM) was a specific attempt to engage imperial history in public memory, particularly at the level of national discourse (rather than focusing on Bristol's local connections to the wider Empire). BECM was also the site of a number of displays, exhibits, and public discussions on Bristol and the slave trade, such as *Breaking the Chains*, a temporary exhibition in 2007 funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund which was unique at the time



for its process of public consultation and its inclusion of the work of local Black artists (Dresser 2009:235).

Although BECM was a unique attempt to address the complexities and nuances of Empire publicly, the museum itself struggled financially, with accreditation, and in terms of visitor numbers, ultimately closing in 2008. According to Sue Giles, funding was always an issue for BECM due its private financing. The low visitor numbers were partly due to a lack of public interest, although some critics and practitioners note the attention to detail, nuance, and balance with which the museum handled the sensitive subject of the British Empire (Edwards and Mead 2013). From Edwards and Mead's account, a concerted effort was made to present a balanced account of the British Empire, neither focused on celebrating the Empire as a form of nostalgia, nor an agenda of infusing guilt and shame upon visitors. The example offered by Edwards and Mead of juxtaposed photographs displaying both the experience of colonisers and those colonised admittedly challenged visitors to understand the ambivalence of the colonial encounter.

The museum shut down abruptly in 2008 as the Director criminally auctioned off items which were loaned from private collections. As a result of the closure, the museum's collections were transferred to Bristol City Council along with a photograph and video archive, while its written archives were given to the Commonwealth Institute in London.

While BECM seems to be an intervention in Bristol's heritage scene which might confound my overall argument, its low visitor numbers, financial struggles, and rapid closure point to a wider dynamic of its reception. In a recorded lecture at London's Gresham College given by the Director, Gareth Griffiths, he notes that the history of Empire is perceived by the public as an "unwanted history" (Griffiths 2004). Likewise, a *Daily Mail* article in May 2012 notes the closure of BECM with sadness, suggesting that the museum closed because of the "nation's dislike of colonial past" in its headline. The paper quotes the Chairman of BECM's Board of Trustees, who noted a "post-imperial angst" and suggested that "the time has not yet arrived for the proper story of the Empire and Commonwealth to be told" (Daily Mail, 13 May 2012). He furthermore stated that Empire was "still an unfashionable subject" (Ibid.). So while the museum may have been an attempt to address the history of the British Empire—however well done this might have been by some accounts—the public mood around the suggests that the Empire was still not a topic which Britons (and Bristolians) wanted to directly address.

*Bristol's Past Celebration of Empire*

BECM appears unique in its time as a sole effort to engage this history of Empire in contemporary public memory. However, it would be incorrect to suggest that Bristol never saw itself as part of the Empire or had an awareness of its role within it. Many older informants from my fieldwork from walking tours to the Commonwealth Society tell me about the excitement of celebrating Empire Day at school, filled with all the flag waving enthusiasm, combined with lessons about different parts of the Empire, and complemented by foods from various parts of the Empire. In 1958 Empire Day was relaunched and rebranded as Commonwealth Day, which took a much more toned-down form of observation, though it is still observed today. Furthermore, the Bristol Tapestry (discussed below), produced in the 1960s and 1970s explicitly refers to Bristol as the “Birthplace of America” and “Gateway of Empire.” What becomes clear is that Empire indeed *was* celebrated in Bristol in living memory, and quite enthusiastically as a matter of civic pride. Yet over the lifetimes of many of my older informants, Bristol has gone from celebrating Empire—and acknowledging its role in making Bristol (and Britain) great—to being unable to celebrate or even go into much depth in recognising Empire and its significance to Bristol.

In historical literature, the Bristol University based and Canadian born historian Charles MacInnes originally published *Bristol: A Gateway to Empire* in 1939, richly portraying the history of Bristol and the pivotal role that the British Empire and trade with that Empire played in building and developing the greatness and significance of Bristol. In a later edition, MacInnes notes that Bristol was heavily targeted by the Luftwaffe during the war and the warehouse where copies of the book were stored was demolished. However, as a definitive narrative of the city’s history, MacInnes had the book republished in 1968, suggesting that this was no academic fringe work of irrelevance.

In this tome, MacInnes illustrates that Bristol was vital to Empire and *Empire was vital to Bristol*. MacInnes’ account is thus contrary to a contemporary historical consciousness and heritage displays which almost entirely disconnect Bristol from Empire (bar the slave trade). Dedicating the text to the Merchant Venturers, MacInnes writes:

For centuries Bristol has been closely identified with British overseas enterprise. Her geographical position, her wealth, and the energy of her citizens combined to cast her for the role of Empire building. As the following chapters show, there have been few aspects of British expansion overseas in which she has not shared. Thus, the story of her connections with the Empire is virtually a cross-section of its history (1968 [1939]:9).

Tracing the ‘pre-colonial’ exploits of Bristol fishermen as early as the 1100s, the 1496 and 1497 expeditions of John Cabot, the city’s role in the slave trade and its related industries in sugar and tobacco in the West Indies and the American colonies, MacInnes makes it quite clear: the

Empire was of critical importance to Bristol, and Bristol was a key port within that Empire, even through and following the periods of Abolition of the Slave Trade, Emancipation, and the decline of the Harbour. While Dresser notes the “unselfconscious celebration of the British imperial mission and Bristol’s role in it” during the interwar period (Dresser 2009:227), MacInnes can be put into a particular historical context of imperial celebration with his original 1939 text. But rather telling is that in the 1968 reprint, he notes the changing context of decolonisation while defiantly insisting, “In recent years, both at home and abroad the denigration of this country’s Imperial past has been overdone” (MacInnes 1968 [1939]:10) before claiming that

[T]he good that Great Britain has done in the world far outweighs the evils for which it is responsible, and the verdict of history may well be that the two most memorable achievements of the British people are that it produced William Shakespeare and created the British Empire (Ibid).

In this regard, MacInnes operates not merely as an artefact of a time and place when Bristol’s role and linkages to the British Empire were known and celebrated. Rather, MacInnes represents an attitude held by and a dilemma facing many of my older informants: what does one do with a history which was not merely fundamental to Bristol’s past and its greatness (and by extension, Britain’s), but which one can no longer openly celebrate? My point here is that MacInnes’ ode to Empire is hardly exceptional, but rather, it is representative of a wider condition faced by older Bristolians and older Britons.

Before the First World War, a wave of imperial pageants and exhibitions swept throughout the country. Bristol International Exhibition Limited, a local company aimed to create an Imperial Exhibition in Bristol on a 30-acre site at “Ashton Fields” on the South bank of the Avon in 1914 (Burlton 2014, cf. Ryan 1999). Known as “White City” because of the white plasterboard of the buildings, the exhibition featured replicas of Bristol Castle (which was destroyed by Cromwell), Francis Drake’s ship *The Revenge*, a grandstand, a concert hall, Egyptian gardens, and a reproduction of “Shakespeare’s England” (Burlton 2014). However, due to financial difficulties from the outset, the event closed after only 8 days in early June 1914, falling short of its intended duration of 5 months from May to October.

Furthering examples of the ways in which Bristolians have viewed their city’s links with Empire, I met Chris, a native Bristolian in his 50s through the public forum I hosted on behalf of the Bristol Civic Society. He told me of his interest in history as a young schoolboy in Bristol during the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, he showed me a copy of a magazine produced by the BBC TV and Time-Life (Vol. 61 out of 61 from his collection, dated 1973) entitled *The British Empire*, a popular, mass-market monthly magazine which touched on a host of places, people, and events

in the Empire. Chris tells me he sees these as “one of the last public memories of Empire” and as a relic of a time in which people could talk about the Empire. He then tells the story of how these magazines were one of his favourite memories from school and that he used them as a study supplement for his A-Levels, even convincing his parents that money for these magazines would help him. He notes how he got an allowance from them every month to buy these magazines, which he says were available at every newsstand in the city, suggesting their wide audience and availability—prices on the cover also show that these were sold in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Mindful of my interest in the subject, he gave me his entire collection of these magazines, consisting of four large binders which he kept and assembled, consisting of 61 volumes and 1700+ pages. In a sense then, Chris and his magazines echo that sentiment of MacInnes—an acknowledgement, even an open celebration of Empire’s importance to Britain rather than the contemporary observations below of distancing, silence, and aphasia.

Considering these examples, although the slave trade is discussed at great length in heritage today, the silence of Empire as a wider frame and context in which the slave trade occurred itself is a related but curious phenomenon. In many ways, these representations may suggest that whole of colonial violence was restricted to the slave trade and West Indian plantations, without considering the wider colonial frame in which these systems of trade were themselves situated. And while in this section I have elaborated on some of the literature discussing the slave trade, in the next section, I turn to ethnographic interviews and content analysis of museum displays to consider this ‘silence of Empire’ and the presence of this wider yet hidden frame in public heritage in Bristol.

### ***An Ethnography of Circumscription regarding Bristol, Empire, and the Slave Trade***

In its focus on museum displays, this ethnography is informed by the methodological approaches of a wide range of literature on museums from an anthropological perspective which encourage us to investigate issues such as the politics of memory and museums (for example, Macdonald 1998, 2006c, 2013; Dudley 2010, Edwards and Mead 2013, Edwards 2016, Leinaweaver 2017). Beyond the literature discussed in the prior section Bristol’s addressing of the slave trade, there is also a body of literature on museum displays specifically addressing the slave trade such as Tibbles’ discussion of English Heritage (2008) and its increased attention to the slave trade as part of Abolition 200, and Dresser and Hahn’s work on stately country houses which links these grand estates to profits from the slave trade (2013). Kaplan and Oldfield (2010) also offer a

broad overview of various issues around museum representations of the transatlantic slave trade, discussed in greater detail on a national scale by Catherine Hall (2010). Douglas Hamilton's work in that volume also focuses on representation in the National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich, its challenges, initial audience reception, and the various ways in which curators have adapted to initial criticism from traditional white, middle class museumgoers (2010, cf. McAleer 2013). Meanwhile, Marcus Wood (2010) discusses issues of representation and participation in Abolition 200 events, exploring and problematising the dominance of white abolitionist narratives (and the silencing of Black agency) in many representations.

John McAleer has also done extensive work on museums and issues surrounding colonialism, especially issues on colonially acquired artefacts (Longair and McAleer 2012). However, one of McAleer's pieces stands out in particular for its attention to the interrelated issues of the historiography of Empire, and representation and commemoration of the transatlantic slave trade, plantation slavery, and abolition, as well as how museums engage with this history for the public in the present (2013). McAleer also relevantly points out the ways in which these debates about Britain's role in transatlantic slavery become "touchstones for questions about, and interpretations of, Britain's wider imperial history" (2013:75). This particular paper also explores various challenges and limitations to representations of the slave trade in two museums with an admitted imperial focus: The National Maritime Museum in Greenwich and Bristol's aforementioned BECM.

The range of literatures on museums also touches upon issues like the presence of colonially acquired items such as the famous Elgin Marbles or Benin Bronzes (for example Small 2011:121-122). Other sources the complex politics of display and representation (for example Macdonald 1998) and specifically, the ways in which changes in demographics and migration patterns have changed the role of museums in British society and thus, challenged how these contentious histories are to be represented.

However, my approach here specifically deviates from this wider museum literature by incorporating a critical reading of displays in Bristol museums and then building on the assembled analytical framework of *silence* to consider the text and layout of museum displays in Bristol. Admittedly, I acknowledge the limitations of the museum genre and what curators can do in public museums with a local focus as well as notions of selectivity, however, the wider aim here is to provide a detailed theoretical analysis to these practices and what work these practices *do* beyond providing pure description.

What follows investigates the ways in which histories of Empire are represented in Bristol's museums. The ethnography asks questions about the representation of the slave trade and its relationship with the wider frame of Empire, the representation of Empire itself, and the ways in which Bristol's history as a maritime city and a key port for the British Empire are presented to the public.

Below I discuss the ways in which Bristol City Council museums (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Georgian House Museum, and M Shed) present the city's history and its linkages with the transatlantic slave trade, and in a roundabout manner, Empire. I draw particular attention to spatial and temporal assumptions about the history of Empire which are both revealed and reproduced through these displays. In particular, I trace two prominent features in these displays: firstly, these displays are physically confined to specific spaces within the museum rather than their content being integrated into wider narratives of the city. Secondly, beyond the literal, physical, spatial displacement of these displays, the content of these displays reveals a further disconnection with the wider frame of Empire. As Deborah Winters writes as a critical museum visitor to Brunel's SS Great Britain in Bristol Harbour, for "an exhibition ostensibly about nineteenth and twentieth century British history in a trans-national context, the word 'colonialism' is only mentioned *once*" (2011:252, italics in original). Noting that words such as "imperial", "colonial", and "Empire" hardly feature at all in these displays (apart from discussions about the slave trade) and that places such as Nevis or the West Indies are mentioned without any mention of their status as colonies, I explore the ways in which the "sensitive history" of Empire is effectively silenced through circumscription, through writing around Empire whilst giving limited (if strategic) mention confined to certain contexts.

### *Bristol Museum and Art Gallery*

Bristol Museum and Art Gallery at the top of Park Street is the city's flagship museum. Situated next to the University of Bristol's Wills Memorial Building, the Museum (BMAG) was given as a gift to the city by one of its renowned citizens and philanthropists, the tobacco baron Henry Overton Wills II. The museum hosts many of the Council's feature collections, including its World Cultures galleries with artefacts from Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Assyria on its lower floor, while the rest of the museum has a large collection of art including paintings and a China collection.

Near the toilets, in a side corridor off to one side of the ground floor of BMAG hangs the Bristol Tapestry. This massive project covers two large walls and illustrates some of the most

prominent scenes in Bristol's history as crafted by over 90 quilters. The idea was conceived in the late 1960s and completed by 1976; while it may be on display now, its origins and interpretations date from another time period concerning the memory of Empire (note that MacInnes' reprint of his text was at the same time, in 1968). Consisting of 4 panels, the tapestry illustrates 1000 years of Bristol history in 27 scenes. While the tapestry addresses the issue of colonialism and Empire, it does so rather briefly in 2 scenes. The first of these contains an illustration of some of the voyages and trade routes originating in Bristol, explaining that

Bristol, always a trading centre, was in the fore front with ideas for overseas colonisation. Well-built little craft and brave men made the saying "Ship shape and Bristol fashion" a worldwide mark of quality. Created in 1552 the Merchant Venturers Society helped earn Bristol's reputation as "Birthplace of America" & "Gateway of Empire"

Another panel of a quayside scene in the 18<sup>th</sup> century includes the caption:

[S]hipping along Broad Quay about 1700...now mostly covered by Colston Avenue and the Centre. The prosperity of Bristol increased greatly in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and at this time was the second port in the Kingdom. Bristol developed a large commerce with North America and the West Indies founded largely on the slave trade. West Indian rum barrels and [indiscernible] of American tobacco are dragged along on sledges as carts were forbidden

Although these tapestry panels explicitly mention Bristol's trading relations with the Empire, most scenes take a local and domestic focus. For the artists of the Bristol Tapestry, Bristol's history was a largely local one which occasionally involved others rather than a history thoroughly intertwined with the wider project of Empire. Foregrounding the oft-repeated motif of Bristol as a trading city, this was apparently just one of Bristol's many trading relationships, not any different from trade with Ireland or Continental Europe. At the same time, the tapestry was commissioned almost 50 years ago in the late 1960s at a time when sentiments like Charles MacInnes' celebration of Empire were vocal and present and only starting to become contested. The politics of the memory of Empire were obviously quite different then; the fact that such a notable project of representing Bristol's history is relegated to a side corridor may also suggest this as well.

Speaking with Sue Giles, the curator of the World Cultures gallery at BMAG, she told me that there is very little in the museum explicitly related to or mentioning the British Empire, despite recognising that many artefacts have roots or connections to colonialism, especially in their acquisition. Indeed, there is a display in the back area of the ground floor, close to the toilets and café which illustrates this contentious link to colonialism, concerning the Benin bronzes which are on display in the museum. Guests are ultimately invited to comment on what they believe

should be done with these artefacts. These contentious issues are admittedly addressed, but the size and location of the display off to the side also relegates this contentious issue.

When asked about the BECM collections acquired by the Council, Giles noted that almost all of the items are in store with no wide-scale plans to put them on display in the near future. This collection consists of thousands of photographs and video footage from across the Empire, in addition to hundreds of objects. Giles suggests that these plans are largely due to limited resources—including staff, funding, and physical space. Rather than re-creating BECM (and its aim to recognise the history of Empire), the most developed plan for the BECM collections is to archive the collections and incorporate a few particular pieces into existing displays and galleries. As Giles mentioned, BECM had long been a controversial project with various issues of funding and visitor numbers, and the public controversy of BECM is something that the conflict-averse Council would rather avoid.

However, she pointed out that the one item on display from that collection is a very prominent piece in the main lobby: a massive 1907 painting of the 1903 Delhi Durbar, marking the accession of Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India. At one end of the painting, a small stand invites visitors to share their thoughts and feelings concerning the painting and what it means, accompanied by a comment box in which to put one's responses. The caption states "By displaying it here, we hope it stimulates debate about if and how its meaning for people has changed since 1907."

A few other notable displays throughout the museum include a bust of the aforementioned historian Charles MaInnes, a portrait of the Indian scholar Rammohun Roy who died in Bristol in 1831 and is buried in the city's Arnos Vale cemetery with many of its great citizens. Displays of maps and prints of Bristol adorn the balcony area overlooking the lobby, alluding only broadly to its maritime history while providing limited context as to the nature and composition of that maritime history and trade.

Admittedly, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery is not considered to be the primary venue for presenting and exploring Bristol's local history; the caption for the Bristol Tapestry, referring visitors to learn more about Bristol's history at M Shed suggests as much. In this light, the relative quietness concerning the imperial aspect of Bristol's past may be quite understandable here. Nevertheless, the ways and the spaces in which it is addressed—side corridors and back spaces—suggest wider trends of where this history may be seen to fit in narratives of Bristol's past.



### *The Georgian House Museum*

Located just off the main thoroughfare of Park Street, the Georgian House Museum at 7 Great George Street is a Bristol City Council museum open throughout spring and summer. A small handful of staff members oversee the museum at any given time—usually one on each floor for security—but like all of Bristol’s museums, the spaces are self-guided. The house itself consists of 6 floors (4 of which are accessible to the public) and includes rooms such as the study, breakfast area, dining room, different parlours and drawing rooms, as well as the kitchen, laundry, and pantry.

In Summer 2015, the Georgian House was also a stop on the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bristol walking tour—a walking tour based out of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in conjunction with a temporary exhibition on William Hogarth. Guides invited participants to have a look around for themselves at their own leisure instead of leading them through the museum. However, before entering, a brief mention is made of one particular resident of the house: the guides refer to John Pinney, his political influence in Bristol, and his connection to the sugar industry and the slave trade. Here, both Pinney and the Georgian House are presented as a typical example a Bristolian merchant’s trade interests, Georgian furnishings, living standards, and lifestyles. As one of the guides explained the lack of guidance is partly due to the size of these tours—sometimes numbering over a dozen—and the smaller spaces of the property. They also cited both the self-guided nature of the museum and their intent to not disrupt other guests.

Upon arrival, a staff member or volunteer offers a laminated guide of the property—one double sided A4—which describes the various rooms by floor. An extended copy of this guide (totalling four pages)—which also comes with a brief history of the Pinney family—is available for sale on a small stand by the front door. There are placards and stands throughout the property which describe rooms, furnishings, art work, or in the basement, some of the goods and food used in the kitchens.

According to the shorter guide, the property “was built c. 1790 for John Pinney, a West-India merchant and plantation owner” (Bristol City Council, n.d.). The museum was gifted to the Council in the 1930s and opened to the public in 1939 with the original purpose of portraying the living arrangements of merchants during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the Georgian era. Not coincidentally however, the Georgian period was also the height of Bristol’s trade with the West Indies and the American Colonies, and much of this trade was reliant upon the slave trade and the slave-reliant sugar (and later tobacco) industries. However, the only mention made of this in the

shorter guide is a brief line on the back page: “In the adjoining room [next to the Master Bedroom] is a small display on slavery with particular reference to John Pinney and his plantations” (Bristol City Council, n.d.).

Although the basic guide provided is largely focused on the house’s rooms and furnishings, only the extended guide offers a bit more detail and context. The extended guide also makes rather limited mention of this relationship between sugar and slavery. On its second page, we are told of the history of the Pinney family, where “There, on the island of Nevis, Azariah was involved in the expansion of the sugar plantations, eventually becoming a sugar planter. His success marked the beginning of the family’s increasing fortunes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century” (Bristol City Council, n.d.). After inheriting from an older cousin, John Pinney “departed for the West Indies where he proved himself an able businessman” before leaving the plantations in 1783. He then came to Bristol and founded the firm “which was to bring him five times the wealth he had accumulated in Nevis” while still carrying on with the business of his West-Indian estates (Ibid., cf. MacInnes 1968 [1939]: 235).

Nowhere in the longer guide is the issue of slavery explicitly addressed despite its centrality to the sugar industry, nor is the colonial nature of the plantation system throughout the West Indies and Nevis. While comments about Pinney are offered by tour guides during the 18<sup>th</sup> century tour before entering the property and a very small side room on the top floor discusses Pinney’s involvement in sugar and slavery, they are nevertheless limited and in the case of the longer guide for purchase, absent.

The rest of the longer guide is similar to the short guide in its descriptions of the rooms, describing some of the furnishings and artwork. Rooms open for display include well-furnished dining rooms, drawing rooms, and a couple of bedrooms and studies, and the two sides of A4 largely focus on furnishings with an emphasis of portraying Georgian life in Bristol. Downstairs, the basement portrays some of the servants’ workspaces such as the kitchen, laundry, and the housekeeper’s room and storerooms. Despite the furnishings described as typical of Georgian life in Bristol, aspects of class are not mentioned, and race is certainly absent. This is not Georgian life for all in Bristol, but rather, Georgian life for an aspiring and ascending merchant class making its money through mercantile trade with colonies in the West Indies and Americas.

The top floor of the house includes the master bedroom, complete with a depiction of the view in Pinney’s day and furnishings to suit his taste. Next door to the master bedroom, another very small (almost walk-in closet sized) room has been appropriated by the Council since 1997 as

a place to discuss Pinney, his business in sugar plantations in the West Indies, and his association and involvement in the slave trade.

A handful of now sun-faded panels in this room juxtapose textual explanations with photos and 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings and portraits to illustrate and describe the sugar industry and life on Pinney's Nevis plantation. One panel entitled "Slavery through John Pinney's Eyes" tells us that Pinney bought 66 slaves (mostly children) between 1765 and 1769. On the side are small photos of Cape Coast Castle and Fort St. George in Ghana (two prominent sites of the slave trade) and a painting by Bristolian artist Nicholas Pocock depicting a slave ship and some of its crew landing ashore. An excerpt from a letter is also used to provide a first-hand account of some of the contemporary attitudes on slavery and race at the time. It portrays how those involved in the trade justified their practice. The quote is also often used by walking tour guides whenever Pinney or slavery are brought up:

Since my arrival I have purchased 9 negroe [sic] slaves at St. Kitts and can assure you I was shocked at the first appearance of human flesh, exposed for sale. But surely God ordained them for ye use and benefit of us; otherwise his Divine will would have been made manifest by some particular sign or token.

Another display discusses the treatment of slaves, making an effort to note that according to diaries, Pinney was one of the relatively humane masters in Nevis.

While slavery is clearly addressed in this small space, there are notable limitations of this exhibit. Considering the position of this room (a very small room at the very top of the house) and the small amount of text about Pinney's connections with slavery in the guide, addressing this past is apparently not the primary objective of this museum space. It also becomes quite clear in the context of debates in Bristol that this 1997 display was the Council's initial attempt to discuss this aspect of Bristol's history, and considering the 1996 furore over the silence on slavery, slavery was obviously the concern here.

Yet within the framework of silences discussed, there are some contexts which are missing, taken-for-granted and not necessarily put into question. The wider frame of colonialism and Empire is effectively written around, taken-for-granted, assumed, and thus remains a related but present silence. For example: why were Bristolians like Pinney in Nevis in the first place? The nature of the relationship between Bristol and the West Indies is never broached, much less exposed as a colonial one. While *slavery* is mentioned in relation to the person of Pinney himself, what of the larger context of colonialism and its larger connections with Bristol and Britain at large?

Any critical discussion of the colonial origins of the West Indian plantation system remains absent. Presented in this manner, the effect is a possible reading of Pinney as a slave owner and planter as a natural, taken-for-granted, matter-of-fact state of affairs, instead of one which is part of a larger system of plantation colonialism—a particular social, political, and economic construct. By focussing discussion on the slave trade without placing the trade itself in a wider geographic and historical context of power and hierarchy, many of the relationships—and the nature of these relationships—are effectively omitted, silenced, and written around.

### *M Shed*

The vast majority of displays and artefacts relating to Bristol and its local history are based at M Shed Museum on the Harbourside. Where Otele (2012) has addressed displays and exhibitions on the slave trade in M Shed's predecessor, the Bristol Industrial Museum, changes have been made with the opening of the new museum in 2011.

The ground floor gallery at M Shed—entitled Bristol places—features a massive satellite image of Bristol and the surrounding area in the centre. The walls around the gallery celebrate Bristol's various local neighbourhoods. These displays include photographs of local neighbourhood landmarks, comments from prior museum visitors and residents, and invitations for further comments and personal memories from visitors. Considering this presentation of Bristol as a series of neighbourhoods, one might interpret these displays as a double-edged sword of fostering both local pride while also reproducing a sense of parochialism.

Other displays throughout the ground floor include a brief series of videos of Bristol, linked to maps which portray the geographic growth of the city. Panels about wartime experiences and the extent of damage caused by German bombings during the Second World War are also popular. Towards the back of this gallery, there are also panels on the history of Bristol Harbour, referencing the importance of maritime trade and industries to the city's growth, wealth, and development; however, these also take a remarkably parochial tone and almost exclusively local focus. Rarely if ever, is it mentioned where Bristol ships come from and where they are going, or the nature of these trade routes and relationships. As with much of this circumscriptive silence, these ships and trades are often presented to exist more or less in a decontextualized vacuum as simply *trade* (cf. Edwards 2016:57).

However, rather than discussing the layout of the entire museum, I want to specifically focus on two specific exhibits at M Shed, both on the first floor under the theme of Bristol People.

One of these deals explicitly and openly with the slave trade, and it is here in this confined and contained context that colonial histories are addressed. The other set of displays discuss Bristol's "trade" with the wider world, making reference to former colonies *without* mentioning or considering the colonial relationship between Bristol and these places.

Next to the main entrance of the first floor, one cannot miss the Slave Trade Gallery. It is a central feature of the museum, and one that curators feel should not be missed or looked past; it is meant to stand out by design. Where Otele (2012) notes earlier incarnations of this gallery, this permanent gallery at M Shed is the culmination of earlier displays in Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, and the Bristol Industrial Museum which M Shed replaced in 2011.



By the front door, there is a large map of the Western hemisphere centred on the Atlantic Ocean, showing a representation of the "triangle trade" or "Great Circuit" which made Bristol fortunes through the trading of Bristol produced commodities such as glass, cloth, manufactured goods for enslaved Africans. They were then exchanged in the Caribbean and North America for products such as sugar, rum, tobacco, and other slave-produced commodities as well as Canadian saltfish from the Maritime region. The map also highlights the 2018 slaving voyages out of Bristol carrying 500,000+ enslaved Africans on Bristol ships, and 20 Bristol sugar refineries in 1760 (none of which remain). This map also contains an explanation of the gallery and the prominent role of slavery in Bristol's economic history, stating that:

The European transatlantic slave trade lasted for over 400 years. It brought wealth to some and misery and death to millions. In the long history of Bristol as a trading port, the transatlantic slave trade lasted only about 100 years, but it was of crucial economic importance. It enabled a wider network of trade in goods and raw commodities that depended on the trafficking of human beings.

Inside, the exhibition includes a host of different displays depicting the history of the slave trade and its legacies. The walls of the gallery are adorned at the top with visitor comments from

an earlier exhibition at Bristol Industrial Museum from 2000-2004 including a wide variety of comments:

All in the past

The black Africans sold them to us. So put the blame on Africans as well as Bristolians

We need a slavery memorial

We have to know where we have been before we know where we are going

We must never let our ancestors down as the struggle still continues

We cannot be responsible for our past but we should learn from it

The working-class English white people's suffering must also be recognised

The problems facing Bristol and other cities today are a legacy of the slave trade

We created the boundaries African states fight over now

For how long do we have to feel ashamed of the sins of our fathers?

While these are obviously curatorial selections from the prior exhibition, there is still considerable value in noting the wide range of attitudes expressed by museum visitors and local Bristolians, many of which were echoed by various informants throughout the course of my fieldwork.

Displays along the walls include a panel on Africa before the colonial encounter (where the empires mentioned are pre-colonial African ones) and European imperialism is not explicitly referred to, but rather labelled as the "scramble for Africa" (inverted commas included). Another panel is dedicated to the abolitionists who campaigned against slavery and enslaved Africans who resisted the practice. Other panels discuss the profits of slavery, those who managed the trade, the sailors caught up in it, and the conditions that enslaved Africans suffered and endured. Another display includes videos of poems and stories featuring black Bristolians, artists, and their reflections and responses to this history. In one corner is a map of the local Bristol area, listing the most prominent properties and districts linked to the slave trade. Video displays share local citizens' comments about the slave trade and whether or not Bristol should commemorate the trade, while another display links those historic atrocities with present-day practices of slavery and exploitation in the world today.

By making such a linkage, curators admittedly make an explicit attempt to draw attention to the relevance of how this history matters today, not entirely relegating slavery as a thing of the past. The multi-temporal implications of slavery are also suggested by a table of objects in the middle of the room consisting of a number of artefacts, such as chocolate bars, a toy train, a

machete, and a tin of tobacco, inviting visitors to think critically about these objects which are still known and common today and to consider whether or not this is “Dead history or live legacy?”

In this sense, connections *are* made between Bristol, slavery, and the present in a productive and critically aware manner. As such, my argument is *not* that there is an absolute, literal silence regarding Bristol’s relationship to slavery and Empire; rather, the sort of silence of circumscription I propose in this chapter is rather more nuanced in terms of the ways in which histories of Empire and colonialism are effectively disconnected and displaced from the *rest* of Bristol’s history. As Edwards and Mead discuss with photographic displays in museums, these histories are effectively compartmentalised (2013). Although efforts to link the history of slavery with the present in Bristol—thus attempting to transcend the central assumption of temporal and spatial displacement—these are still themselves displaced into a particular, contained space.

Edwards and Mead also note this as part of the way representations relate slavery and colonialism; in this case, colonialism (if mentioned) is contained in a discussion of slavery, the latter which is openly addressed because of its “moral certitude” (Edwards and Mead 2013:19-20). Slavery in this sense is considered so unequivocally unacceptable that it *must* be addressed, whereas the history of Empire is far more ambivalent.

The problematic at hand is not necessarily a lack of acknowledgement to difficult pasts such as slavery but rather, *where* and *how* these are situated in relation to Bristol, to Britain, and to the present. Furthermore, the wider relationship between slavery and colonialism is not considered with depth or detail. Additionally, if and when references are made to colonialism in the museum, they are made almost exclusively in this gallery in relation to slavery, separated from the rest of the museum and Bristol’s trade.

Just a few metres away from the slave trade gallery is another set of small panels on Bristol and trade, framed as “Bristol and North America”—which mentions Cabot’s journey, the expansion of trade “as colonial settlement spread” and the seemingly banal development of the wheat trade between Bristol and Canada (cf. Edwards 2016:59). Of course, this almost flippant statement about development of the Canadian wheat trade glosses over processes of displacement and dispossession of First Nations people from their land.

Other displays include “Trade with Australia and New Zealand”; “Tea from China”; “The Banana Trade between Jamaica and Bristol”—which “re-established Bristol’s links with Jamaica and the Caribbean following declining trade in the years after the ending of slavery on the Caribbean plantations”; “Trading with Ireland” (which includes a segment on white slavery). Yet

each of these links involve complex and contentious imperial relationships which are not discussed—Irish occupation or the Opium Wars to name a few. On “Trading with the Wider World” the panel states:

Bristol was built on the proceeds of international trade. It was England’s second largest city from around 1300 to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Until 1700, most of the trade was with Europe, but from 1700 to around 1840, it was geared toward the Americas and West Indies via slavery and sugar. After 1840, Bristol’s trade expanded worldwide.

Considering that almost all of these locations have histories with the British Empire, it is notable that the nature and context of these trade relationships is almost entirely omitted. Bristol’s history of trade is presented as ahistorical, devoid of any historical context or wider perspective beyond the fact of trade. Trade has no political origin or nature, but trade is simply trade, often framed as a fantasy of exchange among equals. This is precisely reminiscent of Trouillot’s comment about the act of silencing which takes place through practice of trivialisation and generalisation (2015 [1995]:96).

One of my key informants on the subject of Bristol and its tobacco industry, Robert, was quite insistent that in the first place, the British Empire was “simply about trade”, and that furthermore, the tobacco trade which was essential to Bristol’s growth was with an independent America. Therefore, according to Robert, Bristol and tobacco had *nothing* to do with and could not be included as part of a relationship with Empire. To some extent, he is correct: much of Bristol’s trade of tobacco was with the United States post 1776. However, the colonial origins of the trade between Bristol and the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland as the main colonies for tobacco production are not addressed. It is not that Robert views this trade as ahistorical, but rather, he does not recognise or acknowledge that the history of this trade and industry is one of Empire.

This perspective is not unique to Robert; a number of friends and informants met in a variety of contexts such as the Commonwealth Society below or during walking tours in the previous chapter articulated similar views. But in this formulation, the Empire and its historical significance to Bristol and to the wider world is effectively silenced and replaced by entities such as an independent United States, which simply trades with Britain. Yet any consideration of *why* this trade exists with an independent United States—consisting of former British colonies—is rarely if ever elaborated. In this respect, when the violent colonial nature of ‘trade’ is removed from this particular context, Robert (and many older, white, middle-class English informants I met who were defensive of Empire) would often say, “Yeah, but the Empire was simply about trade!” And each time I would press Robert to reflect on this a bit more, trade was more or less a dead-



end, matter-of-fact that wasn't really up for debate. Trade was simply trade, not a process involving displacement, dispossession, or violence.

In this manner, 'trade' is itself a key trope through which circumscriptive silence is performed, in turn creating the sort of disconnection and displacement which marks Ann Stoler's conception of colonial aphasia (2011). Trade without the context of colonialism and its hierarchical relationships can be presented as equal, innocent, if not noble, responsible, entrepreneurial, and adventuresome (particularly within the discourse of a capitalist, neoliberal society). Divorced from context and simply taken at face value, trade is a term which can conceal, obscure, and circumscribe more than it actually reveals. In particular, the history of colonialism and its hierarchies of inequality and exploitation remain silenced.

Similar to the ways in which the United States and trade is represented, these displays and other locations such as Canada, the West Indies, and Australia, involve the same problematic lack of historical context and depth which links these places and trade to the wider imperial project. In one example of the Jamaican trade around 1900, the panel discusses the introduction of bananas to Bristol which "re-established Bristol's links with Jamaica and the Caribbean following declining trade in the years after ending slavery on Caribbean plantations."

While the slave trade is again mentioned as a matter of the past here, what is effectively left out is the colonial nature of this trading relationship: Jamaica did not become independent until 1962. Considering the Council's conflict-averse stance—often articulated by Sue Giles and other museum staff in the wake of the late 1990's and reinforced by the label of "sensitive histories", I believe that my interlocutors have tried to present this history as objectively and neutrally as possible. Rather than confronting the complex history of Empire and its integral importance to Bristol, the intent is to present a history that is non-offensive and avoids sparking controversy among Bristol's many diverse groups and interests. But by taking this approach, the status quo is more or less maintained. What results is an effective obscuring or silencing of the imperial context of Bristol's trade, and in turn, a muting of precisely what MacInnes lauds: that Bristol and Empire were integral to each other's wealth. Rather than directly confronting a history of colonialism as integral to Bristol's wealth and trade, panels effectively write around this sensitive topic.

Heritage workers in Bristol do not conceal or hide the fact that slavery was integral to the wealth of the city; but what is otherwise displaced or absent is the wider colonial frame in which slavery and the slave trade occurred: the frame of Empire. My point is that while slavery is openly

addressed, the matter of the colonial is relatively mute, and in this sense, a focus on slavery itself can itself draw away attention to the frame of Empire. By creating a metonym for the wider processes of colonialism, a problematic conflation between slavery and colonialism can be created. This conflation can then be displaced, lest the wider history of Bristol be implicated and tainted. However, the problem with this is that although slavery was integral to plantation colonialism, it was not the whole of it. Additionally, slavery was hardly the whole of the British Empire, which continued for at least another 130 or so years after Emancipation in 1833 with a greater emphasis on the Second Empire in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Australasia.

Other displays on the ground floor mention the importance of sugar and its basis in the slave trade and the West Indies, but as with other examples, the lack of contextualisation about Britain's presence in the West Indies as a colonial one is also notable, similar to the Georgian House. While some visitors may interpret this history as a colonial one without prompt, it is noteworthy that this history is not explicitly labelled as colonial. The issue is not simply with the absence of the word, but the ways in which attempts are not made to link Bristol with the colonial nature of these plantations.

Another panel on the first floor discussing the tobacco industry and Wills Tobacco (the core brand of Imperial Tobacco) also suggests a similar sort of decontextualization, focussing almost exclusively on the local processing of tobacco in Bristol factories and the people who worked for Wills instead of connecting tobacco as a commodity grown in a colonial context and imported to Bristol. While over the history of the company, tobacco was imported from all over the world (including from Zimbabwe, as one guest at a Bristol Civic Society presentation suggested), its origin as a British commodity dates back to the colonies of Virginia (founded in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century), Maryland, and the Carolinas. Interactive screens with videos and audio recordings maintain this similar sort of local, 20<sup>th</sup> century focus, more or less failing to explore or address either the early history of Wills or of tobacco as a commodity, with its roots in the Americas and West Indies during colonial times.

A similar exclusively local focus and effective disconnection between tobacco processed in Bristol and historically grown throughout the Empire was also displayed by Robert, my informant with an interest in tobacco heritage in Bristol. As a local historian with an interest in tobacco, he too notes that tobacco itself has been more or less whitewashed from Bristol's history, mainly due to recent health concerns over the commodity. One of his favourite laments is that M Shed has only one cabinet for displaying the relevance of tobacco to the city, which it also shares with the chocolate industry, which of course has its own contentious (yet absent) history with

West Africa and the local Fry family, whose business was eventually acquired by Cadbury's chocolate.

Yet Robert was adamant that tobacco was one of the industries which built Bristol. As far as his understandings of Empire, Robert was always insistent that "Imperial" was merely a branding and that the company actually had little (if anything at all) to do with Empire which, in his description was all about India, Africa, trade, and conquest and had little to nothing to do with Bristol and the Americas. With these assumptions of Empire, he was always curious as to why I was researching Bristol's connections to Empire which he felt were non-existent; to him, my research in Bristol seemed non-sensical.

But to Helen, a retired civil servant and another local historian of the tobacco industry and the neighbourhood of Bedminster, Robert's view is astonishingly problematic. Through many discussions with Helen in the café of the one of the old Wills factories, we often spoke of Bristol's imperial connections and their absence in historical representation. She too felt that there was a strange silence about Bristol's imperial history which was worthy of more inquiry. Although Helen's projects focus on the local community of Bedminster, she understood that tobacco does not simply come from an independent United States, but that tobacco has its history as a commodity linked to slavery and colonialism. In our conversations, Helen often felt that Bristol's museums fall short in the ways that they fail to address this history of tobacco as one framed by the colonial encounter. And she too agreed that there was a notable disconnection between Bristol and colonialism in the way Bristol's history is presented.

### **Circumscriptive Silence, Aphasia, and Bristol Museums**

Circumscriptive silence operates as a mechanism of aphasia and displacement whereby sensitive issues such as Empire are effectively talked around, instead of directly confronted, often for the sake of avoiding controversy or offense. In this vein, the physical distancing and the literal compartmentalisation of the slave trade gallery from the rest of Bristol's wider trades stands out. On the one hand, this may seem sensible as the slave trade is such a poignant episode in Bristol's history that one might argue that it *should* stand out in order to be noticed. Considering its location by the main entryway to the first-floor galleries, the gallery's location is not incidental—it is meant to be unavoidably noticed.

However, considering the displays just a few metres away elaborating Bristol's trade relationships with various parts of the world—largely through colonial settlement or conflict—the

separation of these displays from the slave trade gallery is significant. This separation can be read in a manner in which the more controversial and morally problematic episodes and characters of Bristol's history are literally contained and not integrated (cf. Edwards and Mead 2013). A similar observation can be made about the small room concerning Pinney's involvement in the West Indies with sugar and slavery, which is itself a separate display on the top floor of the Georgian House, or with the Bristol Tapestry placed in a side corridor. From this, one may leave these museums with a reading that trade has always been integral to Bristol, and that with one major aberration for just over a century – the slave trade from 1698-1807 - trade was simply trade with these parts of the world. However, such a reading – that the slave trade and its conflation with colonialism is an aberration in Bristolian/British history which can be neatly quarantined– surely flies in the face of MacInnes' central claim about the mutual importance between Bristol and Empire.

Considering the wide variety of displays and exhibits discussed in this section, there are still noticeable trends and practices—notably the disconnection and lack of integration between displays pertaining to the slave trade and Empire and the rest of Bristol's history, their spatial separation, and the lack of reference to “imperial,” “colonial,” and “Empire” outside of slave-trade related displays. One of the effects of this is the potential to conflate the whole of Empire with the transatlantic slave trade, thus oversimplifying the colonial encounter, Bristol's role in it, and preventing any wider exploration of the broader issues, problems, and legacies borne from the British Empire.

Another is the way in which trade is framed and the colonies and former colonies with which Bristol traded are often decontextualized; places like Nevis or Jamaica are named, but rarely is their context as colony ever mentioned. The same principle applies to commodities produced in these and other colonies; tobacco, chocolate, and sugar are processed and sold in Bristol with little to no elaboration on the colonial relationships which produced these trades and industries (cf. Edwards and Mead 2013:30).

In this sense, MacInnes' work presents the core problematic: how can one be proud of something that one is no longer able to celebrate? The answer in practice has been to cut out the bad (slavery) as aberration which was also righted by Enlightened Britishness, and then repackage the rest of the imperial endeavour (its violence, its displacement, its dispossession) as something more palatable, if not positive: trade. This, combined with a lack of explicit context of the colonial frame completes the circumscriptive silence where *something* is said, but the very importance and

nature of Empire—that former matter of civic pride, of Bristol and Britain’s greatness—is left silent.

### **The Commonwealth and the Bristol Commonwealth Society**

If the slave trade and Bristol’s role within it are one way to circumscriptively speak of the atrocities of Empire, then arguably, the Commonwealth is (along with trade) another way of circumscriptively referring to the positives of Empire. Considering the ways in which trade with the Commonwealth is high on the agenda of Brexiteers such as Nigel Farage (for example, Farage 2015 in the *Daily Telegraph*), this reference is its own manner of speaking of Empire without making an explicit reference.

Today, the Commonwealth is an international organisation consisting of 55 member countries, almost all of which have historical roots and ties to the British Empire (with notable exceptions being Rwanda and Mozambique). While the Queen is head of the Commonwealth, the organisation boasts that instead of the hierarchy of the Empire, the Commonwealth today has a horizontal structure where each member has parity as each state gets one vote in making decisions.

My ethnography on the Commonwealth is centred on my membership with the Bristol Commonwealth Society, a local members-only organisation of about 70 (a few dozen of whom are actively involved) and an affiliated Student Society at Bristol University which encourages the participation of students from throughout the Commonwealth. The Society owns Commonwealth House at 14 Whiteladies Road, a busy thoroughfare and a prominent junction at the edge of the affluent neighbourhood of Clifton. Prior to moving to these premises, the Society was based at 2 Whiteladies Road (an even more prominent location) before selling that property and moving to No 14 to accommodate car parking. The property at No 2 still bears a material vestige to the Commonwealth, with 4 Atlas-type figures holding up globes with the respective inscriptions of “Africa”, “India”, “Canada”, and “Australia”.

The club was founded as the Bristol Branch of the Royal Colonial Institute by Sir Thomas Lennard in 1913 before rebranding as the Bristol Branch of the Royal Empire Society. It then took its current incarnation as the Bristol Commonwealth Society following the Second World War. The club has seen both its membership and its presence in the city gradually decline over the years in a manner which parallels the influence of Empire, with a slight delay. Sifting through minutes from meetings in the 1990’s, this club was once a preserve of some of the city’s elite. Old

documents list executive members with a host of post-nominal honours and military ranks. Although the club's patron is still the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, she is not very active. Its President used to be the Lord Mayor of Bristol, but in recent years, this role has been occupied by the Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University (who I never saw).

Its members today are almost entirely white, middle-class pensioners who live in Bristol's affluent neighbourhoods such as Clifton, Cotham, and Redland. The ethnographer was a member regularly found feasting on roast potatoes at a Friday luncheon, and other international postgraduate students would attend other talks or events as guests and occasionally presenters. Its members join the club for a host of different reasons; many of its members have personal or family ties to the old Empire or Commonwealth, having grown up in Kenya or Nigeria. Others worked or served in the Empire or Commonwealth with private firms such as Tate and Lyle or in the Foreign and Colonial/Commonwealth Office in places such as Nigeria or Malawi. Despite these links composing about half of the club's active membership, many members admittedly have no formal association with the Commonwealth and join for social engagement, primarily through weekly club luncheons on a Friday afternoon, or monthly talks and seminars about Commonwealth-related topics.

In addition to fostering knowledge and an understanding of all things Commonwealth, the club also sponsors a number of charity projects, including an annual youth summer camp in Malaysia and sponsoring young people interested in doing charity work in various parts of the Commonwealth, often before starting University in the upper middle-class rite-of-passage known as the gap year.

The section below considers some of the ways in which various members of the Society understand and conceive the Commonwealth today, based on various conversations and events throughout the year, particularly Commonwealth Sunday and Commonwealth Day observations in March, as well as a Question Time panel, held in affiliation with the club's sister club, the Royal Commonwealth Society, Bath in the nearby city.

### *Commonwealth Sunday*

For members of the Commonwealth Society, the distance between Commonwealth and Empire was often made quite explicit: Commonwealth was born out of the Empire, but was a structure that was non-hierarchical, where Britain was one of 55 members with an equal vote. As far as public events were concerned, Commonwealth Day observations throughout the city in

March were subdued, yet well attended by club members. During the Commonwealth Sunday church service at the Lord Mayor's chapel (attended by dignitaries such as the Lord Mayor of Bristol and the Vice-Lord Lieutenant of Bristol<sup>13</sup>), a message from the Queen was read out by the Vice-Lord Lieutenant. The message focused on the importance of "a Young Commonwealth" and the role of young people, considering around 60% of the Commonwealth's 2 billion citizens were under 30. The address stressed cooperation and partnership, emphasised in the Commonwealth Charter as an apparent contrast to its imperial roots.

This speech was followed by a sermon by the Lord Mayor's chaplain who acknowledged that "We had an Empire...and we can rejoice in that." Mentioning the old pink maps from school history lessons, he noted that "Britain's colonies were no secret...but those days had quite properly come to an end." He suggested that more than a name change, the Commonwealth, which he explicitly branded as "Empire 2.0" was demonstrative of something better: a change of spirit which took place when the name was changed, and which, as he attempted to illustrate through a Biblical parable concerning rebirth, indicated a different understanding, attitude, and approach toward the people of the world as though the Commonwealth was a sort of "born-again Empire." While openly owning the history of the Empire, the sermon emphasised the improvement of the Commonwealth over Empire, acknowledging the Commonwealth's roots in Empire while also noting a temporal rupture with the death of "the old self" of Empire.

Following the service, twenty or so of us went back to the club for a Sunday luncheon. This was one of the two most important events on the club calendar (along with Founders' Day, a black-tie dinner in October). Well attended by the club's active members, the luncheon also hosted the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bristol. As the guest of honour, the Lord Mayor was asked to give a few comments about the Commonwealth. Quite awkwardly, he admitted he didn't know much of anything about the Commonwealth at all except for what he looked up on Wikipedia earlier that week and printed out to read for the occasion.<sup>14</sup> For this representative of

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<sup>13</sup> The Lord Mayor is a ceremonial position occupied by a member of the City Council, elected by that body. The Lord Lieutenant is also a ceremonial role at county level where the occupant serves as the Queen's personal representative in her absence. Bristol's Lord Lieutenant, Mary Pryor, is also the matron of the Bristol Commonwealth Society, but was unavailable on this occasion due to illness and was represented by the Vice-Lord Lieutenant.

<sup>14</sup> This is a stark contrast to the one time I met the Lord Mayor of Liverpool at a welcome event for a conference on Transatlantic history and heritage. Whereas the Lord Mayor of Bristol had nothing to say about Bristol's history in connection with Empire and Commonwealth, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool opened his remarks by noting Liverpool's history as Britain's biggest slave trading port and the importance of slavery and cotton in the creation of Liverpool's wealth. He noted that this wealth funded many of the grand buildings throughout the city, including the impressive and ornate Liverpool City Hall where we stood.

Bristol and its City Council, it seemed that the history of the Commonwealth was a matter of ignorance, despite its historical importance (especially in its prior manifestation as Empire) in the city.

The following day consisted of a flag raising ritual over City Hall, where an Indian PhD student at the University of Bristol raised the Commonwealth flag, and the Queen's message about Young Commonwealth, partnership, dialogue, and cooperation was repeated by the Vice-Lord Lieutenant. A few dozen of us—including city dignitaries in ceremonial roles such as the Lord Mayor, Vice-Lord Lieutenant, and the High Sheriff—attended this small but public ceremony. Although the flag was supposed to fly over City Hall for only a day, it remained hoisted for well over a month. A fairly short affair, the flag raising was followed by a tea and coffee reception at the nearby Bristol Cathedral Choir School.

#### *Commonwealth Question Time*

The question of the Commonwealth's relevance—particularly among young people—was a key theme for the Commonwealth during fieldwork in 2015. It featured in both the Queen's Speech for Commonwealth Day and a Question Time panel hosted by the Royal Commonwealth Society branch in nearby Bath later that month. The panel consisted of: a middle-aged female academic from Australia who worked at a local university, a white Englishman involved in local politics and the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, a retired white English male economist who had worked in the Commonwealth with the FCO, DFID, and other government organisations related to business and development in Africa, a middle aged Indian male scholar of Commonwealth Studies, and a young first-generation Indian woman finishing her degree in Classics at Bristol University and who had served as the President of the Bristol Commonwealth Student Society.

The opening, scripted question of that event was asked by a young white Englishwoman studying for her A-Levels at a local sixth-form: "What relevance does the Young Commonwealth have in a modern society when it is based on a colonial past?" The responses were diplomatic, and all of them more or less emphasised the positives of Commonwealth over Empire. For example, the Australian academic noted that one of the things that had happened in her lifetime was a shift from an asymmetric relationship of Empire to equality of nations, a "negotiated shift from empire to Commonwealth." Many of the others raised similar points and a belief in the Commonwealth. The economist noted that there was "every reason the past was in the past" and that there was a need to move on and celebrate our shared values, language, and sport within the



Commonwealth. Others emphasised the Commonwealth as modern and non-hierarchical, or that the Commonwealth represented new dimensions to old relationships and relied on rhetoric of soft power. Janki, the student on the panel noted that not having grown up in imperial Britain, she didn't know much about it and felt that many other young people didn't know much about the colonial past and so they didn't see the Commonwealth in that shade. Rather, based on her experiences, it was a chance to meet new people from all over the world. In this example, the colonial past is mentioned in both question and answers, but all of these answers seemed to suggest a clear rupture with the past and praise of the positive virtues of the Commonwealth. A desire to move on from a problematic past was clearly apparent.

Once the floor was opened for follow-up, I introduced myself and my interest about how we know and understand and talk about the Empire today. I said that I was interested in the ramifications of this for how people in the UK understand the Commonwealth because they don't know this past and have a general apathy towards the Commonwealth. I noted, following the comment from John at the FCO at the beginning of this chapter that "We don't really talk about it at all." Their responses—particularly those of the Indian scholar—are discussed at length here because of their relevance to my theorisation on 'silences of circumscription.'

Each of them reflected on their own experiences of work and education, with the Australian academic valuably noting a variance between generations in their understanding of the Empire, from guilt and shame (based on her schooling in the 70s and 80s) to the lack of knowledge among young people today. Along with that, Janki, the student, again asserted that the notion of Empire never really came up in her schooling. Despite her taking A-Level History in school, most of her understanding of this history actually came from an awareness of how the encounter had thoroughly shaped her and her family. She felt that because of the lack of schooling on Empire and Commonwealth, most of her peers didn't really know what the Commonwealth was or what it did.

Jonathan, the economist who worked in Central and East Africa defended the work he and his FCO colleagues did and their good intentions. He also expressed that a lot of people weren't interested in understanding this past and that there was a lot of "ignorance and prejudice" towards people like himself within an interest in the Commonwealth and who served in the then Colonial Office. He also observed a conflation between Commonwealth and colonialism which needed to be untangled, again signalling that to him, Commonwealth was a distinct rupture from Empire. After the event was finished, he came up to me and confessed that he found it hurtful

when many critics accused him of exploiting or abusing people in Malawi and Zambia where he worked.

However, most notably, Balasubramanaym, the Indian scholar of Commonwealth Studies noted that the discipline of Commonwealth Studies was neglected or non-existent in many swathes of academia. Despite my question referring to the links between Empire and Commonwealth, his response immediately assumed an emphasis not on Empire, but on Commonwealth. And he insisted that this past of Empire and the field of Commonwealth Studies had done well to *reinvent* itself and actually align itself with postcolonial studies. He also suggested that Commonwealth Studies had refashioned itself into other forms in politics, economies, and various interdisciplinary area studies. Most notably to him, it wasn't that the Commonwealth had *disappeared*, but rather, it was talked about in different conversations, with different terms and in different ways.

In many ways, his comment led me to consider the idea of 'circumscriptive silence' to think about the ways in which concepts like Commonwealth are, on the one hand reinventions of old formations like Empire. While decolonisation had real consequences in the political realm, Stoler et al (2007) note the persistence of imperial formations which operate as continuities of old Empires through their mechanisms and operations, even if their structures change both nominally and empirically. While Commonwealth is a unique thing in its own right, at the same time, it is also something old which is re-branded as per the sermon by the Lord Mayor's Chaplain.

The Question Time panel stands out in a number of ways as a revealing event during my fieldwork. While the lack of education about the Commonwealth in Britain and Britain's lack of involvement in it were common threads throughout my time with the Commonwealth Society, other trends emerged and were reinforced by the panel. Among these were presentation of Commonwealth firstly, as clearly distinct and ruptured from Empire despite its past. Coinciding with this was the way that despite that past, the Commonwealth was considered unequivocally positive in its mission to bring people together in a non-hierarchical manner. But despite the rhetoric of rupture (which I have no doubt my informants sincerely believe), there are also the ways in which Commonwealth can be seen as a positive, re-fashioned version of Empire, re-inventing itself with positive rhetoric and new terms and ways to talk about (or perhaps *around*) its roots.

### **Commonwealth as a 'Good Way' to Speak of Empire?**

While some may consider the necessity of forgetting the past and the need to “move on” (Rieff 2016) with an institution such as the Commonwealth, it may be worth thinking about the ways in which this re-branded “Empire 2.0” still maintains its continuities with the imperial formation of Empire (Stoler 2007). The Commonwealth, after all, still maintains an association with the Queen and the British Royal Family, as well as its shared participation in certain sports (such as the Commonwealth Games which were founded as the British Empire Games, or other events such as The Ashes in cricket.) Furthermore, there is also the question *who* needs to forget or move on and who this can be a possibility for. Beyond this, there are also questions as to the ethics of historical responsibility and to what extent remembering and forgetting are not only political, but ethical choices with implications for not only understanding and drawing attention to the present, but also for matters of accountability for present and future.

While a primarily white, middle-class demographic seemed quite open to moving on, for a number of Black heritage activists in Bristol who have campaigned for a greater awareness of the city’s history of slavery, the Commonwealth felt like an exclusive, neo-colonial institution with many of the old vestiges of Empire. Some Black activists I met in a follow-up visit to Bristol as part of a public forum hosted by Bristol City Council since my fieldwork expressed an explicit distrust of the Commonwealth, feeling in some instances that the institution was just a whitewashed version of Empire. For many of these activists involved in grassroots community projects, forgetting and moving on were not real possibilities considering the ways in which Black lives have been continually marginalised through hierarchies and structures of racism, exclusion, and marginalisation. To some of them, Commonwealth was just a façade for Empire without any real, substantive difference. Furthermore, this history of both Empire and slavery still needed to be confronted and addressed, and as a result, many of my Black friends were somewhat resistant to involvement with the Commonwealth Society, despite the invitations to participate.

In particular, the way in which the old formation of Empire refashions itself into Commonwealth and continues to permeate its way into other ways of talking about it—whether in academic discourse or in heritage displays—is central to the idea of ‘silences of circumscription.’ These are, in a sense, re-invented ways of speaking of something without directly addressing a problematic or sensitive topic. In this sense, these circumscriptive silences are first and foremost conflict-averse. Commonwealth becomes a way of talking about the positives of Empire without having to mention histories of colonial violence, much less ongoing inequalities which often defy the institutional rhetoric of egalitarianism. The very notion that the Commonwealth Society sees itself primarily as a charity with the ability and responsibility to support projects and causes in

other countries testifies to these inequalities. They do not give with any malicious intent or ulterior motive; rather, this very notion of charity to developing countries is a benevolent and positive vestige of Empire which ironically often neglects the ways in which histories of Empire have created these inequalities.

The Commonwealth and its manifestation primarily through local Commonwealth Society are among the vestiges—institutional and structural—of the old Empire, and as such, still maintain not-so-hidden associations and connotations with that past. However, according to the Lord Mayor’s Chaplain’s sermon, Commonwealth was not only something that one could and should celebrate—it was a way of redeeming this past and how it might be talked about. In this sense, where it might be uncomfortable to talk about the Empire because of its negative connotations, it would be perfectly safe and acceptable to speak about the Commonwealth; even if perhaps, few people knew what it was, where it came from, or what it stood for. This wider lack of knowledge about or concern for the Commonwealth throughout both Bristol and Britain is also a sharp contrast to the extent in which the fantasy and celebration of Empire were pervasive throughout both the city and the country through the Second World War and beyond.

Through looking at the ways in which some informants with associations and interests in the Commonwealth speak of it, there is little doubt that they *are* aware of the history of the institution and its links with the Empire. After all, my older informants at the Commonwealth Society almost all lived through the formal dissolution of Empire and many—as children to British academics in Nigeria, as Colonial Officers or employees of Tate and Lyle in Malawi—witnessed it with their own eyes. But among some of those who are less involved and did not have these experiences, there is almost little to no knowledge of what the Commonwealth is or does, its history, or its relevance; these members were simply here for the social aspects and activities of the club.

Yet on the whole, Commonwealth becomes a roundabout way to discuss the merits of what was once the British Empire. Separated in the consciousness of many as a new institution built on old roots, the Commonwealth is largely cast as “a good version of Empire” and could thus be conceived as a means of talking about the positives of Empire without actually mentioning Empire itself. Most members recognise the nuance and complexity of this history and the ambiguity of Empire, sitting silently and uncomfortably when one of these members (almost always an older, outspoken Englishwoman in her 80s called Angela) raises a toast to the British Empire and its expansion as she did on more than one Friday luncheon, or during the Founders’ Day Dinner I attended in October 2014. In this sense, Angela’s celebration of Empire was awkward

because it was seen to be of another time and another era which could no longer be openly celebrated, even in that environment.

Although the Commonwealth is not the most visible institution in the city, its presence—including its formal links with the establishment—renders it a continuing linkage between Bristol and not merely the past of the old Empire, but also the people, spaces, and places of the old Empire. These links are not just the rhetoric of the club or the institution, but also the observance of Commonwealth Sunday and Commonwealth Day in official capacities and the linkage of the Society to key establishment and ceremonial figures in the city such as the Lord Lieutenant, the Lord Mayor, and the Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University. Considering the role of Empire in the city's history, perhaps these formal vestiges are one way in which the city quietly pays homage to these histories and these connections in an indirect way which does not explicitly speak of colonialism, imperialism, or Empire.

### **Imperial Silences of Circumscription: The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Commonwealth**

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that one form of narrating the imperial past in Bristol is through 'silences of circumscription,' where, although words such as "imperial", "colonial", or "Empire" are seldom used, the British Empire and the city's role as a port and as a node within the wider network are effectively 'talked around' through foregrounding themes and tropes such as the slave trade, Commonwealth, trade, and maritime history. Furthermore, histories of Empire are effectively conflated into these circumscriptive tropes, and then contained and quarantined in small rooms in an upper floor, or side corridors. Even the major exhibit on the slave trade at M Shed is still nevertheless confined to its own space.

In many regards, this echoes Georgie Wemyss' discussion of the "Invisible Empire" and the ways in which positive experiences of Empire are foregrounded to conceal episodes of white violence (2016 [2009]:12). This is especially in the case when speaking of the positives of the Commonwealth, despite its history rooted in the British Empire. However, the ways in which the M Shed and Georgian House galleries operate out of an obligation to address perhaps one of the most brutal episodes of white violence—the slave trade—slightly complicate her concept. These examples in Bristol do not indicate a motive to conceal Bristol's central role in the slave trade or white violence at all, as Madge Dresser—author of *Slavery Obscured* (2007 [2001])—and one of the key consultants involved in these representations of the slave trade suggests. Rather, what is

observed here is an example of addressing *one aspect* of the white violence of Empire while separating this aspect from (and effectively circumscribing) the wider process of Empire.

Moving past binaries of memory and forgetting and their respective connotations with presence and absence, speech and silence, I have suggested that while there are murmurs concerning Bristol's imperial past and its ongoing legacies, these 'silences of circumscription' are commonly used throughout heritage displays and practices in Bristol. Contra Zeruvabel, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger, and some of my informants in the next chapter may suggest, I do not consider this an active conspiracy of silence. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that branding certain subjects as "sensitive" may play a role in creating these circumscriptive silences—I had been told by multiple curators, volunteers, and Madge Dresser herself that these sensitive labels were still to be discussed behind closed doors after my fieldwork.<sup>15</sup> As Trouillot reminds us, this is not so much a matter of conspiracy or political agreement, but rather, an alternative to dealing with uncomfortable truths (2015 [1995]:106). In the interest of avoiding conflict, the result is that these uncomfortable truths are marginalised.

What seems evident is a hesitancy to talk about a past when one is not certain how one should speak of it. It is perhaps a compromise, a tactic to avoid unintentional controversy rather than to address a difficult and problematic past. These silences of circumscription can perhaps be read as an attempt to talk about the less ambiguous, morally charged (and morally clear) episodes of Empire such as the slave trade in order to fulfil a moral obligation to speak (Edwards and Mead 2013) within the politics of regret (Olick 2007). It is also an opportunity to celebrate British efforts of abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and emancipation in 1833. Yet at the same time, by foregrounding particular historical events such as the slave trade, these silences of circumscription have the unintended consequence of effectively obscuring particular historical topics (such as the wider frame of Empire, Bristol's role in it, and its centrality to Bristol). One of the effects then is instead of direct confrontation with a contentious history, discussions on how that history might be sensitively yet effectively acknowledged is placed into an indefinite abeyance. In this light, perhaps silences of circumscription are a quiescent compromise which create their own problems in the future and allow for continuities of inequality and marginalisation which have long marked colonial encounters.

These silences of circumscription are not a matter of ignorance for my informants. Among some of my informants, there is a vast knowledge and acknowledgement of the British Empire

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<sup>15</sup> I am largely aware of this label since Professor Dresser tried to get me access to these meetings after my fieldwork, but I never received any follow-up from the Council employees in charge.

and Bristol's relation to it—from Bristolian sailors such as my walking tour guide Steve who fought in the Falklands War (terming it "Britain's last imperial conflict") to a number of other heritage practitioners who have curated exhibits in local museums on the slave trade or even the role of Empire in other parts of the country. But for them, the question is: *How do we talk about it?* in a public manner without stirring up any trouble. Time and time again conversations, this question of, "Well Alex, what do you think we should do about this?" was asked to me by informants I grew closer to. The conversations I have had with them off the record suggest that they are indeed concerned with these issues and recognise some of the inadequacies present in their practice, as well as some of the limitations within their remit. Yet there is still an uncertainty of how to present and discuss these contentious histories.

Like any binary of remembering or forgetting (Bijl 2012), any binary of intentional and imposed silences, or any assumption of conspiracy from the literature does not have room for this complexity in terms of motives and agency. In other words, are silences of circumscription—the ways in which Bristol and its place and role in Empire are talked around—present as a form of curators and heritage practitioners intentionally concealing these connections, or are they socially or politically imposed by some higher or wider power or discursive pattern? Or is the British imagination simply limited in how it can come to terms with the Empire which made Britain 'Great' and yet which is no more? My suspicion is that this is one of the central existential questions facing the nation, not simply my informants in working heritage. Following scholars such as Stoler, Bijl, Edwards and Mead, Armitage, Hall and Rose, perhaps these silences of circumscription are demonstrative of a wider aphasiac condition in Britain and its imagination, as well as the bifurcation of British and Imperial histories which are kept separate without integration, and this division is simply reproduced in museum displays and heritage practices.

In the next chapter, I wish to build on the core assumptions of the moral normativity of speech in suggesting that some of my informants and actors in Bristol's heritage scene employ an alternative narrative technique through the telling of 'secret' histories, conspiracies, and apocryphal tales. In that chapter, I will argue that those who employ this alternative technique of narration utilise and invoke these normative assumptions of speech in order to make cases concerning the legitimacy of the past and its extensions into the present. This is the case not only considering how Bristol was once a hub of the Empire and slave trade historically, but also considering the continuities between that historical past and the contemporary politics of the present as concerns political legitimacy, history, and calls for justice and reparations. The demand

in that sense is very much one of accountability over the past and over present and enduring inequalities.





## Chapter Four: Public 'Secrets', Contestations of Power and History, and Historical Topographies of Privilege

Although a large city with a rich maritime and industrial history, much of Bristol north of the River Avon and the Floating Harbour (which effectively divides north and south Bristol) has developed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Not coincidentally, this coincides with a period of thriving colonial, mercantile ventures, and the residents of the elite neighbourhood of Clifton inhabited the area as it was downriver from the Harbour (so merchants could see their ships coming into town). Clifton is positioned on a cliff overlooking the city and was situated upwind from emerging industries and air pollution.

Today, the very mention of Clifton is associated with the city's elite along with grand Georgian and Victorian houses. While much of South Bristol contains the city's heavy industry and is predominantly populated by the white working class, and East Bristol contains the neighbourhoods of Easton and St. Paul's which are largely known for communities of Somali refugees and Afro-Caribbean, Black British Bristolians respectively, North Bristol (especially Northwest Bristol which includes Clifton) is home to much of the city's more affluent residents. In a sense then, the urban topography of Bristol is marked by patterns of privilege, inequality, and ethnic divides rooted in the historical expansion of the city coinciding with the growth of its harbour as a key node within the British Empire.

Following the main thoroughfares west/northwest from The Centre where the statue of Edward Colston stands, one ventures past College Green and the grandeur of Bristol Cathedral and City Hall across the green, with a statue of John Cabot in the centre of the City Hall. While Park Street follows a steep incline and is flanked by a variety of businesses including chain restaurants, boutique shops, and nightclubs, the Wills Memorial Building (built from 1915-25) is the unmistakable landmark at the top of the street. Many of the streets stemming off of the west of Park Street (such as Great George Street, where the Georgian House Museum stands) were built by merchants like John Pinney in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the Georgian influence in this part of town is still prevalent. Gifted to the University and the City by tobacco baron Henry Overton Wills II, the neo-Gothic Wills Building is next door to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery which was also gifted to the city by Wills.

Following the route to the northwest, Park Street turns into Queen Street on this side of the [Clifton] Triangle which is filled with restaurants, cafes, banks, upscale retailers, and nightclubs. At one of the corners of the triangle, Queen Street ends at a roundabout which

features a memorial to fallen Bristolian soldiers from the Second Boer War, which faces the grand Victoria Rooms. Although the Victoria Rooms are now owned by Bristol University and used as a concert venue for its School of Music, the venue was originally built as a hub for Bristolian high society to gather for balls and various other socially exclusive events for its booming merchant middle class. Just across the road is the Royal West of England Academy, an ornate art gallery.

The Victoria Rooms are at the foot of the main Bristol thoroughfare known as Whiteladies Road, a tree-lined street which serves as the effective dividing line between two of Bristol's most affluent central neighbourhoods: Cotham to the east and Clifton to the west. Whiteladies Road itself is lined with a few grand buildings such as the BBC's Broadcasting House which houses the Corporation's local unit. Many cafes, pubs, and shops line this lower end of Whiteladies Road and it is a popular hangout for Bristol University students who live in Cotham and Clifton in particular.

As one follows Whiteladies Road, one passes by a local supermarket and commuter train station before the road begins to ascend another gently sloping hill known as Black Boy Hill. Past the station, the restaurants and shops along the road become even posher (more expensive restaurants, luxury furniture boutiques, etc.) and at the top of Black Boy Hill, one finds oneself eventually at The Downs, a massive 400+ acre park flanked by large houses on the Clifton side before one eventually reaches the even grander (albeit relatively newer as in late 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century) villas of Westbury-on-Trym and Stoke Bishop.

Although Whiteladies Road ends at the top of Black Boy Hill, some of Bristol's most coveted and expensive real estate is found throughout the neighbourhood of Clifton to the west. Clifton (which encompasses much of the BS8 postcode) developed largely during the Georgian and Victorian periods, and the grand architecture of its mansions and semi-detached houses (especially along the back end of the Downs along the Promenade) demonstrate the wealth of the city. The neighbourhood stretches all the way to the cliffs along the Avon Gorge, and Isambard Kingdom Brunel's famous Clifton Suspension Bridge is a vanity project which links Clifton to the Leigh Woods across the Avon. Through many walking tours, stories are often told both by guides and audiences that Clifton merchants would see their ships coming into the Harbour along the Avon and meet them at the Harbour to claim their wealth. These stories are told despite the fact that walking tours do not come to this part of town.

Whiteladies Road is thus itself a major thoroughfare for the city's most affluent residents as well as a central shopping and leisure area for this part of Bristol. In many ways, this area of the city is marked by a topography of Whiteness and privilege. At the same time, this is also an area

of Bristol marked by a linkage to the mercantile capitalism of the city's colonial history and involvement in the slave trade.

Here we note a topography of privilege and inequality built into the landscape of the city in both a material and symbolic sense in terms of built environment and place names. Adding another layer to this, the historical development of these most affluent of Bristolian neighbourhoods in the cityscape is clearly attributable to the emergence of Bristol's merchant class during the time of colonial expansion and the transatlantic slave trade. In terms of symbolic associations and place names linked to the urban landscape and this difficult history, Whiteladies Road and Black Boy Hill are subject to different stories concerning the origins of these names. At times, these origins—linked to discourses of race, gender, privilege, and inequality linked to colonialism and the slave trade—are presented as 'secrets,' but if they are secrets, they are apparently well-known, 'public secrets' rather than subject to the rules of silence or concealment.

Talking to John, a white, middle-class Englishman in his late 20s who lived in Clifton and came to Bristol a decade ago to study at Bristol University, he tells me with a tone of astonishment and disbelief:

You know the slave trade is like, literally written into the city, right? Like here in Clifton, where all the slave traders lived and would watch their ships come in on the river from America and the Caribbean, there's a street called Whiteladies Road and on that street, the top of the hill is called Black Boy Hill. It doesn't really get anymore racist than that, does it? To have street names based on race and racism written into the city?

Or in another instance, during an M-Shed walking tour, another white, middle-aged Englishwoman leans in to tell me quite matter-of-factly that "They called it Whiteladies Road because in Clifton, all of the posh, white ladies used to stroll down that road, and Black Boy Hill because of the slave trade." Considering that this was a tour of the Old City which is over a mile away from Whiteladies Road, I found it interesting that she still thought that these two place names were worthy of mention. During another walking tour, a white Englishman in his 60s remarked about Bristol's history and its urban landscape, "After all, Bristol was *built* by slaves!"<sup>16</sup> While it is unclear whether or not he was referring to the physical labour and presence of enslaved Africans or the wealth accumulated by their enslavement and trade, I had certainly heard both suggestions throughout my fieldwork. These three instances were hardly the only time Whiteladies Road and Black Boy

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<sup>16</sup> This comment is quite often made, but not by anyone who is very familiar with the history of Bristol (i.e., my primary informants involved in history and heritage). The historical record suggests that there were very few enslaved Africans actually brought back to Bristol (with a few famous exceptions such as Pero Jones and Scipio Africanus discussed in Chapter 4). The record furthermore suggests that if enslaved Africans were in fact brought to Bristol, they were almost always household servants (as Pero Jones was for the Pinney family) rather than labourers and builders.

Hill were talked about; rather, I include them here because they are quite typical of the ways in which these place names were widely assumed to be linked to Bristol's history of colonialism and slave trade.

Considering how often these two place names were discussed, it was clear that anyone who spent a length of time in Bristol and was at all familiar with its history as a port for the slave trade was able to make some kind of link to the more pronounced and visible reminders of this history in the urban landscape. Indeed, these two place names were more or less the go-to examples of this history built into the cityscape offered by informants, and it is also telling that these landmark places are in the affluent neighbourhood of Clifton, symbolically associated with the city's elite in terms of wealth and power, owing to the mercantile profits of slavery and Empire. The links between these two place names, the neighbourhood of Clifton, and the history of Empire and slavery were quite clearly intertwined. Indeed, these two place names were the main examples given by informants to reference the ways that histories of slavery and Empire haunt the present in Bristol. These were hardly examples of anything forgotten at all in terms of the city's past, but nor were these exactly secrets considering the frequency with which these two places in Clifton were mentioned in relation to my project.

In John's case above, the tone of these comments was one of astonishment, of disbelief, of being surprised that such racialised legacies were still prevalent in the city; it was as if this history and present ideas of Bristol didn't seem to fit together very easily, if at all. In our conversation, John was saying, "This is the history of our city. Can you *believe* that our city still bears the marks of the slave trade today?!" The bewilderment of my interlocutors can certainly be perceived as a disconnection between the Bristol they know and live in and the historical Bristol which was once an epicentre of the slave trade. Looking at the ideas of containment and temporal displacement discussed in the last chapter, the problem here is that history—especially via materiality—leaks from its containers and refuses to be contained in a distant past; even, in this example, much of the wealth gained from this history is specifically linked to Clifton. But in a larger sense, the material past and its seepages into the present (and implicitly, the future) defies some of my informants' perceptions, expectations, and understandings of what sort of city Bristol is.

As the last chapter looked at the ways in which problematic pasts are assumed to be ruptured and separate from the present, these comments may be a response to the recognition that these pasts are *not* actually severed and detached from the present, but rather, have their lingering connections and continuities with the present, making for an uncomfortable encounter

which somewhat reflects Freud's notion of the *unheimlich* (unhomely, uncanny) (Freud 1955). However, this is not a return of the repressed for a number of reasons; firstly, the Freudian notion of repression is often linked to trauma in the first place, and trauma does not seem like an appropriate term in this context. But secondly, in terms of the materiality of these things and places, this is not so much something that is repressed in the sense that it is hidden, concealed, or forced out of sight or memory; these places are there and have always been there in plain sight. What emerges throughout this chapter supports the position that this is not so much a repression as a haunting.

In this sense, this past rather *continues* to haunt the present. In particular, the perceived landscape of Clifton can be seen to be a haunting of the colonial, not least since in one of the prominent greenspaces of Clifton Village, a monument erected by Sir William Draper, a general native to Bristol who conquered the Manila in the Philippines for the Crown during the Seven Years War in 1762 still stands, neglected and often ignored as it is. Yet the haunting of Bristol's colonial spectres are uncomfortable because it would be far easier and more convenient to believe that such racism and the history of slavery is a fact of a distant past, which happened a long time ago, relegated (or perhaps repressed in Freudian terms) either to some obscure closet of history in a museum rather than in the public and urban landscape of the city.

In terms of its present politics, the history of Bristol does not easily fit with the post-colonial, post-war narrative of the city which emerges in opposition to a once celebratory colonial history (Chivallon 2001, Dresser 2009; see MacInnes 1958 for an example of these celebratory colonial histories, also see Macdonald 2015 on narratives contradictory to positive 'myths'). Nor does it fit with the progressive reputation of the city. As Phil (himself a white, middle class male PhD student at Bristol University in his 20s and originally from Oxford) said, "Perhaps one of the reasons people like myself and my friends—progressive, lefty types—don't really want to acknowledge this colonial past is because doing so is in a way kind of admitting that it still has a hold on us in the present." What is difficult to reckon with does not necessarily seem to be this past itself (the past is, after all, a foreign country as Lowenthal (1985) argues) but reconciling the fact that it is *not* solely confined to the past; its connections and continuities are still prevalent and pressing in the present. The very materiality of the city—its place names like Whiteladies Road and Black Boy Hill, its neighbourhoods built by Bristolian merchants trading throughout the Empire, its statues and monuments to slave traders and colonial generals—leak into the present.

In other words, the past of colonialism and slavery is not problematic if it is contained in the past, as a mere matter of history; but its leakage is disruptive of a preferred progressive, post-

colonial, post-war narrative in the present. The problem is not that it happened. The issue is that it haunts us still. This coincides with Elizabeth Edwards' discussion of the archive of colonial images, which she suggests has the power to disrupt these utopian narratives (2016). Reckoning with this fact is arguably upsetting not because Bristolians in the past did things that today's Bristolians disagree with, but because it destabilises the narrative that they wish to tell of who they are and reveals a harsher vision of what kind of society they still live in. It is the presence of and confrontation with the haunting—a reminder that Bristolians are not yet who they want to be, that their society's progressive project is still inchoate—that can be upsetting for some of my informants.<sup>17</sup>

At play here is not a return of the repressed in Freud's terms per se, but rather, a politics of the past which deals more in circumscriptive silences or other strategies of effective displacement (as per the last chapter) or in histories which are often framed as secrets without actually being secrets. While it may seem like attempts are made to keep the colonial ghosts in the closet, they do not stay there, behind closed doors and out of sight. What emerges from this are ways in which various stories told on Council-sponsored walking tours or other heritage actors are contested, almost anarchical in the sense that local legends about place names or the city's history could effectively leak beyond the Council's various narrative strategies. This also raises questions about not only who has the ability (i.e., power) to control historical narratives, but also what formal or informal means of narrating the past entail a legitimate or actual history. In essence, who (if anyone) controls Bristol's past? Or is the past actually anarchic or autonomous, particularly in relation to the multitemporality of materiality which leaks and seeps past containment and clear narratives? (Macdonald 2013:54-56; Miller:2010) Referencing a prior discussion in Chapter 2 on the autonomy and polysemy of materiality, how might this problematic be extended to considering the various "meanings" of not only the past, but also its material vestiges and remnants and the very topography of the city?

In light of the previous chapter's argument on silences of circumscription, how might these informal, unofficial narratives which are often framed as secrets potentially challenge and disrupt the effective disconnection and dislocation of histories of colonialism? With this in mind, is it possible to read these secret histories as strategies of emplacing and connecting these

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<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing, there are a lot of ongoing debates with a similar set of concerns considering Confederate Monuments and racism in the Southeastern United States. Writing on these themes in the Bristolian context whilst being from the Southeastern US, the return of problematic pasts seems to have the same effect of destabilising and disruption of the progressive narratives many would like to believe about their nation or municipality.

“sensitive histories” of imperialism to the present-day cityscape in Bristol? Are these actually methods of ‘filling in’ what is circumscribed and displaced through addressing these histories in a particular frame, or are they a matter of provocatively speaking about histories which are more easily repressed or displaced? If these informants position themselves as telling their audience secrets which the Council supposedly won’t tell them, what does this position and register do in the context of the politics of the past?

### **Secret Histories?**

In the sense that every locality has its own local stories, legends, and anecdotes, Bristol is hardly unique. Building on aspects of the Council-sponsored narratives presented in the previous two chapters (which itself is hardly comprehensive or exhaustive, but begins to illustrate some of the key issues, characters, stories, and themes of Bristol’s history as it is presented by the Council-run M Shed and its volunteers), this chapter both expands the discourse of Bristol’s history and turns its attention towards some of these local stories and the “secret histories” which are prevalent throughout the city. Although these stories about the urban landscape of Bristol and places like Whiteladies Road are often shared by a host of interlocutors in either a matter-of-fact, taken-for-granted tone or one of astonishment and disbelief, there are other occasions throughout my fieldwork where these secrets are allegedly discovered. This language of discovery is a clear suggestion (or outright accusation) that whether through intention or neglect, historical traces have been obscured or covered-up and need to be revealed to a larger public.

Considering the lack of attention drawn to the city’s particularly imperial linkages and histories *beyond* the slave trade, some informants specifically present this silence concerning the city’s imperial past as a conspiracy by the city’s political, social, and economic elites in order to conceal their culpability and shame and in order to consolidate their power over present, past, and presumably future. This ire and mistrust among these informants is primarily directed at one historically rooted elite institution who “have their fingers in everything” according to one informant: The Society of Merchant Venturers<sup>18</sup> and the old Bristolian families who are perceived to make up much of the Merchant’s membership.

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<sup>18</sup> The Society of Merchant Venturers (issued a royal charter in 1552) is often considered by the public as a rather divisive group in Bristol which historically consisted of the city’s mercantile elite. Today, the Merchants (as they are colloquially known) are now a charity which consists of many of the city’s civic and business leaders. The city’s Mayor during the time of my fieldwork, George Ferguson, was an architect and property developer as well as a Merchant who resigned from the Society before taking office, allegedly



Against the backdrop of the aforementioned topology of history and privilege, this chapter explores what these tales and framed secrets *do* in shaping attitudes, sentiments, and a particular consciousness of Bristol's past. The three main ethnographic examples in this chapter include a historical "Pirate Walk" through the Harbour—a very popular, frequent, commercial guided tour of the Harbour which capitalises on the contemporary popularity of pirates but shares a lot of historical information about the city. This is juxtaposed with an account from a Council volunteer and his comments about the Pirate Walk and the supposedly real origin stories of Black Boy Hill and Whiteladies Road. Afterwards, I include conversations at a local radio station with Rebecca, an ex-history teacher turned left-wing political activist concerned with what she contends is a historical cover up of Bristol's past and the present role of the Merchants' in "airbrushing history." And finally, I include another walking tour called the *Treasure Island Tour* offered as part of the 'Bristol Festival of Walks' which focuses on the linkages between two particularly famous novels with supposed links to Bristol (Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*) and the city's maritime history.

The examples of Pirate Pete and Rebecca group together form an analytical perspective in that they both focus on the topic of secrets and as such, draw our attention to an optic of concealment and revelation, and with that, visibility and invisibility. Whereas in form, the *Treasure Island* tour fits the modality of the walking tour discussed in multiple places in this thesis, it also has a slightly different concern and effect than some of the other ethnographic examples throughout this thesis. In its detail and approach in respect to literary works which are well-known in the British imagination, it explicitly and effectively makes noteworthy connections between the historical past and the present landscape of Bristol using both well-known fiction and local history to illuminate Bristol's cityscape and to work towards emplacing its past in the present. In this sense, another topographical (a literary) layer is added onto the landscape of the city.

In all three cases, the main actors involved in these historical discussions and interpretations arguably have political motives in opposition to the establishment and 'official' narratives of Bristol's history (although this is more implicit in the *Treasure Island Tour*). These are not necessarily political motives such as holding political office—although one informant recently ran for Mayor of Bristol in order to "raise awareness" over issues in inequality and education and admitting that they had no hope of winning. But especially in the first two

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out of concern to not show any partiality towards the Merchants. Some progressive informants in particular consider the Merchants as some kind of illuminati within the city, who make decisions which affect city policy behind closed doors and in their own interests. Others speak of the Merchants as the elite/establishment in Bristol writ large.

examples, language of “discovery” or “getting the truth out there” is often used by these informants, suggesting their dissatisfaction and scepticism towards the ‘official’ and established histories of the city, as well as the parties that produce them—both in actuality (for example, museum workers and curators at M Shed) and allegedly (the Merchants as the perceived elites of Bristol).

### *Theorising Public Secrets and Alternative Histories*

Although secrecy may be simply defined as “the deliberate concealment of information” (Lindstrom 2015:374), part of what scholars find interesting is not just the universal presence or content of secrets, but the ways in which secrets illuminate social relations, whether they are matters of gender, ritual, religion, initiation, or politics. The theme of secrecy in anthropology is hardly new, and in fact, has long roots in the discipline, dating to the work of Georg Simmel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and his discussions on dilemmas of secrecy (Manderson et al 2015: S183) and the notion of “secrets as a device of cultural ‘adornment’—a jewel or bauble that seduces public attention” (Lindstrom 2015:374). Often associated with secrets in the context of concealment, Michael Taussig notes the presumed relationship between truth and secret, where they are often assumed to be coterminous—although, the reality is perhaps more complicated than this (1999:3). As we will see with some ethnographic examples below, this notion of truth as secret and secret as truth often implies, as Lindstrom’s definition suggests, a measure of deliberate intent in order to hide, bury, mask, or conceal that which should presumably be revealed and visible for all to see. Furthermore, as Taussig famously notes via the work of Elias Canetti, “secrecy is the very core of power” (1984:290, cited in Taussig 1999:7), and as such, conspiracy theories almost intuitively link secrets and the concealment of truth with power and establishment (Lindstrom 2015:376). This also links the discourse of power and knowledge (and the ways in which those in power control knowledge) in a Foucauldian manner where the Frenchman reminds us that secrecy is indispensable to the operation of power (Foucault 1980 in Taussig 1999:57).

Also often associated with secrecy—and the maintenance of masking—is the concept of taboo, the set of rules which govern things which must not be spoken. And of course, with taboo comes an association with silence which has been both discussed and illuminated at length in the last chapter where I have argued that silence about Bristol’s past is not taboo in the conventional sense in that it is not a strict social code subject to punishment. One may speak rather freely of

Empire and the slave trade in Bristol without fear of repercussion; what the previous chapter elaborated was the ways in which Council museum displays observably detached and displaced Bristol's relationship with the wider British Empire through 'circumscriptive silences' which were a way of 'writing around' histories where curators and other heritage workers felt unsure of how to address such "sensitive histories."

In some ways, these comments are reminiscent of Michael Taussig's discussion of the Freudian notion of the uncanny (and its root in repression which leaks out into the open) and the "secretly familiar which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (Taussig 1999:49, italics in original). From this emerges the concept of the public secret: "that which is generally known but cannot be spoken" (Ibid.:5, 50, cf. Zerubavel 2010:26-29). And central to this, as Taussig describes in the context of his ethnography in Colombia is "knowing what not to know" in a manner which illustrates what Taussig (referring to Hegel) terms "the labour of the negative" (1999:6-7).

But what if the secret is actually hidden in plain sight, or perhaps, as Lindstrom suggests, what if it is "empty – no hidden information in fact exists?" (2015:374). Or what if the secret has already been 'revealed' as such and is no longer a secret, yet some actors continue to suggest that what is no longer secret is still a secret? Is there something that is effectively done by *framing* something to be a secret? The following ethnographic examples consider these questions in a manner which nuances and expands our discussion of the "public secret," particularly in relation to the emphasis on silence. From this, we find that that Taussig's concept only takes us so far in this instance if the public secret as he theorises is widely known, yet hardly taboo in the manner he suggests.

On the contrary, Bristol's relationship with slavery is hardly an unspeakable secret—during 2007 to mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act 1807, the Council and affiliated heritage groups ran around 100 events (attended by approximately 200,000 throughout the year) to commemorate the anniversary—and one key actor in these events notes that these events led to a sort of "slavery fatigue" (Dresser 2009). Furthermore, there is a well-known and ongoing discussion on Bristol's past in relation to slavery, and through plaques, museum displays, and rather heated debates amongst locals over the name and likeness of Edward Colston, Bristol's historical engagement with slavery hardly fits the bill of a "public secret" in Taussig's framework.

But yet, two of the informants below more or less reference the trope of the public secret without using the theoretical term. As we will see with Peter Martin (in his character as "Pirate

Pete”) and Rebecca, the framing and language of the public secret—with its optical emphasis on concealment/revelation and visibility/invisibility, as well as the suggestion of a deliberate conspiracy to conceal takes us analytically in the direction of theorising secrets and public secrets. And yet, as I make clear in the ethnographic examples that follow, these secrets, and the association of taboo which usually accompanies secrets, are hardly secrets at all. In this sense, they take us in another direction, where we need to consider perhaps *why* they may employ the trope of secret histories and *what* they might hope to accomplish by doing so. Within this, we are thus led to consider what ‘secret histories’—or more precisely, framing certain narratives as such—effectively *does*.

### **Alternative Narrations of History**

#### *Bristol Pirate Walks*

Once a month or so, the Bristol Commonwealth Society has a social club luncheon on a Sunday afternoon. More than anything, these luncheons are an additional opportunity for members to get together, catch-up, and socialise—especially if they are typically unable to make most of the club’s events—whether Commonwealth themed talks, classic film nights, formal occasions, or (mostly) social luncheons—during the week. By Spring of 2015, I had met most of the club’s regularly active members through a variety of events—the vast majority of whom are retired, white, predominantly middle (to upper middle) class English.

While the club’s wider influence and membership has gradually declined over the years (the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol is still officially the club’s matron, and previous minutes of meetings in the 90s that I organised for a small archive were filled with the names of military officers, local dignitaries, and many others with post-nominal letters and honours), there are still about 50 members on the roll, a couple dozen of whom are regularly attendees at various social functions. Indeed, there are still quite a few important and influential local people involved in the club—a judge, a former MP, a recent mayoral candidate, former senior bankers. There are also a number of folks with personal links and affiliations with various countries in the Commonwealth—some who grew up during and after the decolonisation of places like Kenya and Nigeria, others who served overseas in the Foreign and Colonial Service. Towards the end of my time in Bristol, a Ghanaian in his 30s had also joined, and a number of postgraduate students from India, Nigeria, Malaysia, and Rwanda were involved with the affiliated Commonwealth Student Society. But

there are also a few members without any links to the Commonwealth personally, who came along because they were friends with members, and who joined the club for purely social reasons.

On this particular Sunday luncheon in February 2015, I met Sarah for the first time—a long time member who had been too busy to attend many club functions since I joined in September, especially considering that most of the club’s events were during weekday lunchtimes. We exchanged the usual pleasantries: how long we’ve been members, what drew us to the club, and what it is we do. After explaining my research—which quite naturally led me to join the club, she replied:

“I need to put you in touch with a friend of mine,” Sarah said. “Have you heard of the Pirate Tours in the Harbour?”

“Well, I can’t say I know too much about them,” I admitted. “Although when I was reviewing the stuff on tourism in Bristol, there was a mention of them on the Visit Bristol (the official tourist board) website.”

“You definitely need to check them out,” Sarah said. “I actually help out on them during the summer as they get really busy and popular. It’s a lot of fun—I get all dressed up and take on this personality as my character, Cap’n Bess!” While she mentioned that a lot of their business (especially in the summer) includes a lot of stag and hen parties, they are also rather involved educational groups and schools as well. She goes on to tell me that I should look up the Pirate Tours and get in touch with Pirate Pete who runs them because he’ll have a lot to tell me about Bristol’s history and about empire and slavery and all of that stuff. She also suggests that I look at a couple of the books he’s written—certainly not academic history books, which she felt I might find a little dull or maybe even a little unbelievable at times, but she tells me that they’re more popular sorts of books to reach out to a wider audience, to get more people aware of and thinking about Bristol’s history.

She continued by telling me that she had not heard from Pirate Pete in a while because not only has he been rather unwell, he also recently published a book about the slave trade in Bristol linking the trade with many of the city’s most famous and most powerful families. She goes on:

He’s actually kind of gone into hiding because as he once told me, he was afraid of getting the book out there because he knew it was going to upset some really powerful, important people who could hurt him. But he felt it was really important to get the story out there and let the truth about Bristol and its history be known, even if it put his life in danger.

Based on this exchange and especially the last comment, Sarah had certainly left me with the impression that I had come across a valuable, yet secret lead for my research.

After emailing Peter Martin (aka Pirate Pete) about the nature of my research and my interest in his tours and trying to arrange a meeting, a few weeks went by without any response. However, on the way to another walking tour with M Shed one morning in March, I came across a black hearse on one of the quays with the words “Bristol Pirate Walks” painted on the side, with a treasure chest in the back where the coffin would normally lie. Standing at the boot of the hearse was a man—appearing perhaps just a bit older than middle aged—wearing a pirate hat. Unfortunately running late to another tour at M Shed just across the bridge, I decided to stop anyway to have a chat with the fellow who seemed to be setting up and waiting for people as he puts out a sandwich board advertising his tour.

“Excuse me, sir. Are you Pirate Pete?” After introducing myself, Pirate Pete<sup>19</sup> tells me that he received my email, but hasn’t been able to reply, but he’s very happy to have a chat and have me come along to observe and participate in the tours. Far from seeming as though he’s in hiding, he tells me that as the weather is nice, he’s giving daily tours every afternoon this week, which he invites me to, but he particularly invites me to come on the coming Saturday.

The following Saturday, a group of us assembled next to Pirate Pete’s hearse, parked at the foot of Pero’s Bridge in the Harbour. On this particular occasion, Pirate Pete told me he was hosting a reunion of chemists and their families from Bristol University, but he was very keen for me to come along, to make notes, and he encouraged me to follow him around with a recorder, giving me a sense that he was happy for me to participate and observe. And although he didn’t at all seem to be in hiding as Sarah suggested, his apparent desire for my presence and recording did fit in with her previous comments about Pirate Pete’s keenness to get particular stories and bits of information about Bristol’s history “out there.” Of course, this implication of getting these stories out there suggests that these stories aren’t already out there.

Upon this second impression of Pirate Pete, I was left with a slight bewilderment between my expectations of him as Sarah had presented him—as being in ill health and in hiding after publishing his book—and Pirate Pete as he is on the tour. Here he was, dressed up like a pirate,

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Martin’s own background has its own traces of the elite: he says he went to Bristol Cathedral Choir School, one of the city’s historically private schools in the city centre, and as he mentions on both the tour and in the book, his grandfather was the Dean of Bristol Cathedral, which gave him a rich interest in the city’s history (Martin and Nwokolo 2014: 4-5).

with a conspicuous hearse from which he hosts his tours, and he certainly seems to have taken up a character for the purposes and genre of the tour which aims to be both educational and entertaining in a manner which suggest a bit of fun. Indeed, his website ([piratewalks.co.uk](http://piratewalks.co.uk)) certainly presents the purpose of the tour as both educational and fun, as a premiere attraction in Bristol's Harbourside. The Bristol Tourist Board's website, VisitBristol, also advertises the pirate walks—although one also suspects that this coincides with the popularity of pirates after the successful Disney movie franchise, *Pirates of the Caribbean* in the last decade or so.

In character, Pirate Pete often breaks into a hearty “AARRRGHHH!” and instructs the tour to do so whenever they come across another large group of people more than once throughout the tour, and he tasks one of the young girls on the tour to carry a Jolly Roger style pirate flag to keep the tour together. After explaining a few props in his hearse—swords, a blunderbuss—we walked around the corner of the quay and stopped at a statue (the same statue of John Cabot discussed in Chapter 3), where Pirate Pete shared another famous local legend in Bristol—that Columbus didn't discover America as he didn't land on the mainland, but rather, John Cabot, sailing from Bristol discovered America in 1497, and furthermore, that America was not named after Amerigo Vespucci, but rather, Richard Amerike—a financier of Cabot's voyage and an important figure in Bristol at the time. Indeed, the Amerike story is a very popular tale in Bristol also told by M Shed guides and known by many local tour participants. As such, the story of Richard Amerike as the namesake of the Americas is another story that everyone who grew up in Bristol (supposedly) knows. But contrary to the story told by Steve on the M Shed tour, Pirate Pete contends that Cabot was brought to Bristol from Venice against his will, put on a ship called the *Matthew*, and to ensure his return to Bristol, kept his wife and children as hostages until he returned. Either way, in each of these cases—whether an M Shed Tour or the Pirate Walk—Bristol's significance beyond itself and the region is clearly articulated through both the story of John Cabot's voyage and the tale about Richard Amerike being the namesake of the Americas. In Pirate Pete's version of the Cabot story, there is also an impression of the city's authorities as cruel and tyrannical, keeping Cabot's family hostage until his return in a manner which subtly calls into question the character of the establishment.

Carrying on with his narration of maritime history in the area, Pirate Pete explained that the locally known phrase, “ship shape and Bristol fashion”<sup>20</sup> pertains to the shape and strength of Bristol-built ships' hulls which were designed to withstand the second highest tide in the world.

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<sup>20</sup> This is a famous local phrase which supposedly refers to the shape of the ships (ship shape) and the way in which cargo is packed in order to avoid either capsizing the ship or having the cargo in disarray (Bristol fashion) with Bristol's famous tidal waters.

He went onto explain that Bristol ships at the time (it's unspecified which time period he is referring to) were useful for oceangoing but were vulnerable to attack by Arabs in North African ships, which kidnapped Bristolians to sell as slaves in Ireland, which in his words, "started all the problems" and over 1 million Bristolians were taken by Arabs as slaves. He notes that there are certain ethnic groups in North Africa which have blue eyes, suggesting the genetic link to corroborate his story. In relation to other tours, the phrase 'ship shape and Bristol fashion' is indeed one addressed and explained similarly elsewhere, but Pirate Pete's association with Arabs and Bristolian slaves is unique and also mentioned in his recent book, as discussed below. By framing Bristolians as victims of the slave trade, this story complicates the narrative of Bristol as only involved with the transportation and trade of enslaved Africans; Bristolians were just perpetrators of slavery, but they were victims too.

Throughout the tour, Pirate Pete actually offers a host of historical information about Bristol and its links to pirates, slavery, and Empire. As we walk from point to point, he engaged me in conversation one-to-one, asking about my research, while also stating that Bristol of all cities was key to the Empire— "that guys went out from here with a sense of adventure and found something...that's imperialism...every British colony! From India to the whole lot!"<sup>21</sup> At another point in the tour, he explains to the audience that at one point, "Bristol was home to 3,000 pirates, including the infamous Blackbeard and 312 slave and pirate ships which made 2,105 voyages transporting 2.25 million African slaves." He explains that commodities such as rum, glass, and iron manillas used as currency among African kings were used to buy African slaves with "about \$7 worth of goods." In his own words to the audience, "It's a huge story and it's never been *uncovered* (italics added) and that's why we've written the book. This story overshadows the pirates because the pirates were the same people as the slave traders." In this instance, the language of "uncovering" and the claim that "*it's never been done before*" offers the audience (including myself) that we are now party to a newly discovered and revealed 'secret' that others do not know about, and as such, this certainly triggers one's attention (as with Sarah's comments) to a certain frame of thinking about such "secret histories."

On occasion through the tour, Pirate Pete is not shy about the fact that historians have questioned the accuracy of his facts or his sources, but adamant that he's spent over a dozen years

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<sup>21</sup> The trope of "adventure" is certainly one often used to discuss ventures of exploration, piracy, and colonialism. This is present not only in the many ways in which tour guides such as Pirate Pete talk about the men involved in these ventures, but also in literature—from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* to the more contemporary *The Dangerous Book for Boys*—and this also certainly seems to fit with a wider observed trend of a "sense of adventure" being an integral component to a certain kind of masculinity.



researching this history, he counters criticism with defiance. For example, he is quite proud of a painting that he did 20 years ago entitled *Eve of Departure, Bristol 1497* portraying John Cabot, his son, the *Matthew* and Bristol Harbour. At one point along the tour, we stopped for a drink, where he let the tour participants order drinks and catch up with each other. Sitting down in a quiet corner, he explained to me that this painting is part of what got him interested in doing these walks, and he went on to explain, “I wanted to show what Bristol looked like...And there are references—so there’s the ship and St. Mary Redcliffe, so I used those as a focal point and the rest is imagination. But I caught it just right, you see?” (Earlier, when explaining the popularity of the painting to the audience—he told me he sold 100,000 copies for £10 each and the Queen had liked it so much she sent him a letter commending it—he admits that historians have criticised the historical imagination of his painting) he then defiantly explains to his audience, “So I tell them, all right, you do better! I’ve got a letter from the Queen, *you* do better!” At various points on the tour, he shares similar anecdotes with the audience where he issues the same challenge to TV and radio hosts who interview him and question his credibility as a historian.

One stop on the tour is the Hole in the Wall pub on Queen Square—a pub with its own often-told local tale about how being on the Harbour, the pub was a popular drinking spot for sailors in centuries past. The pub gets its name from an outcropping in the pub which was used as a “hole in the wall” for lookouts to spot press and crimping gangs<sup>22</sup> and warn drunken sailors so that they could escape via an underground network of cellars and tunnels. Alluding to this underground network of secret tunnels, he had previously mentioned this while peeking through the window of another pub, telling a legend of how an opening in the wall of that pub was one of the entrances used by pirates like Blackbeard to enter a 7-mile network of caves and tunnels under Bristol where pirates, outlaws, and an infestation of rats hid from the rest of the city. Although Pirate Pete invites some of his audience members—particularly the younger ones—to peek through the pub’s window to note the trap door which he alludes to in one story, he also cautions the group to not be too invasive since that particular pub wasn’t always amenable to his tours.

The tour ends just a few stops after the break for a drink at the Hole in the Wall, which is just at one corner of Queen Square, the old Georgian part of the city where a few blue plaques related to figures in piracy and privateering are present—such as one dedicated to another one of Bristol’s native sons, the famous privateer, explorer, and Governor of the Bahamas, Woodes

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<sup>22</sup> According to both Pirate Pete and the M Shed guides, press gangs were Royal Navy gangs which would forcibly conscript sailors, whereas the practice of crimping was a civilian version of a similar practice. These stories claim that often times, the sailors sent to crew slaving voyages were crimped after having too many drinks or being forced to sail in order to pay off gambling and drinking debts.

Rogers. We also walk past the old American consulate—supposedly the first embassy that the United States set up after its independence (as also claimed by the M Shed tours)—again suggesting the importance of Bristol on the world stage historically.

At the end of the tour, Pirate Pete took us back to his hearse and offered to sell two of the local history books he's written—one on West Country Pirates, and another entitled *Bristol Slavers*. Having been told about the latter book by Sarah, he happily offered me a copy and encourages me to use it for my research, telling me that if there was anything that he missed on the tour, "It's all in there." After telling him that Sarah had told me about this book, he mentioned that as he had recently turned 75 and has been in fair health lately, he wanted to make sure that if for whatever reason, he couldn't keep doing the tours, the information that he shares on the tour is available.

### **Genre and the Sense of the Secret: Where is the actual secret?**

In many respects, Pirate Pete's tour fits many norms of the overall genre of the historical walking tour (with the added explicit measure of performance in his character). For example, he stops at similar points and tells similar stories to the M Shed and *Treasure Island* tour discussed below—but there are a few things which mark Pirate Pete's tour out as unique and noteworthy. One of the differences is not simply sheer audience numbers or target demographics either: Pete's walks seem to draw a significant amount of people and of various ages; whereas the M Shed tours usually cater to an older and smaller audience. On the occasion I attended the Pirate Walk, there were probably around 30 people present, whereas most M Shed tours drew a dozen or so at most. Of course, M Shed itself as the city's local history museum commands a far larger audience; but as far as walking tours go, Pirate Pete seems to capture a relatively wide and large audience.

Pirate Pete's tour also adds a bit of a twist of performance and entertainment to cater to tourists within the historical walking tour genre—especially if, as Sarah suggested—quite a lot of their business in the summer consists of stag and hen parties. Certainly the costume, the repeated pirate growls, the pirate flag, as well as the hearse add a bit of spectacle to the Pirate Walks that the M Shed guides in their yellow hi-vis vests don't have and don't seem to want, presumably to maintain their credibility and a sense of professionalism as 'official' volunteers, despite the fact that their own tours are still a kind of performance. But the spectacle of Pirate Pete's tour adds a different air to it which, despite his adamant claims of the veracity of his account, lingers almost

with an air not of suspicion, but of playful amusement which may detract from his perceived credibility among the audience, as well as by other heritage volunteers and actors.

Even if his account is thoroughly researched and the book's claims seem credible, it can be slightly challenging to believe everything you hear from a grown man in a pirate hat who drives a hearse and growls a hearty "Aaarrggghh!" to amuse his audience every now and again. And this is certainly a strong contrast to the Council volunteers in hi-vis vests and City Council ID badges. Perhaps this is a consequence of the genre, as well as the marketing of the tour, but the drawback of Pete's character is a potential compromise in credibility, even if the vast majority of the anecdotes told by Pirate Pete are very similar to those told by other guides, with an occasional twist or variation.

Crucially, the language of "discovery" and "uncovering", combined with the preface Sarah gave me about Pirate Pete's reasons for writing *Bristol Slavers* and his supposed "going into hiding", add a sense of mystery and danger to the story. Consequently, I approached Pirate Pete with a certain sense of expectation of some new information and new stories which I had not heard elsewhere. And though there were perhaps some unique twists—the suggestion that Cabot's family were held captive by the establishment, or that perhaps 1 million people from Bristol and the West Country were taken into slavery by North African pirates and traders—much of the history shared by Pirate Pete is corroborated by local accounts shared by local heritage workers and volunteers. For those who are familiar with Bristol's history of slavery, the Pirate Walk is actually a fairly standard account in terms of the history shared with a few twists, and a bit of fun added in with pirate themed costume and the occasional "Aaarrggghh!"

On the surface, it certainly seems that part of the genre of Pirate Pete's tour—as well as the marketing of his popular history—leans towards *framing* these histories as secret, as opposed to the revelation of actual secrets. To an informed audience versed in the history of Bristol's relationship with slavery and colonialism, much of this isn't actually a secret at all. Nor is it an 'alternative history' really as the majority of content in the account offered isn't all that different from other historical walks and it incorporates many local legends which are often told in Bristol such as the story about Amerike and the naming of America. But part of the experience of the tour certainly seems to aim to give the audience the *sense* of being privy to a secret which is not actually a secret. Piracy, after all, has its own connotations with secrets and buried treasure in the popular imagination. Taken with Sarah's preface which she gave me separately from Pirate Pete, one could interpret Pirate Pete's work as a popular yet subtle effort to challenge the

establishment of certain Bristol families. But through analysing the text and the tour, this sense of conspiracy and secrecy certainly seems more hyped up than it actually is.

Rather, the effect of the tour is that, one is given this sense of being privy to a secret without having been told an actual secret. Yet something about this escapes the idea of the ‘public secret’ as discussed by Taussig and other scholars. Nor is it quite what Lindstrom says about the secret being “empty”—there is information there, but it’s not exactly ‘secret’ information which enforced by a taboo or by Taussig’s sense of ‘knowing what not to know.’ It may be lesser known information, but it still doesn’t quite fit the sense of being a ‘secret’ per se.

However, within the wider context of history and heritage workers in Bristol, the language of the secret employed by Pirate Pete—may in fact be doing something far more significant and noteworthy than it may seem on the surface.

#### **“Nice Little Apocryphal Tales”: A Council-sponsored Narrative vs Secret Histories**

At one point during one of the Old City tours based out of M Shed, Jon, one of the senior volunteer guides and a former history teacher dismisses these many of these secret histories and local legends about Bristol’s past. He often does this as he stops in front of the Slave Trade Memorial Plaque on the side of M Shed, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. On one occasion, he goes into this dismissal when one tour participant begins asking about Bristol’s role in the white slave trade around 1000 AD (which is documented on a panel in M Shed discussing Bristol’s trade with Ireland—a panel which is notably separate from the wider gallery on the transatlantic slave trade).

“Bristol,” Jon notes, “is full of these little apocryphal tales about its past. You’ve probably heard stories about slaves being kept in Redcliffe Caves, or that Bristol was actually, physically built by slaves, or that two prominent landmarks in Bristol—Whiteladies Road and Black Boy Hill are named after references to the slave trade—but none of these are true and there’s no historical evidence to support any of them.”

He explains that Redcliffe Caves *did* have a connection to slavery in that sandstone from the caves was certainly used to make glassware which was sold as part of the slave trade, but as slaves were very valuable, it made no sense to keep something so valuable exposed to cold, damp,

and the elements—it would've been bad business to expose slaves to those conditions.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, he suggests there is little documented evidence of slaves physically being in Bristol despite a few notable exceptions—such as Pero, the African house slave of the Pinney family mentioned in the previous chapter, and the gravestone of another African slave buried at Blaise Castle to the north of the city known as Scipio Africanus—hardly any slaves were actually ever brought back to Bristol.

This clear denial of the presence of enslaved Africans (or at least a claim that their presence was extremely limited) *in Bristol* was quickly offered by tour guides from M Shed, especially Jon. On the one hand, there is little historical evidence to suggest that slaves were actually present in Bristol according to these accounts. And considering Jon's background as a history teacher, his high, discerning threshold for historical evidence to validate claims seems sensible enough. But the strong and immediate denial of the presence of slaves is notable. Perhaps in part, this works as a corrective to what is seen as a problematic and false understanding; however, it may also function to provide a relative absolution to the city. However, there seems to be a moral spectrum invoked here: that although Bristol traded in slaves, that atrocity is still altogether different from *keeping* slaves and *mistreating them in Bristol* (as opposed to stories about the torture of enslaved Africans in the American South or the Caribbean). Looking at the last chapter, one may also note the ways in which the Georgian House Museum is quick to note that although Pinney owned slaves and even brought some back to Bristol, including Pero Jones and some of his siblings, they were still treated humanely rather than abused by Pinney.

Jon continues debunking the apocryphal tales with fervour in his tempo and tone: Whiteladies Road was actually named for a convent in the area, which was once on the present site of the TA (Territorial Army)/Bristol Uni OTC (Officer Training Corps) base. Just as you have Blackfriars or Greyfriars in places like London, here you had Whiteladies for the nuns whose habits were white. And Black Boy Hill wasn't named in reference to the slave trade, but after James II who was known for his "swarly" (which Jon suggests was a contemporary term at the time for dark) skin. Although not every tour participant who hears this is convinced—especially by the comment about James II's skin tone—the straightforward dismissal and the way it is presented matter-of-factly and with ease suggests Jon's confidence in his statements as historically backed.

Having dismissed these well-known and widely circulated local legends about specific places in Bristol, Jon says that "Although they're not true, many of these are just nice little stories,

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<sup>23</sup> Of course, this logic is quite contrary to the conditions of slave ships, which Jon describes in his tours as well.

nice little apocryphal tales to tell.” And on more than one occasion, when a participant brings up other local legends or contests the claims of these ‘factual histories,’ some of the M Shed guides (including but not only Jon) have remarked, “Well, they might tell you things like that on the pirate tour, but our concern is with real, documented history.”

Here, the dismissive attitude and contestation of credibility over Bristol’s past comes to the fore—especially in relation to Pirate Pete. While Council volunteers share a narrative on behalf of the Council, backed with the resources of the Council and Archives, they clearly do not possess a monopoly on historical narratives, and these local legends, often presented as ‘secret histories’ by actors like Pirate Pete, still leak beyond the Council’s frame.

In these dismissals and correctives, these actors working on behalf of the Council arguably attempt to reassert control of the historical narrative by setting out the parameters of what qualifies as ‘actual’ history echoing the complicated relationship between history as a discipline and social memory, which has been touched on throughout this thesis. The dismissal of many other narratives as “nice little apocryphal tales” or as “things you might hear on the Pirate tour” do not merely signal competition over popularity, but also as a matter of influence and credibility, and therefore, this question of who (if anyone) has the right and legitimacy (therefore the power) to narrate the city’s past.

This is perhaps even clearer when one considers Jon’s remarks offered here about Whiteladies Road and Black Boy Hill. Whether or not the archives support Jon’s origin stories for these well-known place names, his is certainly a minority perspective within the city; the idea that these were intricately linked to the slave trade and Bristol’s links to colonialism and ideas of race hold overwhelming currency in the public imagination. Yet, if one reads these well-attributed origins of these place names as linked to Bristol’s role as a colonial port, Jon’s account can also be seen as an attempt to de-racialize the urban landscape of the city and its associations with slavery and to absolve Clifton from the haunting of race. In a cynical vein, one may go so far to interpret this as another attempt to exorcise Bristol’s colonial ghosts by suggesting that two prominent place names in the city often attributed to racialised ideas linked to histories of slavery are not linked in this way at all.

Within a wider politics of the past, at further stake are not just stances of historical credibility, but also, the sort of historical assumptions at play. Is there one ‘correct’ historical narrative, as if there were an objective truth out there? Or is there actually a multiplicity of

perspectives and interpretations of events that is in fact chaotic and anarchic, influenced by wider concerns of politics, power, credibility, and legitimacy?

### **Colston Day, the Church, and The Merchants: Elite Conspiracies?**

In August 2015, the Bristol Civic Society—a local citizens’ group of a few hundred members—mostly (according to some informants within the group) older, white, middle-class North Bristolians<sup>24</sup>—graciously allowed me to host a presentation and discussion on Bristol’s imperial past and present at the edge of the predominantly Black British/Afro-Caribbean neighbourhood of St. Paul’s.

The 90-minute event included a 45-minute presentation of Bristol’s imperial links and material remnants, largely informed by my interlocutors over the year—especially various tour guides, both ones from M Shed and others from the Festival of Walks in May—as well as 45 minutes of discussion about what my attendees knew about this past and how they felt about this. Questions of what ought to be done with this past—of whether or not we should talk about it, and if so, how? —were also featured. The turnout included about 50 people—including a handful of friends in their mid to late 20s and a few of my more engaged and interested informants. A few prominent members of Bristol’s Black community were present, as were one or two members of the Bristol Commonwealth Society, and two M Shed tour guides. Regarding the audience demographics, in the words of one informant, “You could tell who was a member of the Civic Society (by her tone and later comments, she implied ‘older, white, middle-class’) and who came because of the topic and the neighbourhood.” However, the vast majority of the audience were people I had not previously encountered, and their suggestions and insights have been invaluable in framing how I perceive the issues in my research.

Though not a member of the Civic Society, Rebecca (a white woman from a working-class background in her late 30s) was one of the people I met at the event. Prior to the event, one of my other key informants, Ed (introduced in Chapter 2) pointed her out to me as one of the more interesting characters involved with Bristol’s history. After the event, as I was asking folks for feedback and engaging in some of the conversations afterwards, Rebecca came up to me and told me that she was keen to have a chat with me sometime, especially as she had a prior background

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<sup>24</sup> One particular informant involved in the Society had urged me if at all possible to see to it that this event was hosted not in the Society’s usual venue in the affluent neighbourhood of Redland, but for the sake of the demographics of the turnout and the discussion, to host the event in a more central neighbourhood, away from the more middle-class neighbourhoods of Clifton, Cotham, and Redland.

as a history teacher, had recently set up a local radio show about issues in education, and wanted to interview me on air. Passionate about opportunities to address inequalities in education throughout the city, native Bristolian Rebecca has been very involved in education advocacy for a number of years, including an admittedly futile campaign in the recent mayoral elections after my fieldwork (in 2015) in order to raise awareness about issues of inequality and education in the city. She invited me to visit the station the following week, where we recorded an interview for her show and spoke for quite a while before and afterwards.

Ujima Radio is an urban radio station based in the centre of Bristol, near the busy shopping quarter of Broadmead. Although a radio station, it became clear that the station is also an important hub of activity for members of Bristol's black community, as well as other progressive activists interested in matters of social justice. When I arrived at the station, the scene was one of incredible diversity, with a lot going on. In one corner, young white men seemed to be on an apprenticeship or receiving some training with audio equipment. Other people were coming and going from the main office area, while Kevin, one of the producers, asked me to do a quick 30 second spot about my research and its findings—despite the fact that I was still in the midst of my fieldwork and data collection. Various people were working at different desks, some on computers, some with more technical audio equipment, and a few of the folks around, not recognising me, asked me what brings me to the station. I mentioned that Rebecca had invited me for an interview on her show since I'm doing research on how people talk about and understand histories of colonialism and Empire in Bristol today. As I sat down at one of the tables to go over some notes before chatting to Rebecca, a Black woman sat down to feed her toddler, and we began talking about my research where she (as with many other folks I met at Ujima) asked me about my findings. I replied that I was just finishing my fieldwork and hadn't really started to analyse my data yet but shared a few thoughts about how I notice a trend that Bristolians often talk about slavery without discussing the wider context of Empire. As I shared this, Rebecca herself was in a bit of hurry, running from here to there before she and her producer (who is of an Asian background) finally sat down with me, gave me a brief rundown of what we were going to do, and took me back into the corridor and then the recording studio, which is itself a black, insulated room filled with audio recording equipment, computers, and microphones. Rebecca and I sat across from each other, while her producer, Elaine, sat behind a desk and put on a pair of headphones to check audio levels.

The interview recorded for the show was a rather straightforward affair which lasted for about 20 minutes, recorded over one take where Rebecca asked me a few basic questions about



my research and my findings. Many of her questions were about the nature of what I've been doing as an anthropologist interested in how people know, understand, and talk about histories of colonialism in Bristol, and a lot of what I shared was similar to the event hosted by the Bristol Civic Society the week before: namely, that Bristol has its fair share of remnants if not monuments to Empire in the cityscape, yet many Bristolians pass by these landmarks every day without giving a second thought to Bristol's history as a central port for colonial trade. Rebecca, as a former history teacher, then shared her own experience and then asked a few of her own questions about the history curriculum, in particular, the claim that Empire isn't really taught in schools. Rebecca found it astonishing that an American student would learn about the British Empire in high school, whereas many pupils in Bristol will not have had such an introduction to the topic. We agreed that between her experience as a history teacher and my discussion with various informants, that although histories of slavery and colonialism are technically on the National Curriculum, it seems very rare if they are discussed in any great length at all.

Yet despite our shared on-air ramblings about my research and history education in Britain, what made my afternoon with Rebecca really fascinating was our conversations about my research and her own historical investigations before and after the recording. Before the interview, Rebecca told me a story which further fed her interest in these conversations about Bristol's past which we continued to discuss after the recording. She asked me if I had heard about the recent controversy considering Colston Day—an event in which some of the schools which bear Colston's name including Colston's School, Colston's Girls' School, and the recently founded Merchants' Academy—commemorate the controversial Merchant and slave trader.

I had certainly heard about this event, but for obvious reasons of access, was not able to attend; it is a very private event, which undoubtedly makes it an easy target for accusations of secrets, concealment, and conspiracies. But she went on to tell me about a row concerning the Bishop of Bristol and some local journalists. She explained that a local undercover journalist recorded the address by the Bishop—and she stopped to explain the “patronising” ritual in which some of the poorer children (on scholarship) are given a ‘Colston Bun’ and are expected to express their gratitude for this token of Edward Colston's generosity. While she clearly had strong feelings about the patronising nature of this ritual, this was hardly the most upsetting aspect of this episode to her. Rebecca went on to explain the row in which the Bishop “defended Colston and his actions” by suggesting that much of the controversy about Colston's links to slavery were ‘speculation.’ According to a local magazine article, the Bishop said, “And I think of Edward Colston. I think he was a man who lived a life of significance, and I've found there may be still

some speculation however, on some of the circumstances around his business roots right here [in Bristol]. It is speculation...” (Brown 2014). Although the Bishop and the Diocese released a statement which attempted to clarify the Bishop’s words during the ceremony, Rebecca did not seem at all convinced.

The local press, including the magazine which published this account, B24/7 (Brown 2014) and the local paper, the Bristol Post also covered the story (Bristol Post 2014, Rath 2014), where the Bishop claimed that interpretations like Rebecca’s were wilful misinterpretations of his words. Furthermore, in comments made separately to the paper, the Bishop never made any comments about slavery while suggesting that he is adamantly against slavery (Bristol Post, 12 November 2014, cf. BBC News 12 November 2014)

As she told the story, her tone became more outraged, and she went on to explain that she had written a letter to the Archbishop to complain about “Bishop Mike’s defence of Colston,” which, much to her outrage, was dismissed as they claimed that the Bishop’s comments were neither a defence nor an accusation. Astonished, she contends that the Church is embroiled in hypocrisy as the Diocese of Bristol was a partner in the Bristol Anti-Slavery Partnership, and yet here they were, “defending someone who is an apologist for Colston.” As far as Rebecca is concerned, she adamantly feels that this is all part of a “cover-up” between the Church and the Merchants as institutions of the establishment, concealing the truth of Colston and the slave trade from the wider public. By calling this a cover-up, Rebecca—like some informants such as Pirate Pete—signposts and flags the language of secrecy and conspiracy and explicitly aims these charges directly at the city’s elite.

Yet for Rebecca, the controversy concerning Bristol’s history of empire and the slave trade does not merely stop with the Bishop’s words on Colston. For her, this incident is the tip of the iceberg which reveals a far larger and more dangerous issue. She strongly feels that at even greater stake is the running of Bristol’s schools, the perpetuation of social inequality, and the “airbrushing of history”—all attributable in her eyes to one institution—the Merchants. She explained that in the past decade or so, the emergence of free schools and academies has taken away control of state education from the local council and placed it in the hands of groups like the Merchants via some of their charitable fronts such as the Venturer’s Trust. According to Rebecca’s account, the Venturer’s Trust has overseen the transition of some private schools to academy status in order to get money and to garner construction contracts and the running of schools (and their curriculum) to the Merchants. The result is that the Merchants, as an elite and private organisation, have control over education in Bristol in what she refers to as “a land grab.” She

also referred to the ways in which these contracts are often given to members of the Merchants in what she considers a form of cronyism around these school development projects. Additionally, she critiqued the ways in which the free school and academy structure (ushered in by the 2010 Tory-led coalition) serves to entrench ethnic and class inequalities throughout the city through selection and admission policies and what she considers as an example of “institutional racism” meant to exclude Black/minority ethnic (BME) and working-class pupils, thus perpetuating economic and social inequality.

Rebecca continued to speak of both the institutional elitism and racism involved in this restructuring, outraged that “It’s all there in the history if you know what to look for, but most people don’t know it!” For her, this is one way in which “imperialism lives on in the city”—not merely in the “airbrushing of history” and control of the curriculum to avoid talking about Empire, but also in the ways in which “the 1%’ continue to run the city” and give preference to their own, privately educated members. According to her, “the Merchants have their hands in everything,” noting that the then current Mayor of Bristol, “Old Red Trousers” George Ferguson was once a Merchant but had to resign “in an act of show” as a matter of a “conflict of interest.” Her words mark her distrust and scepticism of Ferguson, the Merchants, and Bristol’s wider elite.

Rebecca’s outrage against the Merchants and the Church in its alleged defence of Colston also presents an opportunity to consider what these accusations and her narration of events has the potential to do in Bristol’s discourse and debate over its history and heritage. As with other informants, my aim here is to not necessarily contradict or agree with her statements and accusations, but to consider what her statements *do* on a wider level.

Noting her language of “cover-up” and “airbrushing” of history by the Merchants, the tropes of secrecy and conspiracy clearly come to the fore. In this case, Rebecca’s core accusation is that there is a deliberate, intentional attempt by the elite to control and manipulate the teaching of history (among other affairs in education throughout Bristol). This has admittedly led to her being viewed with a degree of scepticism by some of my other informants—in particular one or two Council-affiliated actors. It is also notable that their scepticism towards Rebecca is similar to their attitudes towards Pirate Pete, marked by a degree of dismissal and reduced credibility.

Yet as with Pirate Pete, a few of Rebecca’s claims are certainly worth noting for our purposes in theorising what the language of secrets effectively *does* in these conversations about historical discourse. For example, Rebecca’s words that “It’s all there in the history if you know what to look for!” remind us that ‘secret histories’ are rarely actually secrets per se but are often

“hidden in plain sight” for those who are attuned and knowledgeable about such topics. Thus, it makes sense if she sees her role as an activist to be one of raising awareness to these things which are there for all to see if only they knew how.

But perhaps one of the most telling statements she makes is that for her, “this is one of the ways in which imperialism lives on in this city.” The disconnection and displacement between past and present, here and there, which is usually associated with imperialism collapses with her statement. She clearly makes the connection with these words that the British Empire was not something that happened a long time ago, over there but rather, something with its resonances and continuities in Bristol, in this present moment. In a sense then, “the history which is there for all to see” which the Merchants allegedly attempt to conceal is not some remote history in the past which is insignificant or distant to the present; her very claim—which in this light, other informants may see as problematic—is that history and indeed, imperialism is *here and now* and thus, needs to be articulated and confronted. The strategies of keeping Empire at arms’ length, of displacing it elsewhere, of containing it in the past are powerfully (and perhaps uncomfortably) challenged by Rebecca’s words and her claim that those who benefitted from the practices of slavery and the trade of colonialism are still the powers that be today. In essence, she is making connections where the norm has been one of disconnection and circumscription; although she may be dismissed by other actors, she is effectively giving voice to that which is often circumscribed or written around in a way that provokes and challenges many other voices in Bristol’s heritage scene.

### **Bristol Slavers**

Pirate Pete’s book (Martin and Nwokolo 2014) is itself interesting, not merely for the reasons Pirate Pete and Sarah had suggested, but for its tone. Invoking the language of secrets and discoveries, its cover suggests that this is Bristol’s history “*discovered* by Peter James Martin and Dr Isioma Ndili Nwokolo.” (italics added)

The preface of the book notes Pirate Pete and his co-author Isioma Nwokolo’s interests in writing the book, noting their interest in “the link between the West Country and the African slave trade” considering their respective origins (Martin and Nwokolo 2014:2). The introduction also notes that “Bristol historian Peter Martin...has been on a *fact-finding mission* for the past 12 years” and upon meeting Nwokolo, they

[S]oon got to work *peeling back history* to reveal what went on during a period of great importance in Bristol. The book *unveils* which Bristol families made their fortune overseas in the Caribbean—the Colstons, Smyths, Nelsons, Wills, Goldneys, Frys and Berkeleys are all famous Bristol names explored within these pages (Ibid., italics added).

Readers are then invited to “join Peter and Isioma on their *voyage of discovery to unearth* the South West’s slave trade past” (Ibid., italics added). The last line of the introduction also notes “the roots of how numerous large estates in England’s West Country *have long been buried, until now*” (Ibid., italics added).

Following this preface and introduction which clearly signposts the language of secrecy and discovery, a short biography of both authors is offered. Pirate Pete notes his Bristolian born and bred heritage, as well as his family’s roots and association with colonialism and empire, and he notes his interest in his native city’s history and his curiosity of the “many monuments to such exotic places in the Caribbean as Barbados, Kingston, Jamaica, St. Vincent, and Nevis” (Ibid., 4). He also notes his childhood in and around Bristol Cathedral because of his grandfather’s involvement with the Deanery. Having introduced himself as a Bristolian, he then notes that he “set off on a quest, which has taken 12 years, to *discover* and explore the buildings, estates, and follies in the West Country and *prise open their secrets* of trading with Africa and the overseas plantations” before inviting the reader to “follow me as we find the source of many South West families’ wealth and *discover* the *hidden* slave lists and shipping manifests linked to the region” (Ibid. 4-5, italics added).

Dr. Isioma Ndili Nwokolo also offers her own biography and interest in the project as a psychiatrist interested in the psychosocial effects of slavery. As she writes, her family comes from present-day Nigeria where she was raised after being born in England, and in particular, she notes how her family come from the region of Nigeria where Bristol slavers obtained and bought enslaved people “with the active connivance and participation of some traditional rulers and powerful local chiefs” (Ibid., 6). She also discusses her familial links to traditional Igbo rulers during the time of Bristol’s involvement with slavery before also noting her own history of fleeing the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 and eventually ending up in the UK as a medical doctor (7).

Although this language of secrecy and discovery is prominent in the introductions and author biographies throughout *Bristol Slavers*, the majority of the text (aside from Nwokolo’s piece in the last 4 pages of the book on the psychosocial aspects of slavery) reads more-or-less like a straightforward, illustrated, popular history. For example, two pages on the Smyths, owners of the well-known estate at Ashton Court read as a brief, standard historical account of the family’s local estates and businesses before making their links with plantation slavery in Jamaica and

Edward Colston in one paragraph (14). The rest of the two pages are filled with illustrations, photographs, and in this case, excerpts of shipping manifests from slave ships owned by Sir John Hugh Smyth (15). Another page offers a very brief biography of Edward Colston and his involvement in sugar and slavery, as well as some of the local landmarks which he sponsored and which bear his name today (24).

Despite making links to some of Bristol's historically famous and wealthy families as well as a few stately homes in Bristol and the region (and thereby establishing links among Bristol's traditional elite, slavery, and colonialism), many of these stories are hardly actual 'secrets' per se. The details offered by Martin and Nwokolo certainly seem historically valid rather than far-fetched, albeit perhaps less well-known than the stories told about the Smyths, the Wills, the Frys, and other families. Not to discredit the work the authors have done in assembling and disseminating the details of these stories, it seems as though these histories are more *framed* as secrets, rather than actually being 'secrets' that have been intentionally buried, concealed, or are enforced by a taboo. So, beyond a marketing tool (after all, who doesn't like to be privy to a secret?), how might we consider these to *actually* be secrets, if at all? And how might these 'secret histories' fit in, not only in the genre of Pirate Pete's illustrated popular history and walking tour, but also within the larger scholarly theory on secrets and public secrets?

### **Bristol's Treasure Island Influences**

May in Bristol sees a "Festival of Walks" which, in addition to the regular M Shed tours, includes a host of other historical and heritage-themed walks, marketed as an opportunity to learn about the city, meet new people, and enjoy some fitness and fresh air. Among the many tours I participated in over the month, one of them is *Bristol's Treasure Island Influences*, described in the Festival pamphlet as an opportunity to "learn about the characters, locations & events that inspired some of Britain's greatest literature. 1000+ years of history from Brewers and Slavers to adventures on the high seas." Indeed, among the many local legends in Bristol are stories of the marooned sailor Alexander Selkirk (the inspiration for *Robinson Crusoe*) meeting Daniel Defoe at one of the city's historic pubs, the Llandoger Trow, a pub which is allegedly over three centuries old in the heart of the Old City. Stories on the tour include one about Selkirk's (a Scot) involvement on a Bristol based voyage led by a famous pirate, William Dampier, Selkirk's abandonment on Juan Fernandez Island after a row, and his rescue after 4 years by another Bristolian captain and buccaneer of the era, Woodes Rogers (commemorated with a blue plaque in Queen Square).

Another story suggests that the Llandoger Trow (arguably Bristol's oldest pub) was actually the inspiration for the Admiral Benbow Inn in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. As described by its own promotional literature, this tour explores the links between Bristol's history of pirates and adventurers and these literary works, and as such, has the potential to create a powerfully linked topography among these well-known, popular works of fiction, the histories which allegedly inspired them, and the present-day urban landscape of Bristol.

I met Mark in front of the bombed-out skeleton remains of Temple Church (according to his introduction founded by and named after the Knights Templar) as he assembled a group of about 20 of us to partake in the day's walk. I had heard about him vaguely a few months before from a couple of the M Shed tour guides—one of whom, Ed, a popular and colourful figure around many of the city walks and Bristol's Harbour scene—was with us for this walk. Ed suggested that I pay close attention to Mark's comments since Mark is the current President of the Bristol Radical History Group, a group of local historians with a professed Marxist orientation towards history. As Mark himself told me at the end of the tour, he is also the President of the Long John Silver Society, a citizens' group advocating for the erection of a statue of Robert Louis Stevenson outside of the Hole in the Wall pub to commemorate the links between Bristol and Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

As a publican from the Bristol area, much of Mark's tour admittedly focuses on pubs as tour stops, during which he shares his vast knowledge of Bristol's history. A self-confessed beer lover, he begins his tour by talking about brewing and one of the most influential "adventurers" and historical figures in local history: Sir John Hawkins, who was among other things, a successful brewer, Mayor of Bristol, Merchant, and advocate for the slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Mark presents Hawkins as both an influential citizen but also as a slave trader and pronounced advocate of Bristol's involvement in the trade. According to Mark, Hawkins remains one of the key (yet largely invisible) figures in the history of Bristol and the slave trade and is perhaps far more important to the history of the slave trade than the locally divisive (and visible) Edward Colston.<sup>25</sup>

Although he takes us through many of the same stops as many other walking tours, Mark also takes us through many stops in central Bristol which the M Shed tours and Pirate Walk do not address—either as a matter of convenience or intentionally—despite taking place in roughly the same neighbourhoods in the city. For example, one of Mark's early stops in the tour is in sight of a pub quite hidden away from public view called The Cornubia. The beer garden of the pub is

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<sup>25</sup> This is a point which one of Hawkins' own descendants hardly contests: (<http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/Weight-past-felt-today/story-16434231-detail/story.html>)

notably covered with a number of flags, mostly of the patriotic sort including a few Union flags, military ensigns, a pirate flag, a number of St. George's Crosses, and a lot of red, white and blue bunting. Mark explains the significance of the area around this pub as a former site of glass production, which was used in the transatlantic slave trade. Although, considering the modern buildings in the area, there are no traces of these old glass factories. By Mark's account, Daniel Defoe (author of the famous *Robinson Crusoe* in the Adventure genre) originally came to Bristol as a Glass Tax inspector, spending a lot of time in pubs where he came across various stories of sailors' adventures and exploits around the world and in Britain's colonies.

Beyond the immense amount of material presented, one of the things which makes Mark's tour particularly effective is the way that he balances the contemporary urban landscape of Bristol, well-known literature, and historical figures in the city, including widely known authors and certain people in Bristol society at the time who encountered or inspired these authors. However, discussing the slave trade is also key feature of this tour as a key source of Bristol's wealth, and in turn, its influence and importance.

Among other stops on the tour, we spend a considerable amount of time (stopping for a pint) at the Seven Stars pub, now tucked away in a rather obscure alley instead of facing the main road. With fervour in his voice, Mark regards this place as "a pub that was key in abolition and saved the world." He shares an in-depth history of the neighbourhood of Redcliffe and its role as the historic centre of the wool trade, the involvement of John Hawkins and brewing in the area, and also the history of the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, who did a significant amount of research concerning the slave trade at this historic pub. Although (as an abolitionist) Clarkson was not welcome in most of the city's pubs, he struck a friendship with the landlord at the Seven Stars and did his research interviewing local sailors not only about the cruelty of the slave trade for slaves, but the low survival rates of Bristol sailors on these journeys as well. Mark argues that actually, this treatment of white, Bristolian sailors was the key in swaying public opinion in favour of abolition of the trade rather than depictions of the cruelty of the slave trade and arguments for the humanity of the enslaved Africans. This controversial claim does not feature in many other historical narratives which present the role abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Clarkson in terms of shifting attitudes on the Africans' humanity. He explains that prior to the 1807 Act, Wilberforce and the cause of abolition were so unpopular that not only were attempts made on Clarkson's life, but throughout Bristol, church bells would ring for days celebrating the defeat of Wilberforce's bill during previous attempts.



In many respects, these claims disrupt a narrative of abolitionists such as Wilberforce and Clarkson as white saviours, but they also disrupt a claim of 19<sup>th</sup> progressive politics affirming the humanity of enslaved Africans (or indeed, of other races). By suggesting the extent to which Bristolians were against abolition (being a key slave port, abolition was a great threat to local businesses) as well as the swaying of British public opinion against the trade because of low survival rates of *white* sailors, this suggests that abolition was not as effective as a noble cause than hagiographic accounts of abolitionists may suggest.

Mark also points out a relief plaque by the front door of the Seven Stars, which he takes a moment to explain. He explains his pride at getting this plaque erected—not merely because English Heritage opposed it—but because he and the Bristol Radical History Group felt it was extremely important to mark this pub as a site of historical significance for its role in the abolition of the slave trade. Along with the plaque mentioned in Chapter 2 on the side of M Shed, it is one of the few places in Bristol where this history is always constantly visible and accessible. Interestingly, it is also one of the only displays in the city where explicit linkages are also made to the slave trade, compensation to slave owners in the 1830s, and the investments which sparked the Industrial Revolution and funded key infrastructure projects such as the Great Western Railway—a project explicitly linked here to one of Bristol’s favourite sons and heroes, Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

In particular, one key attribute of Mark’s narrative on this tour is the thorough linkages among prominent citizens and Merchants in the city, the slave trade, the Empire, and the pirates which occupy many of Bristol’s legends, immortalised in the nationally known fiction of writers such as Daniel Defoe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Jonathan Swift. Throughout Mark’s tour, he does not use acontextual facts related to sites on the tour, but rather, he constantly provides the greater context of colonialism which places these famous works of fiction into a wider historical frame. What emerges from this is an explicit linkage between colonial history and these popular, beloved works of fiction which are well-known in the British imagination. The effect is on the one hand, a contextualisation of the literature; here are beloved and significant works of fiction which hold an esteemed place in British imagination which are products of colonialism. By extension, this acknowledges the ways in which the British imagination is itself thoroughly affected and inspired by colonial discourses. By placing these works of fiction and this history into the contemporary landscape of Bristol, Mark is effectively able to make linkages and connections which seem to have greater resonance with the audience than perhaps some of the other tours discussed. The popularity of Mark’s tour as one of the busier tours during the Festival of Walks

certainly supports this. By suggesting that a particular pub which is still standing in Bristol is perhaps the Admiral Benbow Inn or the place where Defoe and Alexander Selkirk meet, powerful narrative and topographic linkages can be made among Bristol today, a history of Empire, slavery, tropes of adventure, and exploration, and these works of fiction which are well known and invoke certain imagery among the audience.

Citing these well-known works of literature, Mark notes for example that Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is itself an "anecdote for imperialism," and he also notes the role of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in "promoting colonialism". With this in mind, these famous works of fiction—which influence these secret histories and local legends—are deeply tied into the historical context of Bristol's involvement in colonialism and the slave trade, and slavery and colonialism's pertinence to Bristol. After all, just as MacInnes (1958) claims, Bristol is great because of its past as an imperial port an integral role in the building of Britain's Empire. And although Mark does not really frame these histories as secret like the examples from Pirate Pete and Rebecca, the stories told on his tour are still in excess of many other historical walking tours in terms of their content, including the Council-sponsored tours run from M Shed, in making these linkages to slavery and Empire.

By connecting the historical context in which these works of fiction were written with the contemporary landscape of Bristol, one could argue that where other historical representations are marked by spatial and temporal disconnection, Mark's tour restores these connections by placing histories of Empire into places in present-day Bristol through utilising his audience's imagination and their familiarity with these well-known works of literature. In this case, the literature curiously operates as a link which connects the audience to these histories in a more familiar way because of the popularity of these works. Of course, the irony is that *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe* are fiction; yet the idea that they are based on historical events and real historical characters allows them to operate as powerful links between the historical context in which they are written and the places in present-day Bristol which are said to have inspired their respective authors.

Furthermore, as suggested in Chapter 2, the material remnants of these places (some of these important pubs like the Seven Stars or Llandoger Trow are still standing) echoes the ways in which the material landscape of the city furnishes reminders of a past which may not often be spoken about. To an extent then, each of these walking tours—both those presented here and in Chapter 2—offer verbal inscriptions through which one can learn to see or read the city in particular ways which make linkages between past and present.

## Secret Histories, Power, Knowledge, and Emplacement

In presenting these ethnographic examples, these secret histories are circulated (though not necessarily initially produced) among, and by, actors who often express the intention to “make the truth known” or to “get the truth about Bristol’s history out there.” Considering the political suspicions and the rhetoric invoked by informants who share these secret histories, the provocations of these secret histories illustrate on one superficial dimension, a contestation of Bristol’s history. They offer a counter-narrative to the stories told by Council-sponsored walking tours at M Shed, and furthermore, by suggesting their secrets as revelations and discoveries, they position themselves as giving their listeners a role as being privy to information that the establishment and powers-that-be are withholding from the public.

This chapter has considered what these exchanges and the telling of secret histories (which aren’t really secret) might do within the context of the politics of the past in Bristol. On the surface, what is at stake between secret histories and ‘official’ narratives is in fact a contest for legitimacy vis-à-vis the past. By exchanging in acts of revelation and dismissal, in accusations of conspiracies and cover-ups, or relegating these secret histories to the status of “apocryphal tales” my informants engage in attempts to validate their narratives and invalidate those of others, along with the assumptions of history which are revealed through these narratives. But the issue of *which* historical assumptions is no small matter, as it is a fundamental question of power and its relationship to what constitutes knowledge.

Despite dismissals of historical invalidity by Council-affiliated actors, these prevalent and widespread secret histories and apocryphal tales *do* something; at the very least they reveal a particular historical awareness of Bristol’s problematic and contested past. From my experience and conversations with people—not to mention the frequency of certain comments— it would seem that these “apocryphal tales” about places like Black Boy Hill, Whiteladies Road, and Redcliffe Caves, in relation to histories of slavery mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, have far more influence and currency over any ‘official’ narrative of the city’s past. Regardless of historical validity as defined by the academic discipline of history, these secret histories and apocryphal tales have their own sort of influence and power which escapes the strict bounds of historical methodology. In part because they are related to material places and things (as in Chapter 2), they have the potentiality to leak beyond neatly contained historical frames and narratives.

The very anarchy of historical narratives in Bristol also raises pertinent issues about the past and present, and indeed, what kind of place Bristol itself was and is. As mentioned in the introduction, the city faces a tension between its history as a colonial port for the slave trade which contradicts its reputation for progressive politics. What is the temporality of Bristol's relationship with colonialism and the slave trade? Is there a clear rupture that separates the past from present? Can history be neatly contained in the past in a manner that allows its citizens (especially its white middle, upper middle, and establishment classes in neighbourhoods like Clifton) to "move on" and ask others to do so? If this is part of a wider idea of histories of colonialism and the slave trade being just that—*histories, and therefore, in the past*—what consequences does this have for those whose lives and lineages are still affected adversely by colonialism and the slave trade?

By framing these secrets in such a way, actors who claim knowledge of these secrets are making a particular sort of claim about the relationship with past and present; and by explicitly claiming that those involved with histories of colonialism and slavery are linked with the establishment and powers that be in the present, they attempt to destabilise and problematise the assumed severed relationship between past and present. As such, these secret histories challenge the idea of Empire and slavery as displaced; they explicitly and powerfully emplace not only legacies, but continuities of these histories of inequality in the presence of the city in the present moment. In doing so, they effectively speak what is, for whatever reason, circumscribed in museum galleries or dismissed as apocryphal by other Council-affiliated heritage actors. Together, these accounts discussed in this chapter make for a linked, multi-layered topography of the urban landscape of Bristol which problematises any attempt to contain or displace Bristol's difficult history. Topographically, the city is firstly, one of inequality, privilege, and race marked secondly by a history of Empire and slavery, and then finally, mixed with a literary layer which emplaces and connects popular works of the British imagination onto the cityscape. The result is an understanding of the city which not only has the power to contest the narratives told on behalf of the Council, but which also has the potential to capture and engage the public imagination and attention, whilst also redefining assumptions of the past and how histories of Empire and slavery are alive and well in the city today. Within this topographic narrative of the city, these histories are not displaced a long time ago, somewhere over there, but are here and now and in the midst of the city. By doing so, they reveal the powerful ways in which the past—specifically the past of Empire, of colonialism, of the slave trade—continue to haunt, inhabit, linger, and remind us that these histories are still with us here, now, and in the present.

The result is not only something abstract and conceptual without any practical consequence. Within the politics of the past in Bristol, the linkages created and reinforced by these various secret histories provide a stronger basis for political accountability over historical injustices and continuities which still affect Bristolians and haunt the city's landscape today. By emplacing Bristol's uncomfortable history, they not only challenge the establishment and its institutions, but they are also able to contest and refute the displacement of responsibility for the past and accountability for continued inequalities of privilege and race in the city today. In essence, the product of these secret histories which emplace a history of Empire and slavery into the landscape of Bristol allow Black and Minority Ethnic Bristolians to call the establishment to account for the historically rooted inequalities which they are still subject to. By redrawing the core assumptions of the where and when of colonialism, these Bristolians can articulate the reasons for their presence: "We are here because you were there."

## Afterword: The Haunting of Edward Colston's Ghost

*"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" (Solzhenitsyn 1985: 75)*

Standing in the centre of Bristol, the statue of Edward Colston has looked down pensively towards the harbour for over a century. In its history, the statue has overseen the decline and eventual closing of Bristol Harbour, and coinciding with this, the waning of Britain's formal political Empire. Despite controversy over its presence and its symbolic meaning often interpreted as a monument and celebration of a notorious slave trader over the past 20 or so years, Colston's statue remains, even as it is the subject of regular vandalism from having its face painted white, to boarding listing Colston as a human trafficker, slave trader, and murderer, to the addition of unauthorised plaques added to the statue's base to put Bristol's slave trade in context. At the same time, many Bristolians have defended Colston and his statue, noting his philanthropy which donated the present-day equivalent of £10m to churches, schools, and alms-houses for the poor. Despite calls to tear him down or to remove him to a museum space out of the public eye, Colston has endured in situ.

Since the end of my fieldwork in August 2015, the operators of Colston Hall, the nearby city concert hall, have decided to change the name of the venue upon completion of a refurbishment scheduled for 2020. While some welcome the change, others cynically claim that the company is driven by profit motives with the intent to give the naming rights to the highest bidder. Meanwhile, at least one of the schools named after Colston, Colston's Primary, has decided upon a name change, working with parents and pupils to choose the name Cotham Gardens School. On the other hand, other schools such as Colston's School and Colston's Girls' School have decided to keep the controversial merchant and slave trader's name, though not without thorough reflection and explanation for their decisions on school websites.

Colston's statue and the landmarks named after him—which I refer to as 'Colston's Ghost'—are certainly the central flashpoints of debates about the city's history. Though by design, this thesis has almost neglected reflection on Colston's Ghost through its vast elaboration on various heritage techniques, representations, and aspects of debates on Bristol's past as a port for Empire and slavery. Yet these debates over the past always seem to come back to Colston, and this conclusion is no exception.

Symbolically, as the statue was built to commemorate this “most wise and virtuous son” of the city, it was clearly erected in 1895 to celebrate the man almost two centuries after his death in 1721. Endorsed by numerous charities endowed by Colston and built with public subscription, the statue is a Victorian celebration at the height of Empire, praising a famous merchant of Bristol’s history whose wealth (acquired through the imperial frame of slavery and sugar) has forever shaped the city through his businesses and philanthropic efforts. And in this sense, Colston’s statue is not only symbolic of the man, but the wider merchant class in Bristol, including Colston’s contemporaries. Indeed, Colston’s Ghost is one of many like it throughout Britain; imperial era monuments to imperial era figures that do not seem to have a natural, easy-fitting place in the current political landscape of the country anymore. Debates over controversial figures like Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville in Edinburgh, or any number of merchants related to tobacco, slavery, sugar, and cotton in cities like Liverpool, London, and Glasgow are subject to similar debates.

By its very presence, Colston’s Ghost haunts Bristol, just as these other ghosts haunt their respective cities. He is a relic of a bygone era, but nevertheless, an era which has been fundamental in the constitution and making of these cities and of the nation as it is; what would Britain be without ever having its Empire?

The very material presence of Colston is a tangible reminder of an uncomfortable, uncanny, *unheimlich* past that violates a positive, utopian narrative of the city as a beacon of progressive politics and the nation as always having been a leader in the quest for human rights. He does not belong in contemporary, progressive politics, nor does he belong to a moment of the politics of regret. He serves as a damned remnant to the citizens of Bristol, reminding them that Bristol and Britain have not always been leaders of tolerance and champions of freedom, but that the city and the country have been leaders in more sinister pasts, the effects of which linger as continuities in the present. The presence and materiality of Colston, like an archive referencing the past, seeping and leaking in that prominent place beyond containment haunts the present and future, problematizing a heroic or celebratory narrative. Or perhaps, he problematizes any narrative. He continues to stand there, looking down on the city, reminding Bristolians of the narrative of Empire and slavery, making those uncomfortable connections which would be easier to dismiss or ignore.

Colston reminds the city of Bristol’s past as an imperial port built primarily on sugar and the slave trade within a frame of Empire. He reminds the city of a past it would rather not reckon

with, that it seems unsure of *how* to reckon with it. And he stands there still, haunting the present and the future, challenging and confronting his passers-by.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the walking tours run by Bristol City Council which offer a wide narrative of the city's history through the media of spoken narratives offered by volunteer tour guides. They present this narrative in relation to the materiality of the city in the form of buildings, landmarks, and place names, and they also use various images and sensory techniques to invoke the memories and imaginations of tour participants. While the narratives of the city's history offered by volunteers on behalf of Bristol City Council on the M Shed walking tours may make mention of Colston—as Jon and Steve do when they stop at the slave trade plaque on the side of M Shed—not all tours do. Considering the tension around Colston, he is an undoubtedly messy figure which the Council would rather not mention, perhaps the most “sensitive” of the city's “sensitive histories” considering his divisiveness. It is no mistake that none of the walking tours go by this prominent yet toxic statue, lest Colston's Ghost actually be confronted directly. Even the trial 18<sup>th</sup> century tours which ran out of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, going down Park Street and stopping at the Georgian House Museum with the guides' mention of the Pinney residence and its link to slavery, could have passed by the nearby Colston statue, yet did not in order to avoid tense debate or to run afoul of any controversy. After all, much of central Bristol and the Old City is quite compact and stops could easily be made passing by Colston on a number of tours including the 18<sup>th</sup> century tours and the Old City tours.

Yet in walking tours and in museum displays (excepting the Slave Trade Gallery at M Shed in Chapter 3), it becomes clear that Colston is a figure that the Council would rather stay away from, save in contained spaces, where the frame of Empire and its most notorious episode of slavery are held separate from the rest of the city's history. Considering the number of Bristolians who may be quick to defend or absolve him, and cause offence to anyone critical of the statue, perhaps this effort by Council actors is understandable, maybe even laudable for the sake of keeping the peace. Colston is either circumscribed or circumvented by the Council's actors in narratives and in walking tours, and yet, there he stands still, looking down on the city.

In many ways, the debates on Edward Colston's Ghost are precisely debates about what to make of Bristol's history as not only an epicentre of the transatlantic slave trade but also as a key port for the British Empire. How should this history be acknowledged, if at all? What duties and responsibilities for accountability over the past are present in the city's current politics? What should the city do with an uncomfortable, *unheimlich* reminder of a history which contradicts an articulated progressive identity? After all, Bristol was the first major European city to elect a



Mayor of Black descent a few months after I finished my fieldwork in Autumn of 2015. The answers are far from clear, with no consensus, especially considering Bristol's diverse population and the strong presence of its Black community.

And like those debates about particular statues in cities throughout Britain, there is no clear solution for what a nation built by Empire and its role in chattel and plantation slavery should do with this past. Should it simply "move on?" As issues of racism linger and rise to the fore since Brexit in 2016, is this even possible? What does "moving on" look like or entail? *Who* is able to "move on"? While this may be possible for Britain's white middle and upper classes who are in many ways heirs of the spoils of Empire en masse, is this possible for Black Britons, or Asian Britons? If forgetting is an attractive option, why might it be? Would it simply be a matter of convenience instead of the difficult work of confronting a difficult and uncomfortable past which contradicts a hagiographic narrative? Yet with the enduring presence of materialities from that era of Empire, is forgetting even possible? As such, what should be done with Colston's Ghost? Should it be exorcised, or left to haunt the city and its inhabitants?

These are some of the central questions which my various history-worker informants in Bristol wrestle with, particularly in relation to issues of Colston, slavery, and Empire in Bristol's own historical narrative and its urban landscape. As such, this thesis has presented some of the ways in which Bristolians involved in history and heritage work have "dealt with" this history, however effectively or ineffectively, as may be determined.

I have argued that the British Empire is firstly, a story, a particular narrative which has been central to the making of British and English identities, particularly following the work of Colley 2009 [1992] and Kumar (2003) and the critical analysis of history offered by Hayden White (1973, 1978). Scholars of race such as Tyler (2012), Wemyss 2016 [2009], Gilroy (2002 [1987]), and Baucom (1999) have also noted the relationship between whiteness and, particularly, Englishness as the colonial encounter has played a fundamental role in a logic of exclusion and a racialised hierarchy of difference. Contrary to what I have called the central assumption in contemporary understandings of the British Empire (that it was a long time ago, somewhere else over there), the immaterial continuities of Empire are nevertheless present and pertinent in Bristol today, even if the Council or other parties are hesitant to confront these directly.

Chapter Two has also argued that the material landscape of Bristol—its buildings, its landmarks and monuments, and its place names—are haunted by Empire. After all, the city flourished as a port, especially during Britain's First Empire with trade to the Caribbean and

Eastern Seaboard of North America. Bristol's trades particularly involved plantation commodities such as sugar and tobacco and were thoroughly linked to the transatlantic slave trade, as well as displacement of indigenous populations necessary to create plantation economies. Looking at the multitemporal nature of things (Macdonald 2013) and particularly Eva Domanska's notion of the absent-presence of materiality (2006), I have looked at an example of Bristol City Council's volunteer historical walking tours to note the ways in which temporality in these historical practices is not necessarily neatly contained in the past. Rather, materiality and its presence is excessive, in that it leaks beyond any attempts at containment. This suggests not only a complication to historicist notions of the past and linear, progressive time in historical practice (Hodges 2008, Hirsch and Stewart 2005, Palmié and Stewart 2016), but a particular haunting of Bristol's material landscape which cannot be completely avoided, contained, or displaced in the past or a geographical elsewhere (cf. Edwards 2016).

Chapter Three particularly focused on museum representations of Bristol's history in relation to Empire and slavery and a theoretical framework of silence. While transatlantic slavery is admittedly addressed, perhaps due to a sense of moral obligation and moral clarity (cf. Edwards and Mead 2013), the rest of the wider frame of Empire is effectively written around or 'circumscribed' in what I term 'silences of circumscription.' This largely stems from a Council policy at the time of fieldwork to designate certain topics as "sensitive histories", suggesting that history-workers were often unsure on how these topics (such as Empire and slavery) ought to be addressed. Instead of risking political controversy, the conflict-averse Council (largely in response to political outrage in the late 1990's due to the Council's silence on Bristol's role in the slave trade) maintained a status quo which did not directly address Bristol's relationship with Empire *outside of* confined spaces which address and therefore contain transatlantic slavery. This furthermore leads to a conflation between slavery and Empire where they are perceived as one and the same, while the less controversial, seemingly non-violent aspects of Bristol's relationship with the Empire are simply designated as a benign form of trade. I have argued that while slavery functions as a circumscriptive, conflated term for the violence of Empire, the ways in which the Commonwealth is discussed is shorthand for the good, positive virtues of Empire which gave the world the English language, railways, hospitals, and schools. Although a formally different entity from the British Empire, the Commonwealth is nevertheless built upon the connections and relationships of the Empire, and as the Lord Mayor's Chaplain suggested on Commonwealth Sunday 2015, this was indicative of a kind of spiritual re-birth.

Chapter Four looked at non-Council, alternative history-workers and historical walking tours that claim to present public secrets which in fact, aren't really secrets at all to those who are at all familiar with Bristol and its history. Through this lens, the chapter developed a theorisation to think about the anthropological literature on public secrets following the work of Michael Taussig (1999) to look at what the *framing* of a public secret, which isn't actually a secret, does. In relation to the prior chapter, I looked at the way in which these alternative history-workers are actually filling in that which Council volunteers effectively circumscribe. Where the Council actors' strategies of silence effectively allow for a displacement and disconnection between the ambivalent past of Empire in Bristol and the present, these actors are in effect attempting to make connections between Empire and Bristol, placing its continuities in the here and now. This fits within a wider politics of the past and of British and English identity in a sense that these alternative actors attempt to hold Bristol's elite (in terms of the Council and other perceived elites) to account for the injustices of the past which linger into the present.

As a whole then, the thesis has engaged not only the politics of the past, but a wider frame of metropolitan post-colonial memory and the anthropology of history and heritage practices in contemporary England. While other scholars who have handled this topic ethnographically through lenses of invisibility (Wemyss 2016 [2009]) or amnesia, (Tyler 2012), this thesis has utilised Ann Stoler's framework of colonial aphasia to note the prevalence of silences and what these silences effectively do (see also Bijl 2012, Edwards and Mead 2013, Edwards 2016).

Beyond critically investigating one of the core assumptions in how the British Empire is understood today, the thesis has also looked at anthropological discourse on Empire to consider some of the material and immaterial ways in which Empire operates and endures into the present, especially in places like Bristol. Combining an ethnography of various historical practices (including historical walking tours and museum displays and representation), this work has also touched on theories of materiality, memory, absence, and past-presencing, silence, and public secrets in relation to these practices and a wider politics of the past and of British and English identity. While Council actors may be apprehensive towards directly confronting Bristol's history of Empire *beyond* slavery due to how this history fits into a wider politics of identity concerning an ambivalent history, other actors outside the Council have been more vocal and critical of elites and Council actors' handling of affairs. At stake are the sort of questions which debates around Colston ultimately allude to around morality and identity: What kind of a city is Bristol, and what kind of a nation is Great Britain in light of its past? Is this a city/nation that celebrates the difficult chapters of its past when it has not acted in a manner which is now considered moral?

While the apprehension of the Council for two decades has led to a status quo which largely results in disconnection and displacement, heritage activists (especially those from the Black community), in various ways through protests, art, radio, and walking tours, call for accountability and a consciousness of the past which effectively connects and emplaces Bristol's relationship with Empire through the ways in which they inscribe and interpret the city's built environment and landscape.

As of August 2018, at the time of writing this conclusion, Bristol City Council has only recently announced its way of addressing the Colston debate in a way which goes beyond its reticence and silence and attempts to allow for the making of more connections with Bristol's problematic past. Part of this seems to fit in with a wider trend throughout the city since the conclusion of my fieldwork my fieldwork. As mentioned above, one of the schools named after Colston and the local concert hall have decided to change their names and remove their association with Colston.

The Council, however, has decided to keep the Colston statue in situ (despite the continued protests by some of my informants). But in response to the debate which has lasted for two decades, they have finally decided to also put a permanent plaque on the statue to provide context of who Colston was and his involvement in the slave trade (*The Daily Telegraph*, 23 July 2018). Though the final contents of the plaque are still being finalised at the time of writing (August 2018), the Council has announced that pupils from the newly renamed Cotham Gardens Primary School will have a role in its composition and that it will address Colston's connection with the transatlantic slave trade as well as his philanthropy (Yong 2018 in *The Bristol Post*). Ultimately, as with the epigraph from Solzhenitsyn speaking of a different time and different atrocity, Colston's legacy is ambivalent in that he can be considered both generous and monstrous, perhaps serving (as a German Studies Professor at the University of Bristol mentioned during a public forum on Bristol and the slave trade in June 2014) as a reminder of our own human moral ambiguity and propensity for both good and evil.

Although the Council's decision may see some of the protests around Colston continue, from a theoretical standpoint, it seems to be a reasonable compromise through which the themes of this thesis come together. Colston's statue has been controversial in part due to its polysemic nature driven by a lack of any critical context provided in inscription. As such, the statue has been widely interpreted as a hagiographic tribute, as it was intended in 1895. In other words, his presence and the silence of the statue itself have allowed for a gap through which problematic interpretations of Colston without taint or linkage to the slave trade can arise. Like addressing the

absent-presence of Empire in Bristol, the silence, the lack of explicit confrontation and interpretation allows for rumours and secrets and alternative (at times problematic) interpretations of the statue and other places in the city and its history. In part, the inscription aims to change the semiotics of the statue to allow for a re-interpretation of Colston in a more accurate context.

Yet by keeping the statue in place, the Council is able to also allow for a material connection through the presence of the statue. In this sense, the enduring presence of Colston's statue can be read as part of the material archive of the cityscape rather than removing or displacing this record. Although symbolically problematic, its continued presence does not dismiss Bristol's problematic history, nor erase it from the record to suggest it never happened (as removing it or displacing it from public space may effectively do). Keeping the statue in place, while providing an effective interpretation of who Colston was and his involvement in the slave trade, *prevents* the displacement of Empire's continuities to another time and another place. Although it may be an uncomfortable, open wound to some of my friends in Bristol, it also serves as a powerful reminder, perhaps a warning in the vein of the German concept of *Mahnmal*: "a critical statement about the past. It is to serve as an admonition—lest the past recur in the future." (Neumann 2010: 10 quoted in Macdonald 2009: 95). In this sense, instead of being a monument of celebration or mere reminder, Colston's Ghost has the potentiality to serve as a *Mahnmal*, reminding the people of Bristol that the Empire is not a long time ago, somewhere else, but right here, right now in the very heart of Bristol.

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