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Irreconcilable times

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In *Denktagebuch* (*Thought diary*, 1950-73), Hannah Arendt wrote that acts which cannot be forgiven are beyond punishment and hence cannot be reconciled to. In this essay, I draw from Arendt to further theorize and extend the concept of irreconciliation. I draw together ethnographic material, historical material, documents, media reports, and reviews during this era of irreconcilability which includes Black Lives Matter; the memorialization debates on the removal of statues of enslavers; the history of slavery in the United Kingdom; and the ‘harmony ideology’ experienced by BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) academics within UK organizations linked to long-term discrimination. I argue for the concept of irreconciliation as a bulwark against impunity, against a ‘window-dressed’, symbolic performance of redress, and to be able to echo Arendt’s words that ‘this’ – any original cause of injustice – ‘ought never to have happened’.

On 23 July 2020, the New York Democrat Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez delivered a speech condemning Republican Representative Ted Yoho, who, following a discussion about their differences in opinion concerning the link between poverty and crime, was accused of accosting her within hearing range of a reporter and calling her a f***ing b**ch. While Yoho has denied using these words, the media and social media furor which followed attacking either Yoho or Ocasio-Cortez shows how divisive this event was. The *New York Times* labelled Ocasio-Cortez as disruptive as she repeated in Congress the names she said Yoho had called her. So, while she was attempting to point out the complexity of the patriarchal dynamics women face in their public lives, the response to her speech in turn highlighted the abuse received by women – a point that she was seeking to shed light on (Traister 2020). On the other hand, the wide praise she received for identifying the patterns of dehumanizing language used against women, who are frequently accosted abusively at work and with impunity, indicated the increasing spaces available in which to speak out and the support for such actions.

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This also turns our attention to how irreconciliation is increasingly being brought to the fore by those who are suffering discrimination, not least many BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic)¹ academics within UK higher education (HE). The Yoho-Ocasio-Cortez illustration also indicates two common experiences among many BAME academics: namely how they are treated in their place of work, and that if they raise a problem, *they* are deemed to be the problem.

BAME colleagues have tried to raise issues of discrimination because their lives have been affected by various expressions of organizational power and the complicity of colleagues. I, as a co-founder of the first BAME network of academic staff and postgraduate students in Durham University, have been told of many instances of discrimination across different institutions. These can include claims of larger teaching and administrative load; lack of acknowledgement of the contribution being made; ignoring long-term in-depth expertise of BAME colleagues; gender and racial pay gaps; being reprimanded for the smallest of issues compared to others whose serious transgressions are not addressed; circulation and reiteration of racial stereotypes when issues are raised by BAME colleagues; general and everyday harassment; and, above all, bystanderism.² BAME academics who raise issues of injustice are also (like Ocasio-Cortez) labelled as ‘combative’ and ‘scary’ by their line managers. This ends with them becoming caught in ‘the tiredness of the loop of repetition’ (Ahmed 2019: 148) of unresolved injustices, such as those discussed in this volume’s essays.

Generally, it is incumbent upon survivors to forgive, reconcile, and seek closure as a demonstration of peacefulness, as various essays in this special issue note. The Ocasio-Cortez illustration is a reminder of how the processes of conciliation and mediation are also used to their advantage by organizations and institutions in instances of conflict among colleagues. Such manipulations and limitations become apparent especially when grievances and concerns are suppressed or remain unaddressed, or when successful grievance cases and their results are not upheld by the organization’s human resources (HR) departments. These include perceptions recounted to me by certain departmental heads across academia who feel HR exists only to protect management. In such organizational instances, the aggrieved person needs to be passive, accept ‘that cup of tea’ (Ahmed 2019: 188) of conciliation and harmony ideology (Nader 1991).³

In instances of persistent denial of, and impunity from dealing with, past injustices, or of ‘staged’ processes that claim to address injustice, reconciliation is similarly suggested as a solution to those who raise their voices in protest. As ethnographic data from essays in this volume show, survivors can refuse to reconcile and decline to carry out the coercive normativity of forgiveness. When they do so in the face of unacknowledged injustices, and particularly in response to what is perceived as a performative redress of inequality, I have theorized this negation as irreconciliation. I consider ethnographic material alongside historical material, reviews, and reported news events to look at the debates surrounding statues which commemorate enslavers and colonial figures. I also include in this discussion the unsatisfactory responses of HR departments and HE management to complaints of bullying by BAME employees. I extend the concept of irreconciliation to describe the responses of BAME colleagues and others to the microaggressions of ordinary life. First, I bring in the experiences of the bullying of BAME academics through my intersectional, privileged positionalities of being a South Asian/BAME female professor in anthropology. Owing to issues of confidentiality and sensitivity linked to wider BAME networks, I draw on these experiences – both my own and others’ – but, to preserve anonymity, present them

predominantly through a third-person narrative, and where possible cite examples from published sources and reports. Second, I juxtapose these debates with the discussions on the history of memorializing slavery based on my research and teaching on memorialization. [Correction added on 14 June 2022, after first online publication: This paragraph has been updated in this version.]

‘This ought never to have happened’

As noted in my introduction, for Hannah Arendt, writing about the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in her *Denktagebuch (Thought diary)* (2002; see also Berkowitz 2011), acts which cannot be forgiven are beyond punishment, and hence cannot be reconciled to. In her argument for non-reconciliation, she claims that ‘this ought never to have happened’ (Berkowitz 2011: 3). In this she rejects the world that harbours such acts and calls for a new world through the denial of that which currently exists. What Arendt refers to as ‘non-reconciliation’, which we have termed ‘irreconciliation’ in this volume, seeks to redraw the frameworks of reconciliation to highlight the prevalent (unclear) impacts and responses to injustices. I draw from Arendt’s *Thought diary* to further theorize and elaborate on an ethnography of irreconciliation by extending the concept to include protests against the memorialization of slave owners, and the complaints of BAME academics in British HE. Since 2007, I have carried out fieldtrips with students exploring Britain’s history of slavery as part of my undergraduate module ‘Violence and Memory’. The trips focus on the ‘trade’ and ‘philanthropy’ of the enslavers who are depicted as Britain’s ‘virtuous sons’ (see also Fig. 3 below), and so I will also examine the practices of displacement which indicate Britain’s ‘aphasic’ relationship with its imperial past (Gapud 2020: 331). The concept of aphasia allows us to track processes of displacement and goes beyond the idea of ‘historical amnesia’ (Tyler 2012), or invisibility, in relation to the history of slavery and colonialism (Wemyss 2016). Burch-Brown (2020) also proposes that we examine the debate about the statues of enslavers within a transitional justice framework but is uncritical of the framework itself.

What the Black Lives Matter (henceforth BLM) movement has brought to centre-stage is a *public secret* (see Mookherjee 2006): that of the existing discrimination around both the memorialization of slavery’s history and the experiences of BAME academics. Rather than equating them, I am drawing out the similarities in the processes through which injustices in both instances are thwarted rather than addressed. HE’s biases and discriminatory behaviour have been broached many times in the past, but have been unheeded, ignored, and enabled by bystanderism and obfuscation. That these situations are analogous can be seen in the following example: in an event hosted by the Irish Museum of Modern Art in March 2021, during a discussion of Professor Sara Ahmed’s (2017) work on complaints, other speakers compared the vilification of the complainants in HE that Ahmed described to a similar resistance to the complaints brought by women whose children were put up for adoption without their consent by Irish mother-and-baby homes. Ahmed’s work speaks well to how bureaucracy and institutions re-create hierarchies and resist responding meaningfully to grievances. I also show the institutional tactics of ‘equivalence’, ‘due process’, and ‘balancing’ which are deployed in responses to complaints. Continued complaints in the face of unheeding bureaucracies thus emerge as forms of irreconciliation. Thus, participants at the event in Ireland saw a correspondence between the experiences of complaints of Irish mothers and that of BAME academics who protested against institutional injustices. These discussions, while at a different level, might be related to the resistance

that is implicit in the attempts to reveal the truth in post-genocidal contexts, in the history of slavery, or in experiences of racial discrimination in British HE. Regulations are used by organizations to discount the staff experiences of bullying, harassment, microaggression, sexism, and racism that are the result of long-term discriminatory practices. The phrase 'due process' is also invoked in various institutional responses to bullying and harassment complaints in order to stymie them. In each of these instances, codes of rules, regulations, and practices as determined by HR set the remit within which violations are determined and have to be resolved. In innumerable instances, these regulations enable impunity and the letter of the law is often not enforced, thereby enabling the continuation of the status quo. Or law itself is used to sustain the status quo. Here, Derrida's commentary on Benjamin's theorization on violence – that 'force is essentially implied in the very concept of justice as law (*droit*)' (Derrida 1992: 5) – is helpful to think through the role of law in parallel with some of the discussions in the introduction and in this volume related to contexts of state violence.

Despite official statements from organizations espousing anti-racist positions in 2020 after George Floyd's death, the institutional pushbacks against BLM and anti-racist movements have been constant. Here, ethnographic work on memorialization and post-conflict contexts allows for linkages that enable understanding of the concerted organizational efforts at obfuscation. This is alongside what I call 'institutional window dressing' in relation to racial and colonial histories in the United Kingdom and is similar to the tactics involved in diversions and 'aphasia' (Gapud 2020). It is best captured by what Allen Feldman refers to as 'exclosure', which, as we noted in the introduction, is 'the self-defacement of this appearing non-appearance of violence' (2015: 12). Exclosure here (like the discussions of genocidal instances elsewhere in this volume) refers to when the institutional structures meant to redress injustices do so performatively and instead work to undermine the search for justice. I add to the examples to indicate certain institutional performances in British HE where there is continuing discrimination against academics and how these are met with irreconciliation and vigilance. On the one hand, irreconciliation emerges against continuing institutional impunities and their obfuscation of anti-racist movements vis-à-vis performative anti-racist messaging. On the other, it emerges alongside the public outcries and debates relating to statues celebrating slavery. In the following section, I explore the institutional responses and practices around the 2020 BLM events as part of the contexts of current irreconciliation.

Black Lives Matter and institutions

On 25 May 2020, George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for nearly eight minutes while Floyd continuously said: 'I can't breathe'. Floyd's death, Breonna Taylor's death in a raid on her apartment,⁴ and the subsequent BLM protests that have taken place across the globe since May 2020 exemplify the everyday realities of racism. This, alongside the COVID pandemic, is powerfully and irrefutably exposing the inequities in societies. Experiences of racism have been felt intensely during the COVID epidemic, within which carrying out anti-racist protests has also faced criticism. One example of such protests after Floyd's death took place at the base of the 1890-installed statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee (an enslaver) on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia (see Moreno 2020). After witnessing the police tear gas protesters in Richmond on 30 May 2020, Dustin Klein, a Richmond-based lighting designer, and Alex Criqui, a photojournalist, sought



Figure 1. Image of Harriet Tubman projected upon a Confederate monument venerating Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia. (Photo credit: Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press, with permission.)

to amplify the messages of BLM through projecting the movement's images onto the bronze statue. The takeover of the Lee monument for peaceful protest by activists and the light installations depicting intersectional, ingrained injustices exposed the peaceful yet resolute irreconciliation that exists among Black American communities with regard to the contemporary police violence they experience. Here and in other instances, monuments and activities around them are a reflection of an engagement with the past from the vantage point of current predicaments rather than a position on that past alone (Rao 2016). Looking at the occupation around the monument, Aaron Parker, a native of the area, commented: 'This is what monuments could be' (Moreno 2020). Opponents of the Governor of Virginia's attempts to remove the Lee memorial successfully sought an injunction blocking the move. On 26 June, as police in riot gear surrounded the memorial, the image of the abolitionist and activist Harriet Tubman was projected on the Lee monument along with the line: 'Slavery is the next thing to hell' (Fig. 1).

I was extremely upset by these events in May-June 2020 and the worldwide news. I found that this resonated with the messages I was receiving from BAME colleagues about their experiences, and the contradictory BLM messaging being sent by institutions and line managers while at the same time remonstrating against anti-racist protests. The death of George Floyd and the subsequent pain and outrage felt by the injustice of the innumerable deaths due to police brutality in the run-up to 25 May 2020 sparked a fuse across the world as well as many discussions among British BAME colleagues. Much of the discussion of this section is based on personal communications from these colleagues, mainly anonymized, and supported, where possible, by examples from published sources and reports.

The mobilization after Floyd's death was such that various organizations and line managers who had not paid any attention to race issues and had ignored the bullying and harassment of BAME colleagues felt the need to send out 'blacked-out' anti-racist messages in support of BLM. Overnight, BLM had made it trendy to be anti-racist. Suddenly, everyone wanted to 'decolonize' the curriculum as a panacea without thinking through the foundations necessary to put decolonization into action. This was considered by many BAME academics to be hypocritical, seasonal, and a form of virtue signalling whereby institutions sent BLM-related messages without addressing the issues of bullying and structural racism among their personnel. As a result, social media became inundated with discussions of the numerous occasions that the same organizations had ignored racist incidents. This led to various networks and communities writing open letters demanding an end to endemic racism in their institutions and highlighting the need for changes in practices and policies relating to the representation, recruitment, and support of BAME individuals.

In spite of the distressing context of BLM, these letters and communications by BAME colleagues were often deemed to be 'combative' by line managers. The epithet 'combative' reminds us that BAME individuals did not want to go 'back to the cup of tea' (Ahmed 2019: 188) and this was an expression of their irreconciliation to long-term daily microaggressions. Terming BAME communications as 'combative' also parallels the debate about the need for 'democratic decision-making' in the case of the removal of statues, as discussed below. It is worth recalling that the removal of many statues happened after years of trying to follow procedures, of signing petitions, of having polite conversations and cups of tea with councils and authorities – all of which were not heeded. The case with BAME networks is analogous: they have been raising the issues of racial discrimination, bullying, and harassment through formal procedures, and have been thwarted continually. Various EDI (equality, diversity, and inclusion) heads and committees felt they could not support any BAME open letters as that would be a conflict of interest. Others queried the request for greater representation and raised the issues of 'merit', 'criteria', and 'competitiveness', as if the demands for BAME representation were asking for anything more than the parameters of employment outlined in their contracts. BAME networks also pointed out the hypocrisy of these official messages given the way institutions have turned a blind eye or paid lip-service to various grievance cases. In some instances, it is claimed that institutions have preferred to promote and reward those carrying out various discriminatory acts. These include incidences of bullying, harassment, and microaggressions against BAME colleagues (see Devlin & Marsh 2018; Universities UK 2020) in total disregard of various 'respect at work' policies. This has included rewarding those who have had successful, as well as multiple, grievance cases upheld against them.

Owing to such factors, sometimes those at the receiving end of bullying and harassment tend to go off sick or even leave their university rather than engage in a lengthy and formal grievance process which itself often encourages the issues to simply 'go away'. Alternatively, there was a concern expressed to the Durham Commission on Respect, Values, and Behaviour about the perceived practice of paying the responsible party to leave the university, with a perception that this occurs particularly at a senior level, rather than acknowledging that bullying behaviour is unacceptable and deserving of action up to and including dismissal without compensation (Report of the Durham Commission on Respect, Values, and Behaviour 2020: 25).

Separately, some who were believed to be promoting and rewarding bullies are now understood to be tasked with implementing the findings of various commissions and reports. In the process, institutions have subsequently been perceived as congratulating themselves for having initiated investigations, commissions, and reports on actions that their own managerial practices caused. This seems to be the ultimate manifestation of 'a lousy diversity doublespeak' (Doharty, Madriaga & Joseph-Salisbury 2021: 233). Part of this doublespeak includes, as I mentioned earlier, the processes of conciliation, or mediation, which are used by organizations and institutions. These are deployed in instances of conflict among colleagues and even if grievances and concerns are suppressed, remain unaddressed, or when successful grievance cases and their results are not upheld by an organization's HR. The use of terms like 'equalizer' and 'due process' deployed by HR and institutions also enables impunity. As Ahmed (2017) notes in her discussion of these complaints: 'Indeed, many of those I have spoken to have spoken of how they became the complained about; a complaint can be redirected to the complainer; as if she says something is wrong because something is wrong with her'.

The bullying and harassment of BAME colleagues show that they are seen to be trespassers who have risen above the station they are meant to stay in. In accounts from numerous grievance cases, claims indicate how 'bureaucracy' is used to control and bully colleagues. A BAME colleague told me that their line manager had said: 'I did not show them how angry and irritated I was with them [the said BAME colleague]. I just used bureaucracy against them'. These bureaucratic manoeuvres can include an insistence on organizing in-person meetings soon after 9 a.m. (even though guidelines prescribe that those meetings should not start before 9.30 a.m.) despite participants' requests to move it to 9.30 a.m. because of their caring duties and/or transport timings; using performance management as a stick against colleagues whose teaching evaluations are deemed to be negative; getting mentors to report to promotion committees when the role of mentoring is meant to be based on trust and confidentiality; and line managers escalating email discussions frequently with the threat of consulting HR to instigate a more formal process of investigation. Increasingly, one finds that the issues raised by BAME colleagues are being raised *against them* in turn, while, sometimes, senior colleagues find that their race and gender are being discounted when they are mistreated. As Ahmed puts it:

Racial harassment can be the effort to restore a hierarchy: how someone is being told you are not where you should be or you are above where you should be, or you are where I should be or even you have taken my place. Some of us in becoming professors become trespassers; you are being told you need permission to enter by being told you do not have permission (2019: 188).

The law again works efficiently to stop a complaint by declaring that 'a complaint is "not a complaint" because it does not fulfil the technical requirements for being a

complaint' (Ahmed 2019: 161) As in truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs), the law sets the 'parameters within which conflict must be resolved' (Turner 2016: 45) and hence helps to serve the status quo. Ahmed cites a powerful and familiar example:

For example, a member of staff made a complaint about bullying from the head of her department. The experience of bullying had been devastating, and she suffered from depression as a result. It took her a long time to get to the point where she could write a complaint. She described what happened once she was able to file a complaint: 'I basically did it when I was able to because I was just really unwell for a significant period of time. And I put in the complaint and the response that I got was from the deputy VC [Vice-Chancellor] and HR. He said he couldn't process my complaint because I had taken too long to lodge it'. Some experiences are so devastating that it takes time to process them. And the length of the time taken can be used to disqualify a complaint (2019: 161).

Grievance processes can be similar to other conflicts discussed in this volume. As I have argued in this volume's introduction, the South African TRC's moral equalization of the suffering of black and white communities as forsaking revenge was deemed to be necessary for the liberation of the nation. Similarly, in essays by Josephides (Northern Ireland), Bertelsen (Mozambique), Buthpitiya (Sri Lanka), and Clarke (Colombia) in this volume, there has been a process of equalizing blame if violence was carried out by both sides. This moral equivalence has been greeted with anger in various instances as this equalizing position did not recognize the suffering of victims and families. As elaborated by Visser (Bangladesh) and Vaisman (Argentina), processes of amnesties (known as the 'two-demon theory')⁵ have equalized victimhood, ensuring a long period of silence and almost complete impunity. We also find this process of equalizing in the memorialization of slavery. For example, as we discuss further below, when a long-awaited memorial to the enslaved was finally built in Lancaster in 2005 at the peripheral quayside of the city, it was 'equalized' with the setting up at the same time of a pub with the name of the enslaver Robert Gillows in the city centre. [Correction added on 14 June 2022, after first online publication: The year in the last sentence of this paragraph has been corrected from '2018' to '2005' in this version.]

Similarly, institutions are now willing to allow BAME communities to articulate their experiences of bullying and harassment in the light of BLM and the rebranding opportunity linked to the buzzwords of 'diversity' (Ahmed 2012) and 'decolonization'. BAME colleagues note that those who were often silent bystanders and active abettors of the bullying and harassment of BAME colleagues in the past are overnight wanting to be part of the decolonizing project. This is evidenced in the proliferation of decolonization workshops led by staff without any relevant expertise or life experience, and the promotion of research projects as 'decolonized'. Moreover, decolonization like 'diversity might be "just used now," because of its affective qualities as a happy or positive term' (Ahmed 2019: 148). It might explain the keenness of various organizations today to readily use the word 'diversity' and attempt to implement it after years of such requests by BAME individuals. I turn to the debates linked to the statues, memorials, and names linked to slavery in the following sections.

The landmarks and resonance of slavery

On the evening of 7 June 2020, I had watched the video of the slave trader Edward Colston's statue being removed in Bristol, in southwest England, as part of an anti-racism protest which ended with four individuals being arrested for criminal damage. They were acquitted in December 2021. In the United Kingdom, slavery was abolished in the British Empire by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 and the further brutal

apprenticeship of the enslaved ended in 1838. I felt that the removal of Colston's statue was a historic event, like so many others that were happening around the world. From 2007 and during fieldtrips I carried out with students, my own awareness had heightened of the presence of various everyday structures related to slavery within the United Kingdom. Following the Colston figure's removal, June 2021 saw the head of a bronze statue of Egerton Ryerson – architect of Canada's residential school system – sawn off and thrown into Lake Ontario following the discovery of the buried remains of 215 First Nations children on residential school grounds (see Niezen, this volume). Red paint was daubed on both the statues, and graffiti reading 'DIG THEM UP' was written on Egerton's pedestal, hinting at other undiscovered children's graves.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Colston's Royal African Company sold more than 200,000 people from West Africa as slaves – including women and children – and some 19,000 died en route. Many thousands were branded on their chests with the name of his company (Clarke 2020). As I watched the video of the 7 June event (YouTube 2020a), I saw that protesters not only removed his statue from its pedestal, but also rolled the red-paint-covered effigy down the road, before a protester knelt on Colston's neck, enacting George Floyd's death. Then the statue was thrown into the River Avon in a powerful symbolic gesture of consigning Colston to a 'watery grave' – giving him the same burial as the dead and dying slaves who were tossed overboard. The removal of Colston's statue was evocative of Arendt's comments (see Berkowitz 2011: 13): given that such crimes (in this case, slavery) are irreconcilable, should not the world in which they existed be rejected? Here, the very process of 'defacing' (Taussig 1999: 7) these statues exposes a public secret: that of the unaddressed legacies of slavery which constitute the material foundations of many British institutions and charities. The Colston event also revealed how, since 1990, there had been a democratic, formal – albeit fruitless – attempt to have Bristol's city council add a plaque to the statue that identified its connections to slavery. The protesters, thus, reignited the conversation in the United Kingdom about rejecting a society in which the statues of enslavers are allowed to tower over its citizens.

This rejection has already been taking place in different parts of postcolonial Africa, where statues of colonial figures have been toppled as a first step in addressing racism. As South African constitutional lawyer Lwando Xaso has noted: 'Statues represent so many ideas that are wrapped up in the physical object itself, and that by toppling them, you are saying that those ideas that they represent no longer have a place in society' (as quoted in Patta 2020). Such removals have included the statue of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, as well as statues in Ghana, Kenya, and Cameroon. Andre Blaise Essama, for example, has been toppling colonial statues in Cameroon (Akwei 2017; YouTube 2020b) and is being called a local hero. Self-described as an activist, Essama aims to replace all the colonial statues and monuments built by French colonialists in the capital city Douala with those of national heroes who fought for the bilingual country's independence. In 2015, he launched his campaign when he repeatedly beheaded the statue of French colonial hero General Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque and was imprisoned each time. The Cameroonian government has now placed this statue within an iron-grilled complex to protect it from Essama. Similarly, the artist Jimmy Ong has been deconstructing and beheading the statue of the colonialist Stamford Raffles, who is alleged to have founded Singapore (BBC News 2019).

In the United Kingdom, following the removal of Colston's figure, a statue of merchant and slave trader Robert Milligan was removed by the Tower Hamlets Council



Figure 2. Base of Colston statue in the M Shed Museum, Bristol, 11 June 2021. (Photo credit: @ProfDanHicks, Twitter, with permission.)

from West India Quay East London;⁶ a new plaque has been added to Edinburgh's statue of Henry Dundas; Churchill's statue in London was graffitied as being racist; and the petition calling for removal of Shrewsbury's statue of Robert Clive (also known as Clive of India) was narrowly defeated. Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has acknowledged that street names and statues in the United Kingdom continue to honour those who profited from human misery. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, however, has said that one cannot edit or censor a nation's past. Prior to a BLM protest, the statue of Winston Churchill – who is also known as Johnson's and the Conservative Party's hero – was completely boarded up to avoid it being defaced again. The Turner Prize-winning sculptor Anish Kapoor described the Prime Minister's opinion on statues negatively, adding: 'Statues are not history; they are emblematic monuments to our past which can be thought to represent how we see ourselves and our history' (as quoted in Stewart, Walker, Mohdin & Quinn 2020).

The well-known historian William Dalrymple has created controversy on Twitter by referring to the removal of statues as an 'erasure' of history and compared it to the attacks on historic structures by the Taliban and Hindu right-wing supporters of the BJP in India. He clashed with the British Black historian David Olusoga, who tweeted that the removal of Colston was 'making history'. The removal of Colston and the subsequent curation of that statue in the M Shed Museum in Bristol have indeed made history, and the graffitied and red-painted statue was exhibited horizontally lying down (Fig. 2).

That the material wealth of the British Empire was built on its trafficking of slaves has long been known. Since 2007, I have been carrying out a fieldtrip on the history of slavery in the United Kingdom with students which is linked to a module I taught in Lancaster and teach now in Durham. This involves a tour of a city (e.g. Lancaster,

Liverpool, Newcastle, or Durham) led by a cultural historian that identifies its visible but barely noted landmarks, as well as examines documents in archives that links the city to slavery. In this way we have learnt how to look at a city, its buildings, doorways, and roads differently in the light of the city's link with slavery and how that contributed to both its and Britain's material wealth. Rare are the monuments such as the 'Captured Africans' sculpture, created in 2005 by the artist Kevin Dalton-Johnson with support from the mosaic artist Ann McArdle, which was unveiled as the first memorial to mark the history of slavery in Lancaster – the fourth largest port city in the United Kingdom (after London, Bristol, and Liverpool) that had engaged in slavery.⁷

Students were often surprised to find the 'Captured Africans' memorial tucked away on St Georges Quay in Lancaster, in a spot not visited by many. In 2018, when my 8-year-old son visited this memorial with me, he mentioned that he imagined he would see more people there, expected it to be in the middle of the city, and also thought it would be bigger, 'like a steeple', similar to Second World War memorials. Apart from the politics of location, what was striking is that soon after this memorial was set up, a new pub was opened in the city centre named after the famous furniture maker and enslaver Robert Gillows, who became rich from the mahogany wood brought in by the ships carrying the enslaved. Again, we see that most enslavers are commemorated as 'most virtuous and wise' sons of the empire (see the epitaph in Figs 3 and 4 as visible in the plaque under Colston's statue). Apart from naming the pub after the 'voyager' (as per the website)⁸ Gillow, also emblazoned on the pub's front window were these unabashed words: 'trading in the unusual since 1720' (see Figs 5 and 6). All these instances of displacement through naming, semantics, and structural prominence highlight the deeply entrenched processes of 'aphasia' (Gapud 2020: 331): that is, processes through which occlusions of knowledge, of national histories, occur.

The commemoration of enslavers through statues and landmarks such as this pub is worth noting. In May 2021, following a campaign by a group called Black History Lancaster, which was formed in response to BLM, the name of the pub was changed to Jailor's Barrel because of its proximity to the Lancaster castle and prison, where nine individuals accused of witchcraft were hung in 1612 as part of the Pendle witch trial. On 14 May 2021, with the name change a contentious issue, discussion ensued online in open, local forums. While some lamented that the best sign in the town had gone due to 'wokeism' and 'political correctness', others joked sarcastically that the witch community might want the name 'cancelled'. Many were critical of those who argued in favour of the pub's original name, Robert Gillows, and applauded the name change with a 'well done' and further added:

Making a decision to stop celebrating a man who thought it was acceptable to own other human beings isn't ridiculous; thinking that there is something wrong in that choice is ridiculous.

Others pointed to the various name changes the place has had:

Gutted! It will always be Robert Gillow!

It's been robert gillow for about 5 minutes!

I remember it being a restaurant, Elliott's I think. It's had a few names.⁹

In 2021, schools, buildings named after Colston in Bristol were renamed, most prominently Colston Hall, now Bristol Beacon. The plaque under the Henry Dundas statue in Edinburgh has also been changed and now it reads: 'He was instrumental in



Figure 3. Epitaph under Colston statue, Bristol, 11 June 2021. (Photo credit: @ProfDanHicks, Twitter, with permission.)

deferring the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Slave trading by British ships was not abolished until 1807. As a result of this delay, more than half a million enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic'. There are innumerable architectural remnants of slavery in Lancaster and in other cities in Britain. Around the stasis of COVID, there has been more participation at BLM demonstrations and there are increased calls for a change of these landmarks that are seen to be arrogantly celebrating, on a pedestal and without remorse, what is a problematic British, colonial past. While I have explored the role of memorials as standing in for remorse (Mookherjee 2007; 2019), the statues of enslavers and colonizers like Robert Clive represent a pride in an imperialistic past full of injustices. A lack of reckoning with this history is believed by many BAME individuals, and others, to constitute part of the setting for contemporary racism. This



Figure 4. Empty pedestal of Colston statue. (Photo credit: @ProfDanHicks, Twitter, with permission.)

pride in history obscures the foundational violence (see the introduction and Visser and Niezen, this volume) blanketed under amnesia and the ‘celebration and sublimation of the grand beginnings’ (Derrida 2001: 57). Turning to the debates on memorialization as oblivion or pedagogy, I interrogate the role of historical inquiry, which, according to Renan (1896: 163), brings to light the deeds of violence that took place at the origin of all political formations.

Memorialization as oblivion or pedagogy?

Memorialization has various purposes. On one hand, the need to memorialize is based on the externalization and communication of private pain as public and is an injunction against forgetting on the part of communities and governments. However, in the examples I have discussed so far, the mercantile capitalism of slavery and colonialism



Figure 5. 'Captured Africans': Lancaster's slavery memorial. (Photo by the author, 2018.)

are being memorialized for the British public as a history of which to be proud. But the public secret that the material wealth of Britain is rooted in slavery and colonialism often remains unacknowledged in these statues. It has been argued that as soon as we affix a meaning to an object, the memory of it slowly becomes consigned to oblivion (Forty 1999; see Mookherjee 2007; 2019). Thus, in the case of the statues of enslavers, the people they portray could be seen to have been consigned to oblivion after being put on their pedestal. Yet the very fact that the replica of an individual enslaver has been put on a pedestal, overlooking people and a city, decentres the oblivion argument. This returns to Anish Kapoor's point above that these statues 'are emblematic monuments to our past which can be thought to represent how we see ourselves and our history'. The choice of these statues highlights a pride in empire which seems to be embodied in



Figure 6. Front window of the Robert Gillows pub with the words ‘Trading in the unusual since 1720’. (Photo by the author, 2018.)

these statues. That BLM also demands and acts on the removal of these statues is further indicative of the relationship between material objects (Forty 1999: 8) and history. It is assumed that the durability of such objects enables the prolongation and preservation of a history and its values – here of slavery. However, in other instances of the history of slavery, the call for the removal of slavery’s artefacts from our daily cityscapes is being refuted by Liverpool activists like the late Eric Lynch as an injunction against forgetting. I examine this discussion below.

In 2017, as part of the slavery fieldtrips that I have undertaken with students on my ‘Violence and Memory’ module, we came across an image (Fig. 7) of enslaved children in a doorway in Liverpool which was pointed out to us by Eric Lynch, who was leading



Figure 7. Image of enslaved children in a doorway in Liverpool. (Photo by the author, February 2017.)

the slavery history tour. In 2017, we had to do this tour without making it obvious and without blocking pavements as Eric advised this caution, citing difficult experiences he had encountered.¹⁰

On our trip, Eric pointed to this image in the doorway and said there were plans for its removal in line with gentrification of the city and making it a tourist destination for the Beatles. He was against the removal of this and other innumerable architectural remnants (which are distinctively different from statues of slave owners) relating to the slave trade embedded in Liverpool. Here, erasing evidence of historical events can also be about erasing symbols that point to a violent, inglorious past. This is in practice another form of aphasia, another obfuscation of knowledge through urban gentrification.

In the case of the city of Durham,¹¹ the landscape and visitor footfall (apart from students and their families) are connected to visits to the gothic cathedral and the various ecclesiastical landmarks linked to Christianity. Yet the link with slavery and the wealth accrued, which can be identified within these religious edifices, remains unmarked. The histories of slavery and mining are, however, intrinsically intertwined in Durham. So far, when exploring Newcastle and Durham's history of slavery, we see that it is dominated by an abolitionist narrative. However, the slavery fieldtrips with students further demonstrated that, given the North East had connections to slavery, there is a process of 'remembering to forget' (Mookherjee 2006; Rowlands 1999). This is when the focus is on how abolition was fought for in the past. The North East region, including the Palatinate and County of Durham, had connections to slavery in the Caribbean and the North American colonies and then the United States through emigration, resident and absentee sugar plantation ownership, executors/trustees of dead owners, plantation overseers, shipping, trading, coal mining, clergymen, colonial administrators, and military personnel (army and navy). Coal from the North East was sent to Jamaica, where it was used to heat raw sugar cane, harvested by slaves, to turn it into sugar, which was then exported to Britain. The Crowley ironworks on Tyneside made shackles and neck collars worn by the slaves, and specialist agricultural tools for the plantations in the West Indies and the North American colonies (Creighton 2020: 3).

As part of the Anglican Church hierarchy, the Bishops of Durham were involved in running the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which had been set up in 1701 (Fig. 8). The SPG had been left two slave plantations in Barbados by Christopher Codrington, to be developed for a college funded by the plantations in the 1710s. Personnel at the College had Durham connections. In 1835, when the British government paid £20 million (some £17 billion today) to slave owners as part of emancipating the enslaved, the Society received compensation (over £500,000) for the 410 enslaved people¹² on the plantation attached to the college. Speaking in 2006 at the Church of England's synod, in the context of the church's apology for the role it played in the eighteenth century in benefiting from slave labour in the Caribbean, the Rt Rev. Tom Butler, Bishop of Southwark said,

The profits from the slave trade were part of the bedrock of our country's industrial development. No one who was involved in running the business, financing it or benefiting from its products can say they had clean hands. We know that bishops in the House of Lords with biblical authority voted against the abolition of the slave trade. We know that the church owned sugar plantations on the Codrington estates (Bates 2006).

The SPG became the United Society Partners in the Gospel (USPG) when in 1965 it merged with the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA; founded by David Livingstone in 1857).¹³ So the USPG as a Christian mission agency has had a long history of rebranding. Significantly, in 2022, the USPG has opened up its archives and is seeking to come to terms with its past (Sadgrove 2022). Many individuals in the SPG had remained enslavers until abolition in 1833-4 and were beneficiaries of the government compensation. A search on the UCL Legacies of British Slave-Ownership database¹⁴ shows 252 clergymen (Church of England reverends) who owned slaves or were associated with slavery at abolition.

Durham University was set up in 1842 after the compensation payout in 1835 and in 1875 Durham University became affiliated to the University of Codrington College in

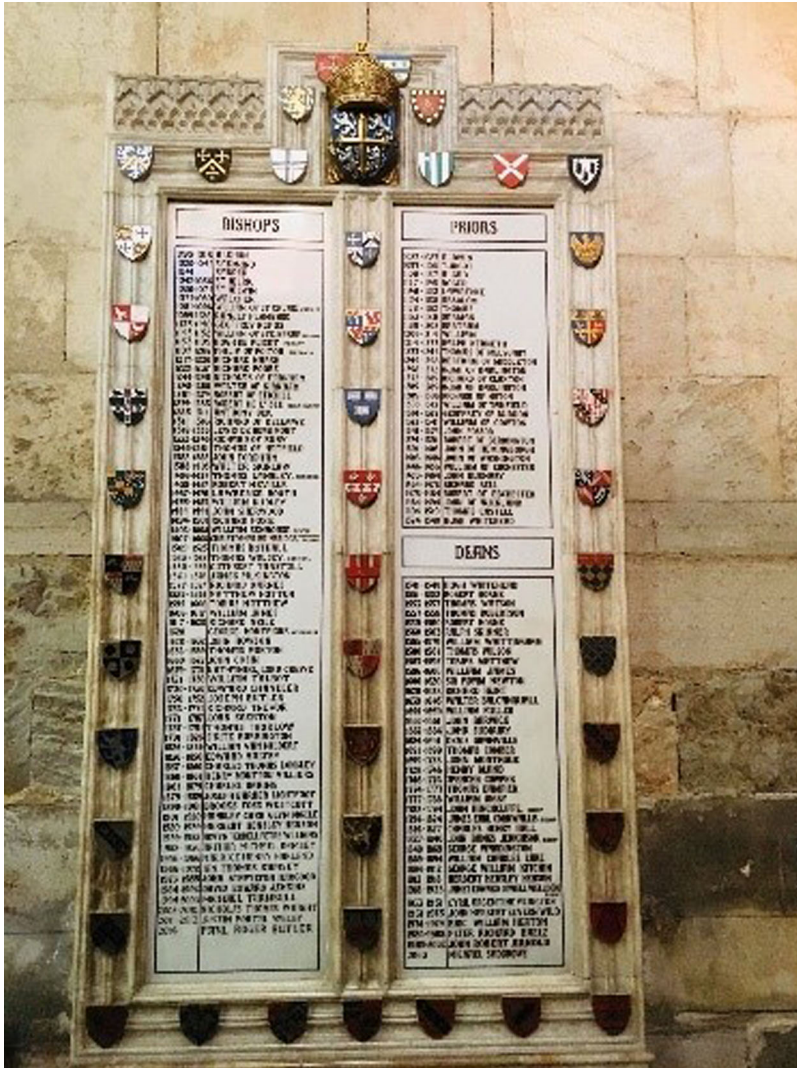


Figure 8. List of Bishops in Durham Cathedral who were part of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). All Bishops in the House of Lords voted against abolition of slavery (Bates 2006). (Photo by the author, February 2020.)

Barbados (named after the well-known enslaver Christopher Codrington) for degree-granting purposes (Simmons 1972). The next year, Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone was also affiliated. The colony had been established to settle the London Black poor, and was supported by Granville Sharp, a member of the Durham County-based family. County Durham’s history is closely linked in with slavery and the campaigns against the slave trade. Post emancipation, the links with the Codrington and Fourah Bay Colleges pose a distinct question concerning Durham’s role in the spread of colonial education and involvement in various types of imperial enterprise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Nwauwa 1996: 26).

Coal was crucial to the development of British industrialization, which underpinned colonialism and imperialism. So, in Durham's history, slavery, ships, coal mining, clergymen, and the various links to sugar plantations are intrinsically intertwined. Within Durham City, the only memorials to mining are the copper artwork in the Palatine café in the university, and the 1947 memorial and the Haswell Lodge banner in the cathedral. All other mining memorials are located outside the city. In contrast, there is the statue in the Market Place to the Marquess of Londonderry, which seems to contravene the history of mining, trade unionism, and leftist tradition and pride intrinsic in the county. He supported the use of child labour in the mines, was against strikes, unions, and tenancy rights, and was an uncaring landlord of estates in Ireland (Castleton 2019).

The debate around the continued ignorance about objects in buildings and cities and names of streets, buildings, businesses, and organizations related to slavery, which exist alongside statues and names of enslavers that exist throughout the United Kingdom, highlights the role of aphasia. The statues and monuments connote a historical arrogance through the ideas they embody and the choice made to put them on pedestals as 'philanthropists'. This is an attempt to glorify them as well as obliterate the violent histories they are linked to. Children watching the removal of the Colston statue with me also assumed that the statue of anyone must be that of a good person. The debate around the removal of statues has raised interesting questions about the significance and banality of memorialization, and the mode of oblivion that is intrinsic to the process.

This oblivion serves the status quo in enabling the statue of an enslaver to overlook our cities. Most people might not have been aware of these statues' history or of their presence in their cities. However, the debate over their removal has made their histories known. So, removing these statues could remove the horrific ideals these enslavers could be said to symbolize, but could it also erase their dark histories for future generations, as Eric Lynch argued? That there is resistance to such removals is seen in the fact that in January 2021 the UK's Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Robert Jenrick, passed a law to ensure that historic statues should be 'retained and explained' for future generations as a source of pride and not to reveal a violent past. Individuals who want to remove any historic statue, whether listed or not, will now require listed building consent or planning permission (BBC Sounds 2021: 16 mins; UK Government 2021). Many academics and public intellectuals argue against the idea of plaques for reasons like those of Xaso and Kapoor quoted above. Gary Younge (2021) powerfully notes that these statues are lazy and ugly, and he demands that all of them should be removed. In their place, he argues, the histories of the enslaved should be made part of the UK school curriculum, from which it is currently conspicuously absent.

That said, some cities commemorate the history of slavery differently. Hence, as we have seen, Lancaster attempts to balance the building of a slavery memorial on the periphery of the city and a pub named after an enslaver in the city centre. Yet today, even after the name change to the pub, the traces of the history of enslavers are retained through the tagline and RG (standing for Robert Gillow) symbol. Liverpool wants to remove the signs of slavery at Albert Dock and make the city a destination for Beatles tourism. But activists would rather retain these structures so that the memory of slavery is not erased from the city. In Durham, there is no visible presence of this past, and the city is renowned for its gothic cathedral. There is also no acknowledgement that the wealth of this city was

founded on the links between the cathedral, mining, and slavery. Instead, this proud mining city houses a towering statue of a man who was against the well-being of miners.

The student responses to these fieldtrips were particularly insightful. They were often stunned by the prevalence and sites that marked the history of slavery in cities. The stories mentioned by the cultural historians leading the students through Lancaster, Liverpool, Newcastle, and Durham also allowed them to join the dots between different figures and protagonists. The presence of the images of the children as slaves (Fig. 7 above) was particularly poignant and the ensuing discussion on memorialization and removal was insightful because it highlighted the ethical challenges related to these themes.

The slavery tours also allowed students to reflect on the role of walking through urban spaces as a performative act and to think through how to memorialize slavery when there is no statue and no official record of slavery, even if it is visible in road signs, plaques in churches and cathedrals, and carvings on doorways and buildings, as we see in Durham, Liverpool (which has a slavery museum), Newcastle, and Lancaster (which has a slavery memorial). Along with a focus on the politics of exhibition and display, remembering and forgetting, and remembering what to forget, students followed Wallace in undertaking 'a performative understanding of human subjectivity, one recognizing that the idea of "the experiencing body located in time and space" is crucial to any process of historical reckoning' (2006: 47). What was significant in the process was for students to discern how various decisions made around depicting the history of slavery had repercussions at an individual and global scale. As I discussed above and also noted in a discussion of a Radio 4 programme, *Descendants*, on 4 June 2021, many abolitionists were paid compensation for their enslaver status when abolition took place. Many married into enslaved money and inherited properties accrued due to slavery. The £20 million that the UK government spent to reimburse the owners of slaves – who themselves were some of Britain's richest businessmen – took the British taxpayer 182 years (until 2015) to pay off. These discussions led many students to become proactive in exploring their family backgrounds and some of them also came to feel pride about their grandparents' mining background, which they would have otherwise not revealed to their peers.

In a particularly interesting debate, students raised the question of responsibility and what their role might be in addressing racial injustice. Following Hannah Arendt (2003 [1968]), we asked what should the relationship be between collective responsibility and individual culpability? Rather than a self-gratifying guilt, we discussed how collective responsibility can be aimed for through an informed critique of the system: in short, we must not be reconciled and instead sensitively take forward the discussion of responsibility. I had been undertaking these trips since 2007 without using the explicit vocabulary of decolonization and BLM. However, students identified these discussions as exemplary examples of decolonization in the faculty. By engaging with these sites, I have followed Wallace (2006) in addressing historical presence/absence and our role as critical, reflexive agents in relation to historical atrocity. The ethnography has also highlighted the need to reflect on our locational complexities within the history of slavery. Here Derrida's (1992: 5) commentary on Benjamin's theorization on violence and the relation between force and law (*droit*) is instructive. As we see in the various essays in the volume, perpetrators already had impunity in the system, and in recent juridical contexts the rule of law has further enabled their impunity by deciding the

boundaries of the cases, which at the outset shuts down, forecloses, the possibilities of truth and justice. Consequently, victims have refused to reconcile. I turn, finally, to what I refer to as the ‘window dressing’ of our current epoch, which makes irreconciliation an essential framework for the work ahead.

Window dressing and irreconciliation: Mahatma Gandhi as ‘diversity’

On 2 August 2020, it was revealed that Mahatma Gandhi would feature as the first BAME person on a British commemorative, but uncirculated, coin to be produced by the Royal Mint. This was thanks to the support of the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak (McGleenon 2020), in response to the debates on race and equity, and the BLM and Rhodes Must Fall movements. However, accusations of racism have also been levelled against Gandhi relating to his time in South Africa, leading to his statue being removed in Ghana. There have been calls to remove his statue from Manchester and Leicester. Historians like Professor Faisal Devji have, however, pointed out that although Gandhi was a fallible man, his record was mixed as he supported Africans during the Boer and Zulu wars, and he was more radical and progressive than most contemporary compatriots (Regan 2020). Hence, according to Devji, it is ‘absurd’ to compare him with slaveowners and his statue represents the Gujarati communities in the United Kingdom who were ousted by Idi Amin from East Africa. Claudia Webbe – Leicester’s Black British MP – also considers these criticisms against Gandhi a ‘massive distraction’ from the BLM movement. Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary Priti Patel are of Hindu, South Asian descent and part of the East African flight of Indians to the United Kingdom. They are part of the core of the ‘diverse’ Conservative government whose hero Churchill also reviled and demonized Gandhi. The inclusion of Gandhi on the coins is therefore deeply paradoxical. Gandhi was not only an anti-colonial campaigner, who led the protest against British rule in India and exposed the moral impoverishment of British colonialism, he was also a critic of capitalism.

The use of Gandhi here reminds us that diversity can become a ‘commitment to something, including a commitment to change, change as diversification’ (Ahmed 2019: 148). Such window dressing is also reflected in institutions’ BLM support messages; their new focus on creating institutional BAME networks, and calls for ‘respect’ at work; and the use of the buzzword ‘decolonization’ – all in contradistinction to years of them disregarding the bullying and harassment of minority colleagues. The many passive bystanders or fence-sitters who ignored the discrimination of colleagues also add to the toxicity of institutional life. Is this sudden focus on decolonization a form of rebranding of institutions, a ‘Schindlerization’, to create a feel-good, upbeat vibe (Reich 2006: 466; as mentioned in the introduction to this volume)? It is in this context that the figure and principles of Gandhi and decolonization seem to be up for appropriation into institutions whose practices have been absolutely antithetical in the near past.

Decolonization needs to be about everyday practices and beyond the curriculum, while involving active bystanders and allies. As Achille Mbembe points out (Patta 2020), decolonization has to be done for posterity’s sake and must be backed up with socioeconomic justice, material change, and engagement with the intersectional injustices within institutions. This is particularly true in anthropology, where the study of historical gaps in the British educational system (Wemyss 2016) is not deemed to be a matter for disciplinary focus. Yet, in spite of or because of the security of jobs and salaries, many feel unable to raise concerns about injustices within our home

institutions. There are likely other varied reasons. This then makes it difficult to teach or discuss anti-racism with students or to act on it within the obstructive organizations one works in, among other factors.

The recent outcries relating to racial injustice and statues in the United States (Lee memorial), the United Kingdom (Colston, Rhodes), and Canada (Ryerson linked to residential schools) has highlighted clearly to me the similarities between the processes through which any redress related to genocidal injustices have been stalled, and the legal means through which the debate around statues has been curtailed. I have explored the links between the debates on statues and staff experiences in HE institutions. I noted above that in Bristol, a petition was submitted in the early 1990s to address the controversy of the Colston statue and the various landmarks linked to it. Yet any change was stalled by the wealthy Society of Merchant Venturers, who ensured that Colston's plaque mentioned only his 'philanthropy' (Steeds & Raval 2020). The debate about removing the statue of Ryerson (in lieu of changing its name) in Canada at X University (students called it X University in order to not use the name Ryerson) has gone on for decades, as has the university's attempt to 'pacify' the movement. This is captured in the aptly named Instagram account @wreckconciliation_x_university. The removal of the statue only took place after the discovery of the graves of the resident school First Nations children in 2021. Similarly, in the case of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in Oxford, all 'due process' was followed with inquiries and investigations. After Oriel College initially backed its removal, in May 2021, it was announced that the statue would not be taken down due to the cost and complex logistics (Race 2021). Any decision to move the statue would require planning permission from Oxford City Council, Historic England, and the relevant minister, Robert Jenrick. In October 2021, a plaque was added to 'contextualize' the debates around the statue in Oxford. The removal of the Lee statue in the United States was also stopped by two injunctions, but the statue was finally removed in September 2021.

As I mentioned above, in January 2021, Robert Jenrick passed a law to ensure that historic statues should be 'retained and explained' for future generations. This celebration of pride in all the violent and unjust events of the past is also reflected in the decision to make the 'retain and explain' policy a test for board appointments for trustees of museums to ensure that their views on heritage align with government policy (Barker & Foster 2021). Academics interviewing for these jobs thus have their public statements and social media posts examined to ensure that they agree with 'the retain and explain' policy (Barker & Foster 2021). Contrary to Derrida (2001: 57), there is no amnesia about the foundational violence which is being celebrated as grand beginnings. The attempt to retain and explain highlights the need to celebrate the spoils of colonialism, empire, and slavery. As Spivak asks, '[W]hen does the love for one's corner of the ground become the nation thing?' (2010: 13). Today, rather than just forgetting, as Renan (1896) argued, being necessary in order to create a nation, it is pride in nations' dark histories that also seem to be foundational for states across the world.

In all these instances, our three formulations of irreconciliation are apparent: it occurs when past historical injustices have not been addressed in spite of the issues having been raised; when historical injustices have been symbolically addressed through committees and investigations only to strengthen the status quo and resist the truth; and when the protests continue against such virtue-signalled and performative redress.

I have drawn together an ethnography and review of documents, media material, and events relating to BLM, the debates on the removal of statues of enslavers, the absent presence legacy of slavery in the United Kingdom, and the intransigence and long-term discrimination in institutions. It becomes obvious how the prevalence of the drawing out of the processes of equalizing, the use of the law (*droit*) and bureaucratic regulations, and ‘harmony ideology’ all sustain injustices. We see how inequalities are consigned to oblivion in instances relating to legacies of slavery, institutional bullying, and harassment relating to BAME colleagues and BLM. In demonstrating this, I have tried to identify the need for the concept of irreconciliation to be employed as a form of vigilance against impunity, against the ‘window-dressed’, symbolic performance of redress. Irreconciliation is also ‘the absolute willingness to register the impact of violence, so that that registering is also the creation of a possibility for being otherwise’ (Ahmed as cited in Binyam 2022), beyond the corrosive subjectivity that injustice and its lack of acknowledgement engender. We should build on Hannah Arendt (Berkowitz 2011: 3) and say ‘this ought never to have happened’. As Josephides suggests in her essay in this special issue, irreconciliation is about being held accountable, which is a necessary aspect of a mature, enlightened self and enables care for one’s person.

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NOTES

¹ BAME is an umbrella term with which many within that collective do not feel comfortable as it homogenizes experiences and hierarchies. The term is often used interchangeably with black (which refers to those who see themselves as being politically black) or BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of colour) used in North America. I use BAME while cognizant of the criticism against it as well as its bureaucratic connotations. It nonetheless brings into focus the broad and varied intersectional experiences of non-white people facing racism in the United Kingdom. In my experience, the term BAME has allowed individuals to share and support each other in their experiences of racism.

² To protect confidentiality and the precarious/fragile status of the affected persons, among other matters, I have deliberately withheld some of this material. I hold additional material and sources to substantiate these claims.

³ Here, as in Nader’s (1991) example of ‘harmony ideology’ in genocidal injustices, the institutional contexts prevented complaints from being voiced.

⁴ Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African-American woman, was fatally shot on 13 March 2020 when police officers entered her Kentucky apartment as part of an investigation into drug dealing. The details of the case are hugely contested. None of the officers involved in the raid have been charged with Taylor’s death.

⁵ This phrase is used pejoratively among the left in Argentina and refers to the rhetorical efforts of ‘reconciliation’ based on ideas of forgiveness and forgetting, which seek to absolve military perpetrators.

⁶ See Wemyss (2016) for a history of this statue.

⁷ See Rice (2007) and Wallace (2006) for the histories of slavery in Bristol, Lancaster, and Liverpool.

⁸ https://www.robertgillow.co.uk/doing_wp_cron=1597391486.2163779735565185546875_www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs (accessed 28 March 2022).

⁹ I have paraphrased comments and not cited the references of these forums to keep them confidential.

¹⁰ This seems to have changed as in 2018 Eric Lynch was awarded the Citizen of Honour by Liverpool City Council in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the city and to the International Slavery Museum. In fact, on TripAdvisor, Lynch's slavery history tours were considered as one of the 'top things to do in Liverpool' (https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186337-d215463-Reviews-Slavery_History_Trail-Liverpool_Merseyside_England.html, accessed 28 March 2022). On 2 November 2021, Lynch sadly passed away and there are plans to create the 'Eric Lynch Slavery Memorial Plaque' in recognition of his life spent drawing attention to the city's slavery history when it was not supported by the authorities. William Brown Street is one of the first of around ten streets in Liverpool which will become home to an 'Eric Scott Lynch Slavery Histories' plaque.

¹¹ This section on Durham draws on Charlton (2008).

¹² A database of those awarded compensation for being enslavers can be found at the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>, accessed 28 March 2022). The details of the payout to Codrington can be found here: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/claim/view/6568> (accessed 28 March 2022).

¹³ See <https://www.uspg.org.uk/about/history/> for more (accessed 28 March 2022).

¹⁴ See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/search/> (accessed 28 March 2022).

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Temps irréconciliables

Résumé

Dans son *Denktagebuch* (*Journal de pensée*, 1950-73), Hannah Arendt a écrit que les actes qui ne pouvaient pas être pardonnés étaient au-delà du châtiment, donc hors de portée de la réconciliation. L'autrice de cet article y puise inspiration pour théoriser davantage et élargir le concept d'irréconciliation. Cet article combine matériaux ethnographiques et historiques, documents, articles de presse et rapports durant une époque d'irréconciliabilité qui a vu Black Lives Matter, les débats mémoriels sur l'enlèvement des statues d'esclavagistes, l'histoire de l'esclavage au Royaume-Uni et l'idéologie « de l'harmonie » à laquelle font face des universitaires noirs, asiatiques et membres de minorités ethniques (« BAME ») au sein d'organisations liées à des discriminations de longue durée au Royaume-Uni. Elle avance des arguments pour le concept d'irréconciliation comme rempart contre l'impunité, contre un redressement des torts symbolique, « d'affichage », faisant par là écho aux mots d'Arendt selon lesquels « cela » (toute cause originelle d'injustice) « n'aurait jamais dû arriver ».