Edward Colston, Nostalgia and Resistance: How Does Britain (Mis)remember and (Re)imagine Colonialism?

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Abstract

The toppling of the Edward Colston statue by Black Lives Matter protestors in Bristol became one of the defining moments of the British summer of 2020. The removal of the statue reignited conversations around how Britain conceptualises colonialism and empire today. This paper seeks to evaluate and contextualise these conversations and argues that the toppling of the statue was an act of anti-colonial theatricality that disrupted Britain's official narratives of post-colonial bliss. Using a critical, postcolonial framework, this paper seeks to explore what public memory of Edward Colston reveals about Britain's relationship with colonialism, and what counter-memory can do to resist (mis)remembrance and (re)imagining of colonialism, past and present.

KEYWORDS Edward Colston, Bristol, postcolonialism, resistance, counter-memory, statues, public memory

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Introduction

In the centre of Bristol on 7 June 2020, Black Lives Matter protestors pulled down a statue of Edward Colston, an active participant in the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century.[1] The incident was covered widely in popular media, with dramatic footage of the statue being toppled and thrown into the Pero harbour circulating worldwide. It was far from the first collective cry for the removal of a statue commemorating a colonial figure;[2] however, the toppling of Colston somewhat eclipsed the reach of campaigns such as the student-led 'Rhodes Must Fall'[3] movement, in part because of the theatricality and poetic justice of the statue being tossed into a "watery grave" in Marenka Thompson-Odlum's words,[4] as was the fate of many Africans during the perilous transatlantic journeys to which Colston actively contributed.[5] In Britain, the toppling and its aftermath reignited national discourse about public memory of empire and colonialism. References to a colonial 'legacy' and 'past' abounded in discussions after the incident,[6] revealing a national proclivity for placing colonialism and its realities firmly in a time long-since past. This grammar of legacy is informed by a spatial delineation between metropole and colony that dominated understanding of colonialism throughout the lifespan of the British Empire[7]—a line of thinking that has

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[1] Mark Steeds and Roger Ball, *From Wulfstan to Colston: Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol* (Bristol Radical History Group, 2020); Kenneth Morgan, "Edward Colston and Bristol", 1999, The Bristol Branch of the Historical Association Local History Pamphlets.

[2] Johannes Schulz, "Must Rhodes Fall? The Significance of Commemoration in the Struggle for Relations of Respect", *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2019): 166–86; Nick Pinto, "In Dishonor of Columbus Day, Protesters Shroud Obscenely Racist Statue at AMNH", *The Village Voice*, 2016; Timothy Kubal, *Cultural Movements and Collective Memory: Christopher Columbus and the Rewriting of the National Origin Myth* (Springer, 2008).

[3] Brian Kwoba, Roseanne Chantiluke, and Athinangamso Nkopo, *Rhodes Must Fall: The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire* (Zed Books Ltd., 2018).

[4] "What Do We Do with the UK's Symbols of Slavery?", *BBC News* (UK, 11 June 2020), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-52995528.

[5] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 34–38.

[6] "Racism and Statues: How the Toxic Legacy of Empire Still Affects Us", *BBC News*, 6 July 2020, UK, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-53305729.

[7] Keith Robbins, "Core and Periphery in Modern British History", in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 70, 1985, 275–97; Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire 1", *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 124–41.

since been extensively problematised.[8] The reality, of course, was and is much more complex. The "imagined communities"[9] of the (neo-)metropoles,[10] to borrow Joe Turner's phrase, are entangled in an often invisible web of power and subjection that has only become more complex in the global, cosmopolitan, capitalist system.[11] Modern Britain is no exception. This paper argues that the felling of the Edward Colston statue exposed and disrupted the romanticised public memory of empire and colonialism in Bristol, reinforcing and reviving Bristolian resistance to official narratives of postcolonial bliss. Two key questions structure the argument of this paper: 'What does the Edward Colston statue reveal about British imagination of empire and colonialism?' and 'Why is the felling of the Colston statue so significant?' To answer the first, the paper begins with a brief theoretical survey of the ways in which official historiographies and narratives are constituted by power relations and reified through state-sanctioned objects, institutions, and activities. The focus then shifts to Bristol and Edward Colston. I discuss Bristolian public memory, colonial nostalgia, and haunting after the "post-colonial cut"[12] in (neo-)metropolitan Britain. This lays the theoretical and contextual foundation for a postcolonial analysis of the felling of the Colston statue. Applying the thinking of Tiffany Lethabo King, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault, this paper argues that the public vandalism and removal of the Edward Colston statue was an example of "anti-colonial theatricality",[13] "counter-memory",[14] and "collective

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[8] Michael Steed, "The Core—Periphery Dimension of British Politics", *Political Geography Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1986): S91–103; E. Spencer Wellhofer, "Core and Periphery: Territorial Dimensions in Politics", *Urban Studies* 26, no. 3 (1989): 340–55; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 1st ed., Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World (University of California Press, 1997), 1–56.

[9] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso books, 2006).

[10] Joe Turner, "Internal Colonisation: The Intimate Circulations of Empire, Race and Liberal Government", *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 4 (1 December 2018): 765–90.

[11] Stoler and Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", 19–20; Barnor Hesse, *Un/Settled Multiculturalisms: Diasporas, Entanglements, Transruptions* (Zed Books, 2000).

[12] James Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain* (Pluto Press, 2020), 1.

[13] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 41.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 95.

catharsis",[15] an act of resistance against the officially denied "living present"[16] of colonialism and conquest. This analysis thinks with the wider literature relating to contemporary postcolonial resistance and offers a yet unexplored analysis of the significance of the felling of the Colston statue.[17]

What does the Edward Colston statue reveal about British imagination of empire and colonialism?

What and how societies officially remember, imagine, and reimagine the past is steeped in and constituted by power relations.[18] These official historiographies and narratives are entangled in a power-knowledge nexus and are permeated through state-sanctioned institutions and social activities, such as the heritage industry,[19] education,[20] and science.[21] In the Foucauldian power-knowledge nexus, the ways in which history is understood, taught, and produced is constituted by pervasive meta-power, which sets the parameters for acceptable forms of knowledge and defines what is 'true'.[22] Collective recollection of this 'truth' is also often physically embodied in what Lesley Lekko calls

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[15] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (Pluto Press, 2008), 112.

[16] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[17] Ann Mumford, "Edward Colston And the Coronavirus: A Reflection on Narratives of Taxation in Taxing Times", *King's Law Journal* 32, no. 1 (2 January 2021): 157–67; Saima Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston: Histories of Slavery, Memory, and Black Globality", *Women's History Review* 29, no. 7 (9 November 2020): 1218–25; Lara Choksey, "Colston Falling", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24 November 2020; Christine Yeats, "Should They Stay or Should They Go?", *Public History Review* 28 (22 June 2021): 152–56.

[18] Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory", *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (1 April 2016): 125–42.

[19] Lesley Lekko, "African Space Magicians", in *...And Other Such Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 66–67.

[20] Bruce Van Sledright, "Narratives of Nation-State, Historical Knowledge, and School History Education", *Review of Research in Education* 32 (2008): 109–46.

[21] Ieva Zake, "The Construction of National(Ist) Subject: Applying the Ideas of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault to Nationalism", *Social Thought & Research* 25, no. 1/2 (2002): 240–41.

[22] Jonathan Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: An Overview of Theories of Power since Lukes and Their Application to Development* (Brighton: Participation Group, Institute of Development Studies, 2003), 1–3.

"conventional architectural expressions of remembrance",[23] such as statues. These expressions, however, are as much a question of forgetting and reimagining as they are of remembrance and commemoration. In *The Empire at Home,* James Trafford explores how, after the end of formal empire, Britain embraced the title of a "post-colonial nation" through a "spatio-temporal cut from Empire, which disavowed the violence in the world that it had terraformed".[24] For this "post-colonial cut" to be embraced as a national truth, it is important to make visual this spatial and temporal separation from empire, colonialism, and various projects of conquest. Statues and monuments are crucial here.

The Edward Colston statue, one of many architectural nods to the Bristolian,[25] was erected in 1895 during the 'Pax Britannica' period. This period was the height of British global hegemony,[26] but importantly, it occurred after the abolition of chattel slavery from which Colston acquired the bulk of his wealth. British patriotism and supremacy was the order of the day in the late 19th century, but the statue remained in place until 2020, long after the mass migration of British colonial subjects from (sometimes former) colonies to fill labour shortages in the mid-20th century.[27] During this time, the 'colony' began to be reproduced at 'home' through projects of exclusion, domestic neocolonialism,[28] and internal colonisation.[29] As Ambalavaner Sivanandan points out, the capitalistic, colonial tenet of "labour without overheads"[30] from

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[23] Lekko, "African Space Magicians", 63.

[24] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 1.

[25] Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston", 1219.

[26] Douglas Johnston and W. Michael Reisman, *The Historical Foundations of World Order: The Tower and the Arena* (BRILL, 2007), 508–10; William Roger Louis, Alaine M. Low, and Andrew Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 332.

[27] Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

[28] Ambalavaner Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", *Race & Class* 17, no. 4 (1976): 347–68.

[29] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*.

[30] Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", 350.

fungible,[31] colonised bodies was reproduced in the metropole through "the forced concentration of immigrants in the deprived and decaying areas of the big cities";[32] nationality laws that necessarily distinguished the alien immigrant from the White, British citizen[33]; and the institutionalisation of discrimination through laws such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act.[34] In 2020, several generations after this mass migration, resistance to these projects of internal colonisation, to which the Colston statue contributes, is still very present.

The statue bears the inscription, "erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city".[35] Using the epithets "virtuous" and "wise" to describe Colston is in direct contrast to the lived realities of subaltern subjects who were affected by the brutality of the Royal African Company (RAC), of which Colston was a shareholder and eventually Deputy Governor.[36] This kind of romanticist and revisionist description is a hallmark of the official narrative of the "post-colonial cut", an idealisation of a public memory and nostalgia for a "Bristol that never was"[37] and, on a larger scale, a 'Great' Britain that never was. Bristolian resistance to this official narrative of the city has been documented for over a century.[38] In 1920, clergyman Henry Wilkins condemned the "cult of Colston" and noted his links with the

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[31] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 1997); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81.

[32] Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain: For Wesley Dick—Poet and Prisoner in Some Answer to His Questions", 350.

[33] Ibid., 353.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Nasar, 1219–21.

[36] Ibid., 1219; Steeds and Ball, *From Wulfstan to Colston: Severing the Sinews of Slavery in Bristol*.

[37] Samuel J. Richards, "Historical Revision in Church: Re-Examining the "Bristol Saint" Edward Colston", *Anglican and Episcopal History* 89, no. 3 (2020): 243.

[38] Bristol Radical History Group, "Edward Colston: A Century of Dissent and Protest", Bristol Radical History Group, 2 June 2021, https://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/edward-colston-a-century-of-dissent-and-protest/; Timothy Ryback, "Black Lives Matter: Toppling Colston - Vandalism or Vindication?", International Bar Association, 24 June 2020, https://www.ibanet.org/article/BD33E13D-A4D8-4F57-A7F6-026D6AF54130.

RAC.[39] Similarly, published in 1973, Derek Robinson's *A Shocking History of Bristol* brought Colston's chequered past into the public eye, reigniting debates about his celebrity status.[40] 'Slave Trader' was scrawled onto the statue in 1998, resulting in national news coverage,[41] and the name of the city's most famous concert venue (formerly called 'Colston Hall') has been protested for decades.[42] Though the venue had been in the process of being renamed since 2017, it was only after the felling of the statue that its name was officially changed.[43]

Colston's officially celebrated posthumous identity is spatially bound to Bristol as a metropolitan city—he has been called the "Bristol Saint"[44] and a son of the city. However, his escapades, and certainly those of the RAC, were rooted in Africa and the Americas, a fact which is not acknowledged on the monument. This spatial and conceptual separation of the colony and the metropole, which constitutes a nationalist imagining of the British Empire, was the precursor to a transition from direct rule to neo-colonialism, commonwealth, and internal colonialism, optimistically and neatly contained within the phrase 'post-colonialism'.[45] It is important to recognise the debates around the distinction between postcolonialism as a theoretical approach and post-colonialism as a temporal phenomenon, predicated on the binary division between the time of colonialism and the time after colonialism. Anne McClintock perhaps most famously criticised the overoptimistic, abstract, and ahistorical uses of 'post-

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[39] Henry J. Wilkins, *Edward Colston (1636-1721 A.D.): A Chronological Account of His Life and Work Together with an Account of the Colston Societies and Memorials in Bristol* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1920).

[40] Derek Robinson, *A Shocking History of Bristol* (London: Abson Books, 1973).

[41] Emma Wilkins, "Graffiti Attack Revives Bristol Slavery Row", *The Times*, 29 January 1998.

[42] Steven Morris, "Bristol's Colston Hall Renamed after Decades of Protests", *the Guardian*, 23 September 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/23/bristols-colston-hall-renamed-in-wake-of-black-lives-matter-protests.

[43] Steven Morris, "Bristol's Colston Hall to Drop Name of Slave Trader after Protests", *the Guardian*, 26 April 2017, http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/apr/26/bristol-colston-hall-to-drop-name-of-slave-trader-after-protests.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 59–106.

colonialism' to denote a common past and condition.[46] In this paper, I follow the lead of Ashcroft et al.[47] in acknowledging the heterogenous and nuanced applications of the term. I use the hyphenated form 'post-colonialism' to denote an idea of posteriority and progress and 'postcolonialism' to reference a more nuanced, resistance-centred theoretical approach.

The way that Colston is (mis)remembered in official narratives is a part of Britain's 'public memory'. Bodnar defines public memory as "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and, by implication, its future", stressing that public memory is fundamentally a question of "the structure of power in society".[48] This idea of shaping understanding of the future and the contemporary relevance of public memory of colonialism in Britain was highlighted during the 2016 Brexit referendum.[49] Trafford notes that during the 'Vote Leave' campaign, Britain's "'post-colonial melancholia' for its lost colonies"[50] was brought to a head. The nationalist Brexit discourse, exemplified by the slogan 'Vote leave, take back control',[51] showed that despite concerted attempts to cultivate a culture of nostalgic romanticism, "Britain is necessarily stuck within the stuttering time-loops of the post-colonial cut".[52] Brexit stoked an old but smouldering fire. The felling of the Colston statue, which happened towards the end of the turbulent Brexit process, reignited post-colonial anxieties and discomfiture within the British imagination. This notion of taking back control which has been lost relates to a deep longing for the 'good

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[46] Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 84–98.

[47] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2013), 168–73.

[48] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 15.

[49] Kerem Nisancioglu, "Racial Sovereignty", *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. S1 (1 September 2020): 55–58.

[50] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 8.

[51] Susan K Schmidt, "An Institutional Mismatch: Why 'Taking Back Control' Proved so Appealing", *LSE BREXIT* (blog), 7 May 2020, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/05/07/an-institutional-mismatch-why-taking-back-control-proved-so-appealing/.

[52] Trafford, *The Empire at Home: Internal Colonies and the End of Britain*, 184.

old days', or what Paul Gilroy calls "fantasies of return to the imaginary homogeneity of past whiteness and the restoration of Britain's imperial status".[53] That is to say, British public memory constantly tries to recapture and reimagine a "past not yet past",[54] a past of imagined simplicity that haunts the present. This imagined simplicity is often conceptualised as a time of cultural and ethnic homogeneity[55] when the public was not accosted with 'wokeness', BLM, athletes taking the knee, and 'political correctness gone mad'. In using 'haunt' here, I evoke the engagement of Black studies scholars with Jacques Derrida's 'hauntology'—the ghost-like return of the past in the present [56]. As Diana Taylor puts it, pervasive narratives of conquest and control "haunt the present" and produce publicly acceptable memories. Taylor refers specifically to the Americas here; however, this idea of haunting certainly applies to the British context generally and to Bristol specifically. While the looming figure of Colston haunted some, it quietly comforted others.

Why is the felling of the Colston statue so significant?

In *The Black Shoals,* Tiffany Lethabo King problematises the official narratives and public memory of settler colonialism in the United States. Through an analysis of a Christopher Columbus statue, defaced and tagged by protestors in Boston, she conceptualises conquest as a "living present"[57] that is constantly repeated, realised, and resisted. She extends Patrick Wolfe's assertation that conquest and invasion is "a structure not an event"[58], stating that conquest and settler colonial violence is "a milieu or active set of relations that we can push on, move around in, and redo from moment to

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[53] Paul Gilroy, "A London Sumting Dis...", *AA Files*, no. 49 (2003): 7.

[54] Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 13.

[55] Gilroy, "A London Sumting Dis...", 7.

[56] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 1994).

[57] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[58] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 388.

moment."[59] I believe the same can be said of the various other projects of the British Empire. King calls the defacing of the Columbus statue "anti-colonial theatricality"[60], a performance that violently, if momentarily, interrupts narratives that "disavow and 'unknow' the ongoing violence of conquest".[61] I contend that the collective performance of removing the Colston statue and throwing it into the harbour where slave ships once moored[62] constitutes anti-colonial theatricality that resists British romanticism and colonial nostalgia. Those who removed the Edward Colston statue showed that Bristol, a city whose wealth is directly linked to the transatlantic slave trade[63], can be a site of resistance rather than quiet complicity.

In Foucauldian terms, this anti-colonial theatricality of vandalising and removing the Colston statue is a kind of 'counter-memory',[64] which "looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives" and "forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past".[65] When it comes to colonialism, imperialism, and conquest, the dominant narrative in Bristol, and Britain as a whole, is cloaked in romanticism and revisionism, a narrative that has stubbornly persisted in the face of decades of criticism. The felling did not come out of the blue, nor is it the first anti-colonial theatrical performance in Bristol, but it was one of the loudest rebuttals yet to the drone of colonial romanticism. As a theatrical performance, the removal and vandalism of the statue literally forces this public memory into view and into question. The importance and power of performance in counter-memory and

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[59] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 40.

[60] Ibid., 41.

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] Nasar, "Remembering Edward Colston", 1218.

[63] Christine Chivallon, "Bristol and the Eruption of Memory: Making the Slave-Trading Past Visible", *Social & Cultural Geography* 2, no. 3 (2001): 347–63; Madge Dresser, "Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol", *Slavery and Abolition* 30, no. 2 (2009): 223–46.

[64] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Cornell University Press, 1980).

[65] George Lipsitz, *Time Passages*, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 213.

identity construction has previously been discussed.[66] However, Buffington and Waldner[67] have cautioned that the physical removal of monuments can ironically lead to a form of harmful counter-revisionism that ultimately produces an equally ahistorical and romanticised counter-narrative. This has also been argued in the British press after a sculpture of Black Lives Matter protestor Jen Reid was erected (and quickly removed) in place of the Colston statue.[68] However, I argue that in this case, the physicality of the vandalism and toppling was a direct and much-needed refusal of the spatio-temporal cut narrative that pervades in British post-colonialism. I contend that anti-colonial theatricality is not the same as romanticism. Statues are not "merely symbolic" and nor is the act of tearing them down; indeed, as Rahul Rao notes, the felling of statues has been "emblematic of liberation" for Anglo-American imperialism as well as postcolonial resistance.[69] In direct response to what the Home Office calls "widespread upset about the damage and desecration of memorials with a recent spate over the summer of 2020",[70] a new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill was introduced. Section 46 in particular,[71] which has increased the maximum penalty for criminal damage of less than £5,000 to a memorial from 3 months' to 10 years' imprisonment, highlights the tangible value that statues and monuments have in the eyes of the carceral British state.

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[66] Zane Radzobe, "Performance as Counter-Memory: Latvian Theatre Makers' Reflections on National History", *Nordic Theatre Studies* 31, no. 1 (2019): 92–107.

[67] Melanie L Buffington and Erin Waldner, "Human Rights, Collective Memory, and Counter Memory: Unpacking the Meaning of Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia", *Journal of Cultural Research in Art Education*, 2011, 92–108.

[68] "Edward Colston Statue Replaced by Sculpture of Black Lives Matter Protester Jen Reid", *the Guardian*, 15 July 2020, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/15/edward-colston-statue-replaced-by-sculpture-of-black-lives-matter-protester.

[69] Rahul Rao, "On Statues", *The Disorder Of Things* (blog), 2 April 2016, https://thedisorderofthings.com/2016/04/02/on-statues/.

[70] Home Office, "Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Criminal Damage to Memorials Factsheet", Home Office Website, 13 May 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-criminal-damage-to-memorials-factsheet.

[71] Home Office, "Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021: Criminal Damage to Memorials", Pub. L. No. 268, § 46 (2021).

It is also important to note the collectivity of the removal of the statue. Such collaboration is a way of reclaiming power through "collective catharsis", which Fanon describes as "a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the forms of aggression can be released."[72] For Fanon, such catharsis or cleansing cannot happen without violence—indeed, he contends that violence is a "cleansing force"[73] insofar as it allows the native to reclaim and restore their identity. Of course, neo-metropolitan Bristol is very different to Algeria under violent colonial rule, where Fanon writes from. The violence that Fanon describes is also not the same as the violence enacted by the Black Lives Matters protestors (though it is important to note that the vandalism did have direct carceral consequences, as four people were charged with criminal damage under the new Crime Bill).[74] However, the principal of "collective catharsis" is still useful when thinking about responses and resistance to a system that is "always changing and in flux".[75] Of course, removing a statue in and of itself is not decolonial. However, as Bristol City Poet Vanessa Kisuule has noted, the "blissful catharsis"[76] of the removal of a statue whose presence has been questioned for decades should not be quickly dismissed. In this new phase of hegemonic rule, there is a parallel to be drawn between the necessity of violence for decolonisation as Fanon describes it and also for anti-colonial resistance as King sees it. Whether in colonial Algeria, the settler colonial United States, or neocolonial Britain, resistance to colonialism and its many effects must involve collaboration and disruption.

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[72] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 145.

[73] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 94.

[74] "Edward Colston Statue: Four Charged with Criminal Damage", *BBC News*, 9 December 2020, Bristol, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-55248263.

[75] King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, 49.

[76] Vanessa Kisuule, "Bristol City Poet Vanessa Kisuule: 'Edward Colston Does Not Represent Us'", Blog, *NME* (blog), 12 June 2020, https://www.nme.com/features/vanessa-kisuule-edward-colston-statue-bristol-2686256.

Conclusion

The dominant narrative of a spatio-temporal cut at the end of formal empire has led to a public reimagining of the violent realities of colonialism and its effects in Britain today. With the felling of the Colston statue, official narratives of (mis)remembrance have been countered and resisted. This resistance is not new, but it has taken on a new life with the violent disruption of the city's most potent symbol of historical revisionism. Applying the thinking of King, I have argued that the toppling of the statue, similar to the vandalism of a Christopher Columbus statue in Boston, was an example of anti-colonial theatricality that disrupts the dominant narratives of colonial pastness. The performance constructed a counter-memory through collective catharsis. As Foucault shows,[77] the relationship between knowledge and power is one of entanglement and inseparability: what we 'know' about the past is bound to structures of power. The Black Lives Matter protestors in Bristol momentarily interrupted the dominant narrative upheld by structures of power in Britain by showing that colonialism is indeed a "living present". The visceral carceral reaction of the government to the felling of the Colston statue confirms that symbols of public memory are much more than decorative or commemorative. New laws introduced by Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick in January 2021 seek to safeguard "historic monuments at risk of removal" and "protect England's cultural and historic heritage"[78] from "woke militants who want to censor the past".[79] In this time of renewed neocolonial fervour, critical scholarship that engages with acts of resistance such as this is imperative. This essay is a small contribution to this important work.

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[77] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I.*

[78] Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, Oliver Dowden, and Robert Jenrick, "New Legal Protection for England's Heritage", Press Release, GOV.UK, 17 January 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-legal-protection-for-england-s-heritage.

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