

Goodnight Colston. Mourning Slavery: Death Rites and Duppy Conquering in a Circum-Atlantic City

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Abstract: In the wake of the riotous procession that toppled the statue of Edward Colston, this essay sketches an ethnographic itinerary through the spectral geographies of Bristol, a circum-Atlantic city haunted by the ghosts of slavery. The paper offers a Caribbean cosmological reading of the toppling and aqueous burial as a kind of duppy conquering, a vital act of social renewal that clears ground for processes of spiritual and affective repair. The paper then explores two rituals of restoration—a remembrance ceremony for an enslaved woman and an inchoate ancestral invocation upon an empty plinth—alongside other, kindred paths of repair in the long afterlife of Atlantic slavery.

Keywords: Atlantic slavery, Bristol, Colston, haunting, ritual, repair

You came down easy in the end.

The righteous wrench of two ropes in a grand plie.

Briefly, you flew, corkscrewed, then met the ground

With the clang of toy guns, loose change, chains, a rain of cheers ...

And who carved you?

They took such care with that stately pose and propped chin.

Wise and virtuous, the plaque assured us.

Victors wish history odourless and static.

But history is a sneaky mistress.

Moves like smoke, Colston ...

I think of you lying in the harbour

With the horrors you hosted.

There is no poem more succinct than that.

But still you are permanent.
 You who perfected the ratio.
 Blood to sugar to money to bricks.
 Each bougie building we flaunt haunted by bones.
 Children learn and titans sing
 Under the stubborn rust of your name.
 But the air is gently throbbing with newness ...
 "Hollow", Vanessa Kisuule (2020)¹

Mo(u)rning Notes

8 June 2020.

Last night I attended a slave trader's funeral. Well, I missed Edward Colston's brief shroud-covered internment, when rebels mounted his pedestal and blindfolded his gaze. I missed him being dragged along cobbled streets. And his final aqueous burial in the Bristol docks. But I attended the wake. On Sunday 7 June, at minutes-to-midnight, compelled from my bed I pulled a lighter from a cigarette box, felt for a stick of incense on the desk and carried it behind my ear as I peddled towards Bristol's city docks.

I moved over ancient streets that held a sombre quietness, towards the centre of town. I rode by Guinea Street, named for a coin made of Ashanti gold, once used to purchase humans along that coast of the same name; a street where some of those who profited from Atlantic slavery once lived. The Royal African Company (RAC) minted this coin and held British monopoly over human purchase and trafficking from this coast. They shipped more enslaved people to the Americas than any other institution (Pettigrew 2016:11). Colston, a 17th century Bristolian plutocrat, was a shareholder, investor, and director during a 12-year tenure with the company. Under his watch the RAC trafficked an estimated 84,498 African human beings towards the Americas (Ball 2020a).

I rode through the handsome 18th century Queen Square. Built in the height of Bristol's slaver profiteering, it became an "exclusive residential enclave" for city's merchant class (Dresser 2001:105). Rogers, Laroche, Bright, Jefferis, Hobhouse, Freke, Elton; surnames of colonial governors, city mayors, RAC officials and privateers whose residences lined the leafy square. These men, like others living in the city and its surrounding estates, accumulated great wealth from the economy of enslavement.² During the 1700s this square held perhaps the greatest concentration of slaver wealth per capita and square foot in all the city (Dresser 2000:31–34, 2001:105–108). Queen Square was also home to Custom House, which took rents on all goods moving through the port. A port that sent ships along Atlantic triangles, propelled by trade winds and currents that carried them from Bristol with fabrics, brassware, copper, and other European commodities, to be sold and

exchanged for humans along the West African coast. Then onwards, through the Atlantic abyss (Glissant 1997:5–10) to sell their surviving “cargo” in the plantation Americas. And, finally, northeast the ships sailed, returning from the Americas with bounties of Antillean sugar, rum, and coffee, North American tobacco and cotton, and a few nominally free or enslaved Black servants who would reside, work, and die in Bristol.

I cycled on, past Merchant Venturers’ Almshouse. Built in 1696 by an exclusive guild of wealthy merchants whose headquarters once stood next door, the almshouse was a shelter for their most loyal sailors. Seafarers who, infirmed by age, disease, and perilous journeys, might live their final years without destitution, minded by their paternal bosses. “Our weather-beaten vessels here repair ... from the Merchants’ kind and generous care ...”, reads a verse, carved in wood, still mounted on an outer wall. The guild required many seamen. For, just two years after their almshouse opened, the Merchants petitioned parliament to break the RAC’s enslaving monopoly, thus opening the cruel economy to Bristol ships.

Colston, whose almshouse was elsewhere in the city, left control of his philanthropic estate to the Merchants—who still exist in their original name. Today they run state-funded schools (several were named after Colston or themselves), they own elderly care homes, and extend finance to local charities. Colston’s foremost defenders for nearly 300 years (with recent support from Conservative councillors), they tried in 2018 to “sanitise” the wording of a “corrective plaque” to be placed on the statue, to acknowledge his historic crimes (Ball 2020c). And alongside the local Colston societies—Grateful, Dolphin and Anchor (also populated by local businessmen)—the Merchants presided over numerous annual celebrations of Colston’s life and so-called philanthropy (Morgan 1998:105–106). Most of these commemorations have now disappeared or removed references to Colston, owing to the unwavering interventions of *Countering Colston*, an activist collective, formed in 2016, who held protests at these rituals (Steeds and Ball 2020:276–285).

Eventually I reached my destination, the city centre. Beneath Colston Tower, at a crossroads with Colston Avenue, I met a scattering of card carefully encircling an empty plinth. The placards were inscribed with names—Belly Mujinga, Sarah Reed, Mark Duggan, Stephen Lawrence, Joy Gardener, and more—Black Britons whose lives had been cut short by police, mental health services, immigration officers, and racist attackers. Black Britons whose families await justice or redress—in perpetuity, it seems. Here, I lit the incense. Its smoke wafted toward the sky.

Other placards issued urgent demands, indictments, messages of hope. Besides the plinth I greeted several strangers, unmasked and undistanced by the deadly Covid-19 virus. They were holding a kind of vigil besides the pedestal, milling about and chatting in quiet conviviality. It felt like the calm hours that follow Bristol’s St Pauls Carnival, when small bands of friends linger in the streets, inhaling the spiritual residues of the great assembly that has just passed. The city was still.

Earlier that day, Bristol—to which my West Indian grandparents migrated by boat in the 1950s, finding work in Cadbury’s chocolate and Wills’ tobacco factories, processing commodities that had moved along the very Black Atlantic triangles that carried their ancestors to Dominica and them to Britain—had awoken in

an antiracist uprising. The mobilisation brought around 10,000 people into the streets to rebuke anti-Black state violence in America and Britain; to protest the many ways Black lives are cut short, enclosed, and frustrated across the Atlantic—realities so vividly embodied by the high rates at which Black Britons were exposed to and dying from the Covid-19 virus; alongside the British government's unwillingness to name and address the structural racisms surrounding such deaths (Iacobucci 2020a, 2020b). "Denial is the heartbeat of British racism", read a placard held by a Bristolian protester.

Bristol's Black Lives Matter protest formed one wave in a tide of marches across over 260 UK towns (Mohdin and Storer 2021); a tide described by activist-scholars as "the largest anti-racist street mobilisation in British history" (Bhattacharyya et al. 2021:187). And somewhere in the middle of Bristol's uprising, the riotous rite occurred. Conducted with precision and direction, it took just 83 minutes from plinth to harbour. Grappling ropes were carefully tied around the statue's neck, and with collective endeavour it was rocked and pulled from the high platform upon which Bristol's Victorian elite had mounted it (in 1985, 174 years after Colston's death). Then it fell, to riotous applause. The crowd pulled the hollow bronze effigy some 600 metres to Pero's Bridge, Bristol's only monument to an enslaved person—Pero Jones, servant to Nevis planter and former city Mayor John Pinney who brought him to Bristol in 1784, where he lived and died in bondage. Here, Colston was hauled over the railings and plunged into the cold depths, to take "residence" (Sharpe 2016:41) in that continuous body of water that connects the Bristol Channel to the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean. It is this body of water on which Pero, sugar, cotton, and rum entered the city; the same body of water into which the 19,341 human beings who did not survive the Western kidnap aboard RAC ships were thrown during Colston's tenure (Ball 2020a).

On 7 June, Black women and men, boys and girls, brown and white people of many ancestries made speeches, stood, and danced atop the plinth. Together they repossessed the racial geography of their city as they celebrated Black life, affirmed the anti-racist *communitas* of the day and the complex multiculturalism in which they live. All whilst rejecting Britain's long and re-vitalising commitment to the machinations of racism, its unwillingness to address the repressed presence of empire.

By the time I arrived at the protest, I had missed the burial rite. But heading further down the planned route of the protest (from which Colston's burial detoured) I met former schoolmates who held up mobile phone videos and narrated the toppling. And for all who once passed beneath that statue on their way to school, work or elsewhere—feeling the slaver's gaze above us—we felt a weight had been lifted. Our city, returning to Kisuule (2020), now "gently throbbed with newness..." (see Figure 1).

Spectral Geographies. Rituals of Restoration

Bristol is a haunted circum-Atlantic city. Once a metropolitan valve in a vast planetary empire, its history as a port that amassed great wealth from slaver economies is well documented (Dresser 2001; Steeds and Ball 2020). Street and school



Figure 1: “Holding vigil, 1 am, 7 June” (photograph by author)

names, grand 18th century houses, tobacco factories, and 20 former sugar refineries remind us of this past (Carby 2019; Jones 1996; Philogene Heron 2020). And yet, for all that Bristol’s geography repeatedly whispers “empire”, the collective work of contending with its violent mercantile memory and inherited inequities has hardly begun. National school curricula, mainstream political discourse, and common-sense accounts lead us to believe that slavery resides in the past, that its historic scenes sit somewhere tropical, far from Britain’s shores; in the decadent ruins of a grand plantation house, a sugar mill (re)covered by vines and trees, an old fort repaired in the name of heritage tourism. However, if the events of 7 June teach us anything it is that “the time of slavery” (Hartman 2002) is still here, now, in Britain. Atlantic slavery “negates the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or progression, then and now coexist”, Sadiya Hartman tells us; “we are coeval with the dead” (2002:759). Paramount to the presence of slavery—its living, unresolved and underacknowledged grief—is how its ill-gotten gains, relics, and monuments still sit, obscured denial, littering quotidian landscapes. And yet, slavery’s living presence is recognised and made visible by Afro-diasporic peoples living the violent afterlives of enslavement, who continually seek ways for our ancestors to rest in peace.

When British slavery legally ended (1834–1838) nominally free Black labourers of the Antilles were coerced—with vagrancy and land tenure laws (Walcott 2021a:37)—into low wage labour and economic insecurity, exacerbated by

imperial neglect and neo-colonial “underdevelopment”; the very conditions that eventually drove descendants of enslaved people to board boats for post-war Britain (Dresser 2001:233). At slavery’s legal end there were no reparations paid by the British state or slaveholders (unlike compensation received for lost “property”, producing debts the British taxpayer would service until 2015; Manjapra 2019). There was no apology. No universal system of redress led by the merchants of those ports (London, Liverpool, Bristol), those who initiated, profited from, and whose streets and buildings continually evoke this brutal economy of the flesh. Without a period of mournful reflection, a radical rupture, ritual, or act(s) of redress to mark its end, slavery remains in this sense very much unresolved and alive. And, since something we might call Black freedom is still pending, “the long emancipation” continues (Walcott 2021a). It makes sense then to think of slavery as something of “a ghost, both the past and a living presence” (Trouillot 1995:147). In Bristol, Colston is one such spectral presence.

Following scholars, artists, and activists who have worked for decades to counter British practices of imperial forgetting, I want to suggest that since the city’s modern material formation—much of its inherited wealth, industry, educational institutions, infrastructure, and architecture (Carby 2019:184–185)—grows from the profits of Atlantic slavery, *all Bristolians* are “implicated subjects” (Hall 2018:9). That is, we each inherit an intimate geographic and material relationship to the business of slavery (Carby 2019). And the affective and spiritual implications of this inheritance are heavy. To inhabit a cityscape that repeatedly evokes, celebrates, yet veils the ill-gotten prosperity on which its modern foundations lie (Scott 2014), demands collective work to confront its municipal spectres. Such a reckoning may enable Bristol’s living residents to adequately remember and forge futures that address the ghosts of enslavement and empire.

A month after Colston’s descent I am home working. It is a sunny July day and the front window is ajar. The alcoholic couple from downstairs are outside smoking. They enter a conversation about the toppling with the elderly man across the way. “They want to find the people that did that, and prosecute them”, the woman asserts, in defence of a statue she maybe seldom noticed until it hit worldwide news. Shifting back in time to defend Colston’s charity, the old man wistfully adds, “Those people then, years ago, they looked after their own people and put their money back in to their own city”. Somewhat talking past the other two, the boyfriend interjects with a sense of urgency: “Its 300, 350 years ago! How many generations ago!? How can you go back? It’s centuries before our lifetime!”

Having each affirmed their convictions: on the illegality of the toppling, Colston’s benevolence, and the pastness of Bristolian slavery, their conversation lulls. I stop eavesdropping and return to whatever I had been working on. Then suddenly, seizing my attention again, the old man screams “GO HOME!” My eyes shoot to the window as this familiar anti-immigrant slur ricochets through the estate. Who could the old man be shouting at? The elderly Jamaican woman on the end? The Somalian man and his son? The new Brazilian family next door? Or maybe the Hungarian woman? (EU settlers being far from exempt from such

directives.) Then my heart calms. I laugh. He is shouting at his brother's unruly dog. I glimpse the creature bound past, then return to my work. And minding my business.

And yet, my thoughts wander. I mull over their conversation, asking what led my neighbours to defend a 17th century merchant who gained such wealth from trafficking and trading humans? What made them disavow the relevance of slavery to our city's present? What led me to connect my neighbours' sentiments to the slogans of Britain's far right and the Conservative government's current "hostile environment" immigration policy?³ Perhaps Paul Gilroy's (2004, 2005a) *imperial melancholia* concept is useful here. Gilroy posits that the vitality of British racism/xenophobia grows from a psychopathology of national guilt; from the deep sense of loss accompanying empire's end; and the emotional fall-out of a crumbling self-image of greatness. This feeling of global pre-eminence was intimately tied to the domination of others, elsewhere, all living within, and subjects of a vast dominion called Britain. Rather than face all that empire was, its elation, grandeur, dispossession, and violence—the complex emotions its memory engenders—post-imperial Britain (or rather, England's hegemonic white body politic) oscillates between: (i) complete denial; (ii) a revisionist defence of the "Great" of Great Britain (railways, world cup and world war victories, heroes of abolition, philanthropists); and (iii) feelings of racialised resentment towards those who settle(d) her shores (from the Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean)—those of us Enoch Powell called the "alien wedge" (dark labour, foisted upon white workers; Gilroy 2005a:50). And somewhere at the heart of this national torment, Gilroy insists, is the inability to institute "a collective process of mourning for what ... [Britain] had loved and lost" (2004:107). This is a process which must happen at home, in the empire's metropolitan heartland (as Carby [2019], Gilroy's peer and fellow student of Stuart Hall, has reminded). It is in such mourning, he contends, that the British polity may locate a "reconstructive practice" and build a sense of collective existence grounded in conviviality and "planetary humanism" (a being-togetherness on Earth, as human, with difference, and respect).

Atlantic slavery seems to be Britain's most intractably repressed imperial memory. Its mourning feels immeasurable and unfinished. For this modern project brought together vast continents, imperial powers, and innovated industrial assemblages that sought to possess person as property, to seize human from community, name and language, and ontologically demote human being/life to commodified body: bought, sold, insured, disciplined, disposed of, and worked, oftentimes to death. To mourn those kidnapped and injured by this most cruel system, demands a special kind of reconstructive practice. Which leads me to ask, as others have before: how might we remember, reclaim, and grieve those taken across that body of water on which British ships led voyages to West Africa and the Americas? 2,108 voyages in Bristol's case. Bristolian vessels trafficked an estimated 563,000 enslaved African humans throughout the 109 years of the city's official involvement in "the trade"; one-fifth of Britain's human traffic from Africa during this time (1698–1807; Richardson 1985). Of this number, an estimated 99,000 died/were murdered *en route* to the Americas (ibid.). Crude arithmetic

from logs and registers indicates industrial scale, but says nothing of grief and loss, the brutal conditions of the passage, or what mourning the “wake” of the slave ship (Sharpe 2016), at the ports of its construction, embarkation, and return, might entail.

Recently departed oracle-poet of the Antilles, Kamau Brathwaite, has meditated on what is at stake for such circum-Atlantic healing. He speaks, from and to the Caribbean, yet his vision of the submarine connective tissue of Afro-diasporic life (its “tidalectics” [Brathwaite 1999:34], rhizomic relationality [Glissant 1997], or diasporic intimacy [Gilroy 1993])—speaks to circum-Atlantic cities like Bristol, where enslaved, nominally free servants, and Black sailors would land/reside, and where thousands of 20th century Caribbean settlers made home. On Black collective memory of enslavement, Brathwaite (2015) declares:

There is a dream, a wish for restoration ... You know, when we downgrade our history, when we fail to recognise the nature of it, we are perpetuating that situation where we cannot really, properly, heal and restore ... What I’m saying is that unless you have a ceremony that recognises the death of 50 million people, unless you can go out in boats and throw flowers on that ocean, you are encouraging ghosts to haunt you forever. You are encouraging cries in the psychic night.

This Atlantic world, at once an open saltwater graveyard and the pathway that births Black life in the Americas (Walcott 2021b), haunts many of its ports and shorelines, demanding repair.

In what remains of this paper, I ask what happens if we take Gilroy and Brathwaite literally in their calls for rituals and practices of collective mourning. Or to assert it with requisite urgency: “the ceremony must be found” (Wynter 1984:19). And so, what ceremonial work enables us to mourn the enslaved? How might we lay slavery’s psychic and affective hauntings to rest, or rather, address them directly? Might we find kindred ceremonies to Brathwaite’s scattering of flowers in Bristol, a slaver-city troubled by imperial ghosts, enduring race-class inequities, and imperial melancholia?

This essay grows from a series of *mo(u)ring notes*. Notes from the day(s) that followed the burial of the effigy of Bristol’s most glorified slave trader. This was not a mournful rite but a celebratory anti-funeral, a new beginning that made space to mourn those who had died unceremoniously, whose present-past lives the memorialisation of enslavers had obscured. First, a brief note on method. There is intention to the narrative mode of this essay; a mode I intuit as *spectral geographies*.⁴ Refusing to narrowly prefigure or define this animate concept, I prefer instead to see it as an invitation/provocation to actively attend to buildings, rituals, plaques, waterways, streets, place names, and other spaces that evince traces slavery; however silently, however obscured. Perhaps we may think of spectral geographies less as a thing, a conceptual object, than as practice. A way of moving in and inhabiting the city/land/shore that opens itself to the hauntings that stifled public memory can provoke.

This practice of spectral geographies recognises, following Wynter and McKittrick (2015), how human geographies (the spaces and genres of human being we make and inhabit) are formed through *The Word*—naming, myth, narration,

plaque, etc. And, through silences. Bristol's built environment persistently whispers and places the memory of slavery before me, as I move about and dwell in the city. Yet, its maritime memorialisation (even celebration) of itself has largely muffled such memory within the city at large (Dresser 2001). When whispers are met with public silences, haunting is provoked. And so, as Jacqueline Nassy Brown eloquently put it (of Liverpool, though equally true of Bristol) "slavery's spectre envelops" the city (2005:164). My practice is inspired by Brown's pathbreaking book, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, in which she demonstrates a methodology of ethnographic walking and place-based conversations, that intricately map relationships between Blackness, place, and memory in Liverpool (connecting the local to the circum-Atlantic). Much like Brown's Liverpoolian interlocutors, I too, a native Black/mixed-race Bristolian, feel spectres of enslavement as I move through, converse in, and listen to my natal city. Indeed, we might think this excavation of Bristol's haunted geographies as something kindred to artist Jeanette Elhers' consideration of *shadow memories*. Of Black Copenhagen, Elhers (2015) explains how:

colonial memories are like ghosts ... If you start looking for them you will see for yourself; quite easy ... The shadow will always follow you around—just like history will always be a part of you ... Slavery flows all over the city ...

The poetic form and intention of this essay is thus twofold. First, I want to invoke and illustrate the structure of feeling—hauntings/shadow memories—that propelled Bristolians to take hold of their city's racial geography, to uncover its violence by ritually removing a central symbol of its slaver present-past, and therefore, create an opening for envisioning anti-racist futures. Description, narration, and poetics bring us closer to such affects/acts. And second, to return to Wynter and McKittrick (2015:16–23), via Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020), this poetics may itself be considered a small step in the practice of undisciplining human geography, pushing us to think beyond the colonial science fictions of the humanities (liberal monohumanist stories of Man and nature), towards another telling of our human and planetary being. "We are words made flesh", writes Gumbs; "But we make words. So we can make ourselves anew" (2020:xi). Therefore, we can honestly re-story the circum-Atlantic (and other imperially implicated) places we call home—towards making them anew. And here, as we try to find (the words to describe such) ceremony and reconstructive practice, it is of little surprise that this essay recursively centres Black women's scholarship, rebellion, refusal, and circles of ancestral invocation—as those who are so often leading the spiritual work that drives/seeks circum-Atlantic repair.

Circum-Atlantic Duppies

If I were a duppy

I would be tormenting

Every slave trader, village raider, African snatcher, captain, shipmate, crewmember ...

That ever bloodclaat mek di mistake and never rass ask mi if mi did waa fi guh nuh weh ...

If I were a duppy

I would torment every merchant ...

Yes de whole bag ah dem that ever benefited from the toils, trials and tribulations ...

Yes, if I were a duppy

I would be tormenting them

And their descendants

“The Third World Duppy”, Rebekah Lawrence (2008)

When my grandparents’ generation (the so called “Windrush Generation”; of varied ages, who travelled on various vessels) settled in post-war Britain they swapped “one colonial context for another”, as Ken Pryce (1978) writes, consigned to “shit jobs”, workplace “colour bars”, and everyday hostilities. Yet, amidst oppression, they also made Britain home, developing friendships and kinship amidst the “churn” of urban life (Noxolo 2018). And soon it was clear they had come to stay. They fashioned Caribbean-British patterns of family and sociality, allotments and cooking, musical forms and ways of ordering the cosmos. Most of Bristol’s Caribbean citizen-settlers hailed from Jamaica—St Thomas and Clarendon. From there they carried funeral practices and spiritual concepts they re-made in England’s West Country. Some belief in duppies will have travelled too. Duppies, according to Julian Henriques, may be conceived as “troubled spirits, malicious souls, who do not rest in peace ... and are feared as objects [and agents] of dread ... hence the need to conquer them” (2019:148). “To prevent the undead rising up”, he warns, they must “be buried in the proper manner” (ibid.). Yanique Hume (2018) terms such proper mortuary practices “rituals of separation”—the “nine-night”, committal, and wake—practices transmuted by Bristol’s Jamaican community. At their Afro-Jamaican root they can ensure safe passage for the two spirits of the deceased—worldly and ethereal—to the afterlife (Hurston 2008:39–56; Leach 1961). Without proper ceremony or with matters left unresolved, the worldly spirit may linger in the interstices of life and death, walking the earth and trying to communicate with, even torment, the living.

Despite fears and desires to conquer them, many duppies are not malevolent at all. A friend from Red Hills, Jamaica—someone my Bristolian-Jamaican aunt would describe as having “the gift of sight”—has encountered benign and sometimes guardian-like duppies. She mentions seeing peasant, maybe enslaved, duppies, quietly walking, dressed in white, quietly going about their business in the rural Jamaica night. She received visitations from the ancestral duppy of her grandmother, watching over her whilst she studied for CXC end of school exams (the Caribbean equivalent of the UK’s GCSEs). And when in England, where she says “the air is thick” with duppy and ancestral activity (referred to interchangeably), she has received contact from the dead in theatres and old apartment buildings.

Whilst there is no uniform belief in duppies amongst Bristolian Jamaicans—with some indifferent and many disavowing them altogether—duppy visions/affects do manifest in the city. And they offer a heuristic with which to consider a breadth of familiar, ambiguous, or malevolent visitations from the dead. And my intention here is also strategic and speculative. The duppy heuristic (see Iton 2008:135) urges us to look/listen beneath the normative disenchantments of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo 2011), towards Caribbean sensory ways that recognise the presence of the dead, ghosts, and ancestors—the peopled past—in the landscapes of the living.

We can therefore comprehend Colston as a kind of duppy. For, although he was given a lavish funeral, his burial in 1721 was possibly incomplete. Indeed, his body was carried 114 miles in a four-coach, 16-horse procession from Surrey to Bristol, where his charity schoolboys and almshouse elders sang psalms in the rain whilst leading his carriage along a torchlit parade towards a packed church. However, local lore suggests that over 100 years later Colston's body was exhumed by a Victorian man claiming to be his kin. His burial clothes were stolen, and his partially naked corpse was described as eerily well preserved: "the colour of living flesh, and ... firm to the touch" (Byrne 2020). Moreover, the Merchant Venturers also came to possess some of Colston's hair and fingernails, which they would show to schoolchildren visiting their private museum. So, far from resting in peace, Colston's dug-up corpse, its preserved state, and the display of his bodily matter, suggest his earthly spirit might have been unsettled, invited to linger in and wander the city. But, even if we reject this invocation of Colston's duppy, his symbolic presence still saturates the city. Until recently, some six streets, three schools, an international concert hall, several offices, Bristol's tallest tower, numerous student halls, an ornate almshouse, a Freemasons' lodge, at least two pubs, and a sweet bun all bore his name (Steeds and Ball 2020:297–298). In a paper on Bristol's affective landscapes, Buchczyk and Facer (2020:616) interviewed a Caribbean chef who discussed the Colston Hall concert venue (now renamed Bristol Beacon) and why, despite its good programming, he stopped attending shows there. He described his "discomfort", "feeling a strange atmosphere", and the building being "cold and awkward". "The location", concluded the authors, "seemed to ooze the aura of its name", a spectral energy that precipitated uneasy affects.

Beyond landmarks and confectionery, we also have the glut of rituals that fed the "cult of Colston". These were led by the Merchant Venturers, Bristol Cathedral, his schools, and the charitable societies established in his memory (Ball 2020b; Jordan 2013; Steeds and Ball 2020; Wilkins 1920). My elder sister attended Colston's Girls' School on a scholarship in the 1990s. She remembers being a Black mixed-race girl on "commemoration day", the annual festival marking Colston's birthday. She had to wear a special uniform, complete with hat and bronze chrysanthemum brooch—Colston's favourite flower—as well as attend a remembrance service featuring his favourite hymns and prayers. Afterwards, they had to "line up and march, very 'solemnly and respectfully', from the cathedral to the centre [of town] and throw a chrysanthemum towards him in 'gratitude and appreciation'". Around a quarter of the class—Black, brown, and white girls who

somehow learned of Colston's crimes (histories their teachers omitted)—refused to throw their flower at his feet. Each year they held their refusal despite disapproving looks and threats that they would be held back when everyone went home.

The scale and grandeur of these school rituals sat second only to the elaborate pomp of the three Colston societies, who, on the evening of his birthday hosted a grand dinner in the ornate Oak Room of Bristol's Red Lodge—offering, in their words, a “silent toast to the pious and immortal memory of Edward Colston” (The Grateful Society 2008:20). Curiously, Colston's cult—its array of dedications and bid for his symbolic immortality—does not extend back to his life. Rather, it emerges over 100 years after his death, with Victorian city elites who in an age of growing municipal identity sought to recast Colston—shrewd merchant, devout Anglican, philanthropist; a man in their image—as a figure of moral standing that the city's masses should emulate (Jordan 2013; Morgan 1998:106). The rituals my sister was forced to participate in required a selective recasting of Colston as the man Bristol businessmen and politicians wanted him to be. This involved actively forgetting his deep investment in enslavement, that he lived most of his life outside of Bristol, and that he admitted only loyal, disease-free, and austere Anglican boys/men to his schools/almshouses—institutions described as “joyless” places (Morgan 1998). The Victorians who named a concert hall for him, erected a statue in his honour, and established a cult in his name, resurrected a hollow apparition of Colston; a kind of philanthropist duppy that subsequent generations of Bristolians (like my neighbours) would become deeply (sometimes melancholically) attached to.⁵ Colston's ghost, like the city's many relics of enslavement, lingers in the landscape. And only recently have Bristolians made successful strides to conquer him.

However, Colston is not the only duppy or ancestral presence we should consider. What of the un-mourned spirits of enslaved humans who died on Bristol boats, cast into the Atlantic? Or those carried to the city on returning vessels to live and die in bondage or nominal freedom? Were they properly mourned? What are the (meta)physical traces of these Black lives around the city? Vincent Brown (2009:1232) has described how the deceased would be thrown from slaver vessels making the Western crossing:

Bodies were usually dumped unceremoniously into the ocean, cast to the sharks that followed the slavers with anticipation. Generally, there was no recognized ritual at all, no closure, only the continuation of disorientation on a cosmic scale.

Bristol vessels would have been no exception, offering little chance of rituals to ensure that the spirits of the dead might fly to the ancestral plane—to kin, to community, to rest in peace. Or to put it otherwise, and carefully speculate as Stephanie Smallwood does, “Would their spirits wander aimlessly, unable to find their way home to the realm of the ancestors?” (2007:61). Perhaps their earthly spirits traversed that single body of water connecting Bristol's harbour to the Atlantic; maybe they mounted the trade winds and ocean currents that carried slaving vessels home to Britain; or perhaps they sat heavily in the stained oak

holds of these ships. Whatever the mode of travel, these duppies could have found their way to Bristol, to roam and dwell in its cityscape.

There is a cemetery I visit in east Bristol. It is a peaceful place with wildflowers, graves, and benches dotted beneath an array of trees. Three minutes from my flat, I took to walking there more during the Covid-19 lock-in. Researching the Montravers sugar plantation in Nevis, owned by John Pinney of Bristol, I read about a woman, a seamstress, Frances “Fanny” Coker (Small and Eickelmann 2019). Coker was born enslaved on that plantation in 1767, until manumitted aged 12 by Pinney who later brought her to Bristol as his wife’s maidservant, along with an enslaved servant Pero Jones (whose bridge was mentioned above). I learned from a friend that Fanny is buried in this cemetery. And I learned that it hosted a ceremony of remembrance for her in 2017, marking her 250th birthday. On that sunny August afternoon 60 people of many ages and backgrounds gathered to fill the cemetery’s 19th century chapel with song and poetry. They then moved by drum-led procession towards her grave, singing creole chants, before stopping to witness a dance beneath a tree of remembrance. They continued to a crossroads for another poem and a Cameroonian freedom song. Then to the Baptist gravestone for hymns and the laying of flowers, candles, a calabash, and wooden cross. And finally, the reading of a letter invoking her Igbo-born mother who had remained enslaved in Nevis when Frances was brought to Bristol. Her re-imagined words sought to comfort her daughter: “... Rest my dear, find peace.”

The ceremony was led by Black Bristolian artist Ros Martin, alongside fellow artists, elders, schoolchildren, and other local residents. The assembly formed part of *Daughters of Igbo Woman*, a research and film project that sought to creatively recover the memory of Coker, her mother and grandmother, between Britain, Nevis and Ghana. On the day, Martin commented that:

People came, to be together, young, old, black, white, to reflect on the curtailed freedoms of Frances Coker, and acts of inhumanity then and now ...

It was powerful, moving, healing and a fitting tribute in a beautiful tranquil cemetery. An unforgettable memorial tribute has taken place to remember all those impacted by the transatlantic slave trade and its enduring legacies.

Importantly, lodged in the minds of all those in attendance ... [is] the name Fanny Coker; this is where her final remains lie, who she is and what she represents to each ... one of us. Let’s begin our own process of healing ... (Daughters of Igbo Woman 2007)⁶

Though Coker’s original funeral was most likely at Broadmead Baptist Church (of which she was a member), this Black-led ritual of restoration reclaimed her—and those injured by enslavement—in and for the present. “These are our common ancestors”, stated Karmilita, one of those assembled, “we want to remember with dignity” (ibid.).

And it may be no surprise that many who assembled for Coker’s memorial also form the *Countering Colston* collective, whose campaigning throughout 2017

finally led to the historic renaming of Colston Hall. Conquering slaver duppies and honouring ancestral ghosts form overlapping elements in this reconstructive practice.

A Rebel City

On Wednesday 23 June 1976, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Bunny Wailer performed to a sold-out Colston Hall. The show was part of a 27-venue international tour in which The Wailers shared a planetary vision to confront and conquer the enduring inequities of enslavement, racial capitalism, and empire (Gilroy 2005b). Although there is no recording of the show, one wonders whether the Jamaican trio knew anything of the man for whom the hall they performed in was named. They and their audience most likely passed Colston's statue (100 m away) *en route* to the venue, may have sighted the ancient docks in the distance, and could have learned of the city's slaver profiteering. One wonders how their audience, which included first- and second-generation Caribbean Bristolians, connected the spirit of the songs sung that night—*War*, *Get Up Stand Up*, *Crazy Baldhead*—not only with the city's history, but also the "endless pressures" (Pryce 1979) they faced, police harassment, un(der)employment, workplace prejudice, educational discrimination, and community under-investment, which led to uprisings in the city four years later. Though *Duppy Conqueror* was not on their setlist, one can only imagine the sonic exorcism Marley and his rebel⁷ band performed that night—as their voices, drums, and guitars shook the stone and mortar of that hall, near that statute, near those large houses and ancient docks. And when Bob, Peter, and Bunny stepped off stage after their five-song encore, who can know what spectres they may have vanquished or how their metaphysical deliverance may have moved their applauding audience to envision Bristol anew.

Though we can be sure that their message resonated across many quarters of this rebel city, with its history of civic revolt (dating back to the 18th century). From the mid-20th century Bristol's Black inhabitants would bring their own radical traditions and freedom visions to the city, repeatedly rising—alongside white and brown collaborators—to refuse racialised oppression. In 1943 Black GIs stationed in Bristol during WWII held a 400-soldier rebellion following violent intimidation from white supremacist sections in the US military (Wynn 2006). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s newly settled Caribbean Bristolians fought occasional attacks from groups of young white men known as the "Teddy Boys" (common patterns of violence from Notting Hill to Nottingham; see Dresser 1986:10). And in 1963 Caribbean Bristolians led the Bristol bus boycott (modelled on boycotts in the US South) which overturned the local bus company's policy of refusing to hire Black or Asian workers, resulting in Britain's first anti-racism legislation. But, as the 1960s and 1970s wore on English immigration discourse became more vehemently racialised, marked by the birth of the neo-fascist National Front in 1967, whose campaigns of anti-Black and brown terror were felt across Britain. My mother bears some painful memories of this time, being a Black schoolgirl on a predominantly white council estate at the edge of Bristol in the 1970s. She remembers calling the fire brigade when the hedges of

their home were doused in petrol and set ablaze. And she recalls sitting that day in their living room, her infant nephew playing beside her, when a brick smashed through the window missing them by inches. She pulled his small body close as shards of glass lay around them.

Amidst this atmosphere, young people of my mother's generation, UK-born Black Britons, and their white working-class friends and neighbours, arose to confront racist subjugation. This was no longer a case of simply "settling in but ... a 'settling up' with the former 'mother country'" (Noxolo 2018:803). So, amidst Britain's economic recession, deindustrialisation, and the rise of Thatcherism, began the long rebellion of the 1980s. Starting in 1980 in St Pauls, Bristol's Caribbean core, uprisings then blazed through Black Britain (Brown 2005:59–69); St Pauls saw skirmishes with police again in 1981, 1986, and another uprising in 1987—the year of my birth. Today, whilst the racial violence of the latter half of the 20th century is largely over, Black and brown Bristolians still experience job insecurity, educational exclusion, and are priced out of neighbourhoods they were raised in (Runnymede Trust 2017). It is in response to this continuous thread of racialised inequity, a police murder across the Atlantic, and troubling Black and brown Covid-19 mortality rates that the city arose again in 2020, in proper Bristol fashion.

A Visioning Platform

Plunging Colston into the docks was an act of vital social renewal. An aqueous burial was apt. Not simply for the poetry of his effigy inhabiting that vast body of water across which his ships trafficked humans, casting overboard those that perished. Or because Bristol's waterways were imperial veins along which mercantile wealth was hauled into the city. But also because freshwater is said to "catch the spirit" (of the duppy), enabling the purification of space (Hume 2018:124). And, after the statue was dragged away and the plinth stood empty, a man was seen at its base, burning sage. Maybe he was following/(mis)appropriating Native American smudging practices. Maybe this "burning out the spirit" was informed by Jamaican understandings that duppies are "sensitive to strong smells and have difficulty navigating ... cloud[s] of smoke" (ibid.). Perhaps it was neither. Whatever the actor's intentions, the spiritual elements for cleansing the "Colston urban assemblage" (Buchczyk and Facer 2020:614)—that crossroads where Colston Avenue, Street, statue, Hall, and Tower meet at Bristol's centre—were in deep play. Whilst I have shown how Bristol has experienced what Deb Thomas (2020) calls "the looping temporalities of racial reckonings", reckonings that recur across circum-Atlantic sites, I believe that this ceremony sought to go one step further; to break the civic impasse surrounding Bristolian slavery.

Over a century of scholarship and activism willed, then pulled, the statue down (BRHG 2021). However, before the felling many had refigured Colston's effigy with their own interventions, or what Guyanese-Scottish artist Hew Locke (2020) calls "mindful vandalism" (an inversion of "mindless vandalism", i.e. intentioned counter-hegemonic alteration). As a child I recall going past the statue on the school-run, Mum commenting when Colston had been coated in blood-red paint

or looking up to see a traffic cone on his head. Memorably, in 1998, leading up to Bristol's first public exhibition on slavery, "Fuck off slave trader" was painted in thick letters across his body (Dresser 2016:42). For many the statue was far from loved. And in its shaded location beneath a huge London plane tree in one of the city's busiest, most polluted thoroughfares, one could have easily missed it altogether. Then in 2006, the year before Abolition's bicentenary (1807–2007), Hew Locke created a series entitled "Restoration". It featured embellished photographs of Colston's statue weighed down by cheap trinkets, faux jewels, and cowrie shells (a currency used to purchase enslaved humans). These hollow riches hung like heavy chains around his neck as he stood pensively. The gallery press release described this image as the collection's "most haunting", as it rendered conspicuously visible the muffled violence of merchant memorialisation at Bristol's urban centre (Locke 2006—see link in references to view images). And, shortly before Colston's felling, several "guerrilla" edits and "counter memorials" (Dresser 2016) appeared and re-signified the statue. The most memorable laid small wooden figures at the plinth's base, positioned in cramped formation signifying humans in the hold his slave ships. It is upon studying this work that you realise the orientation of the boat's bow and hence the direction of Colston's brooding stance. He is looking down to the docks in a south-by-southwest direction, towards the shipping route to Africa.

The day after the ceremony, as the plinth stood empty and city authorities cleared placards and dredged up Colston, a petition was launched, calling for bus boycott activist Paul Stephenson to take Colston's place. It attracted 76,729 signatures. Yet, the Stephensons objected. Perhaps they wanted to protect their (grand)father from the media furore; or maybe they shared Gary Younge's scepticism towards "premature adulation" (particularly as Stephenson is still alive). "[W]e mustn't rush to set the reputation of public figures in stone", Younge wrote in 2002:

... [it] should be resisted wherever possible. Not because it causes controversy but because it is an inadequate salve to compensate for their loss, an unsatisfactory means of ensuring their memory ... Like a tattoo dedicated to a lover, it excludes all possibility of a change of heart. Removing it may leave a scar ...

What if the plinth remains empty? A visible scar on the social body of a city of repressed memories. Shortly before the toppling, the council stemmed local traffic flow, installed new benches, and created a pedestrian space to sit, meet friends, or just think, amidst the bustle that surrounds you. From here, one can look up at the empty pedestal, its open platform, and reflect on Bristol's present-past, consider its violence, all that was taken and the need for repair. Danish-Trinidadian artist Jeanette Elhers' *Atlantic* (2009) is helpful here. Elhers' films and stills feature figures moving along the route of Danish slave trafficking: haunting forts, walking into the ocean, labouring in plantation houses, dancing in stately Copenhagen homes. Yet, the subjects are removed, replaced by silhouettes. The onlooker is held, one commentator notes, between "remembrance and oblivion", trying to imagine biographies, names, faces. Where the excesses of Locke's cheap jewels urge an interrogation of slavery's true cost, Elhers' shadows, their conspicuous

erasure, provoke other questions: Who was there? Where were they taken and why? The silhouettes invest the negative space of the unknowable with questions: about human lives, the dispossessions that mark their memory, and if they returned to us, what they might say. So, far from an empty plinth signalling an “erasure of history” (Abrahams 2020), empty spaces arouse yet more questions: Who stood there? When and why was he pulled down? Where else do the traces of enslavement inhere in the materiality and place names of the city? Herein, deeper, more honest explorations of Bristol’s past might populate and revitalise its civic space (see Figure 2).

Late one night, just over a month after the felling, a statue of a Black woman appeared on the platform. She wore a dark denim jacket, beret, and afro; her fist was held aloft, towards the sky. Her salute faced south-by-southwest. The woman was Jen Reid, a Bristol resident of Jamaican descent who was walking home from the protests and climbed the plinth for a photo. She was born on 2 November, the same day as Colston. In a statement about the statue,⁸ she recalls:

When I was stood there on the plinth, and raised my arm in a Black Power salute, it was totally spontaneous ... It was like an electrical charge of power was running through me. My immediate thoughts were for the enslaved people who died at the hands of Colston ... to give them power. I wanted to give George Floyd power, I wanted to give power to Black people like me who have suffered injustices and inequality. A surge of power out to them all.

In an interview (Mukena 2020) she later elaborated on this feeling:

... being on that plinth was cleansing ... I used to work for a company nearby ... I had to see that statue every single day. Colston being up there was a disrespect to every decent human being ...



Figure 2: “A visioning platform” (photograph by author)

It took 125 years to remove his effigy, and just 24 hours to remove Reid's. However, that a Black woman, who shares Colston's birthday, should be glimpsed atop the plinth and then disappear, that she stood on that altar and channelled a cleansing surge of ancestral power, seems spiritually apt. One might recognise in Reid's words, an inchoate and distant echo of Kumina, the Afro-Jamaican tradition where ancestral spirits, spirits of the sky, the energy of lightning and thunder can be channelled through dancing bodies, during drumming ceremonies. There were, of course, no drums when Reid mounted the plinth, no dancing, nor is she (to my knowledge) initiated into Kumina. And yet, this sighting of Reid's "surge of power" might nonetheless be read as a kind of visitation.

Much as Reid's statue appears then disappears in the events following Colston's symbolic burial in 2020, a woman the archive calls "Black Mary" seems to appear then disappear from record around Colston's death in 1721. Mary, believed to be an enslaved maid servant, appears in Colston's will, receiving a small inheritance (conditional upon loyalty until his death). She then seems to reappear 123 years later in an imagined deathbed scene by Victorian artist Richard Jeffreys. Surrounded by "weeping mourners, the Anglican cleric, the almoner at the door" (Dresser 2001:3), the woman, understood to be Mary, is depicted at the centre of the painting, kneeling beside Colston's bed, holding his hand.⁹ The man who painted *The Death of Colston* in the same year his body was exhumed, 1843, resurrects Mary and Colston in a conveniently reconciliatory scene; a distraught, deferential servant, cradling the hand of her munificent master. "We stumble upon her in ... circumstances that yield no picture of the everyday life, no pathway to her thoughts", Hartman (2008:2) writes of Black women glimpsed in the colonial record. If Mary could return to world, one wonders what she might reveal, what she might say. Yet, the archive offers no further mention of her.

Is there a synchronicity to these glimpses of Mary and Reid? A month after Colston's effigy falls, the figure of a Black woman replaces it. She states that she is channelling energy for enslaved spirits through her body. The archives are silent when we look for Mary; she is only depicted posthumously in a pose of deference, giving a hand of comfort to her dying enslaver. Yet, Reid stands tall, high, on that platform, her *hand clenched in a fist*, channelling a surge of cosmic power; towards every Black person subjected to racial injustice; towards Mary. Though separated by nearly 300 years, these two lives seem connected: in their relation to the slaver duppy (in labour; a shared birthday and plinth), through Reid's salute. And as Black Bristolians, "coeval ... in the as-yet-incomplete project of freedom" (Hartman 2008:14).

And there is perhaps a broader mystical rhythm to all of this: a slaver's spectre is ritually vanquished; then Afro-Diasporic spirits are called on through restorative acts to assemble those who lived/died in enslavement alongside those affected by contemporary racisms. The need to heal and repair seems to propel Reid's words/acts; much like those leading Fanny Coker's memorial; or those who marched; and those who dumped the slaver by Pero's Bridge. Bristol's unsettled history of Atlantic slavery, along with each of the rituals and practices of restoration that respond to it, remind us how "the past that is not the past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe 2016:9). Though empty plinths cannot direct us to

a clear future, they begin to clear the ground for a fuller excavation and construction of the past. They clear ground for ceremonial and personal reclamations of enslaved ancestors and offer platforms upon which to envision more egalitarian futures. To make ceremony in the ways I have illustrated is to reckon spiritually and affectively with the city's past, to respond to its duppies, and thus remake and claim common ownership of its civic space.

After Affects

The concerns I have elaborated have meaning beyond Bristol. For over 500 years, since Genovese-Bristolian Giovanni Caboto's (John Cabot's) supposed 1497 "discovery" of North America, the city has been but one node around an interlinked ocean of (settler) colonial violence, enslavement, and trafficking—each with their interconnected hauntings (see Lawrence 2008). Hence, Colston's toppling can be thought in circum-Atlantic relation to innumerable kindred acts: from Queen Victoria's statue being dumped at the back of Georgetown botanical gardens of newly independent Guyana (Locke 2019); to the throwing of Columbus' statue into the sea in during Port-au-Prince uprisings in 1987 (Trouillot 1995:156); to the wave of colonial, Columbus, and slaver monuments toppled from Madeira to Mexico to US cities following Colston's felling. Concerning remembrance rites: we can consider NourbeSe Philip's (2008) many ceremonial readings of *Zong!* honouring the enslaved human beings thrown from that ship in 1781; or commemorative journeys to Gorée Island with Dalla Malé Fofana (2020), Elmina Castle with Sadiya Hartman (2002), or Fort Prinzenstein with Jeanette Elhers (2009); or we might consider Gullah kin kneeling eastwards in ancestral prayer or lament on Saint Helena Island in Julie Dash's 1991 film, *Daughters of the Dust*. The kindred ceremonies and restorative practices are many.

And across Britain the BLM mobilisations and Colston's felling initiated the removal of slaver and colonial statues/paintings from key civic spaces, alongside the renaming of streets and university buildings. This fleeting "epiphany moment" (Wilson 2021) centred racism in (white) public consciousness, leading to all manner of individuals and institutions issuing statements to "do better" and fight racism. Then there were the reactionary and repressive responses. Far right riots unfolded in London, and English cities saw marches to "defend" war memorials and statues. Conservative ministers pursued prosecutions for those who felled Colston (though they had just been acquitted at the time of writing), threatened to defund museums that removed colonial statues, and prohibited schools from teaching with materials from groups that support the abolition of capitalism or promote "victim narratives that are harmful to British society" (DfE 2020)—thinly veiled attacks on BLM and kindred collectives. Then, in early 2021 as the dust seemed to be settling, the government released their disturbing "Race Report" (CRED 2021), aptly summarised by the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent as "a tone-deaf" dismissal of the lived realities of Black and racialised people; with its denial of institutional racism, disregard for previous reports' conclusions, "mythical representation of enslavement", and disingenuous repacking of "racist tropes and stereotypes into fact" (United Nations Human

Rights Council 2021). And this was swiftly followed by the 2021 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, an authoritarian reply to Colston's felling, which threatens up to ten years in prison for the "damage and desecration of memorials", including "emotional or wider distress" such damage might purportedly cause (with little reference to the emotional toll of slaver/imperialist veneration). The law came into force after the trial of the "Colston Four", yet their acquittal by jury (11 to 1)—on the basis that their actions were in the public interest as a slaver's statue constituted an affront to common decency—was nonetheless decried by Conservative politicians. Most notably PM Boris Johnson, who retorted: "What you can't do is go around seeking retrospectively to change our history... or edit it in retrospect. It's like some person trying to edit their Wikipedia entry—it's wrong" (Forrest 2022). Whether a cynical dog whistle or genuine ignorance of historiographic practice, this statement seems too fallacious for critique. Better, we might read Johnson's claims against Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995:26) four axioms of historical silencing, and come to our own conclusions concerning how dominant historical narratives are cast and which tellings are deemed significant:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).

And so, a year and a half on from that powerful antiracist uprising, conservative forces cling ever more aggressively to a selective telling of the past ("*our* history"), preferring silences to fuller investigation and elucidation of Britain's imperial past. "Denial is the heartbeat of British racism", repeats the BLM placard from last June (exhibited alongside the statue in Bristol's M Shed museum).¹⁰

Meanwhile, in my hometown the work of repair continues, resolute as ever. In March 2021, after decades of campaigning by Pan-Africanists, Rastafarian elders, and recent efforts by a cross-party coalition of councillors, Bristol City Council passed a historic "Atonement and Reparations" motion. Addressing Bristol's role in and inheritances from African enslavement and trafficking, the pathbreaking ruling commits city representatives to lobby parliament for the establishment of a national All-Party Parliamentary Reparations Commission.¹¹ At a city level it commits to community-led reparative justice planning and wealth creation programmes. Green Party councillor and Bristol's first Black Lord Mayor Cleo Lake—who attended Colston's Girls' School, campaigned with Countering Colston, danced and read poetry at Fanny Coker's memorial, and proposed the motion—described the decision as a special opportunity to play a "leading role" in "calling for systemic change":

Reparations is not a paycheque for the descendants of people who were enslaved, it is a process ... which looks for holistic repair ... [It] can include public apologies, social justice initiatives, education or cultural projects, commemorative ceremonies, affirmative action and much more. (BBC News 2021)

With Bristol pledging a formal programme of reparations and beginning to respond to the living-presence of slavery across its urban geography, the everyday



Figure 3: “A better world is possible. Black Lives Matter” (photograph by author)

groundwork of repair, finding ceremony, and vanquishing duppies goes on—in this city and beyond (see Figure 3).

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Endnotes

¹ For a performance by the poet, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3DKfaK50AU> (last accessed 9 June 2021).

² To track the profits and scale of “the trade”, see Richardson (1985); for how economies of enslavement shaped Bristol’s built environment, classed contours, and industrial “take off”, see Dresser (2000, 2001).

³ The most vivid and violent incarnation of the “hostile environment” includes the attempted mass deportation of thousands of elderly Caribbean-born British citizens in what became known as the “Windrush scandal” in 2018—for which only 5% of promised compensation has been paid by the time of writing. Meanwhile Home Office chartered deportation flights to the Caribbean and continental Africa have been ongoing. And this

racialised border violence continues with the 2021 Nationality and Borders Bill, which holds the legislative power to criminalise migration and divest millions of Black and brown Britons of their citizenship and make them stateless.

⁴ *Spectral geographies* is my giving name to practices I was already improvising as I researched and moved through Bristol. Only after this naming did I encounter Coddington's (2011) work on the (settler) coloniality of remembering in Alaska, which elucidated my thinking *vis-à-vis* connections "between colonial histories and present-day practices", concerning land/sea, law, and unfinished pasts. And here my thinking also detoured via Derrida's (1994:xviii) invitation "to learn to live with ghosts" and, as I argue, vanquish them.

⁵ Perhaps unsurprising, given the fond memories many Bristolians have of attending events there since childhood (see Steeds and Ball 2020:282).

⁶ For a description of the ceremony, attendee reflections, and a video of the day, see <https://bit.ly/3qw2B8W> and <https://youtu.be/JTP7r0WkaYg> (last accessed 9 January 2022).

⁷ "Rebel" is a category of self-ascription—amongst others Bob, Peter, and Bunny claimed—through which the band presented themselves to the world. Alongside such songs as *Soul Rebel* and *Rebel Music*, Marley once summed it up to an irritating BBC interviewer who asked if he was "meddling in politics", by saying, "My rights, ah my rights ... Me ah rebel man! We're revolutionaries, ya know! ... who don't have no help and who don't take no bribe from no one, we ah fighting single handed, with music". See this clip from the BBC documentary, *Bob Marley Exodus '77*: https://youtu.be/_oBdlcNclw?t=2 (last accessed 9 November 2021).

⁸ Source: <http://marcquinn.com/studio/news/a-joint-statement-from-marc-quinn-and-jen-reid> (last accessed 8 February 2022). The statue was created by wealthy white artist Marc Quinn and has been critiqued as an opportunistic "quick-fix reactionary gesture" by an artist with a dubious record of documenting Black women's bodies. Sceptical of Quinn's intentions, I elect not to mention him in the body of the paper, instead foregrounding and responding to Reid's words. For a critique of Quinn's work, see <https://artreview.com/marc-quinn-Black-lives-matter-statue-is-not-solidarity/> (last accessed 9 January 2022).

⁹ See <https://museums.bristol.gov.uk/details.php?irn=117224> (last accessed 8 February 2022).

¹⁰ See <https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/the-colston-statue/> (last accessed 8 February 2022).

¹¹ Akin to US congress' 32-year-old HR40 federal reparations bill (first proposed in 1989), which finally advanced to a full Congress debate in April 2021.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study

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