

We, the Living Archives

UK Community of Practice

whose  knowledge?

Literary Archives and Memory

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Liberatory Archives and Memory



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This collection of essays is part of the Whose Knowledge? Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMY) UK Community of Practice knowledge production series. Together, memory workers, artists, and archivists share reflections, research, and anti-colonial practices that reimagine archives as living, collective spaces of resistance, solidarity, and liberation.

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Whose Knowledge?

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Liberatory Archives and Memory Programme

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This publication was creatively designed and printed in Malaysia. Working with limited resources, designing and printing in Malaysia ensured the publication could be produced within our budget, while also enabling us to compensate the designer and printer fairly for their creative labour and expertise. In this way, the publication reflects the translocal solidarities that shape our work through shared commitments to ethical production.

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Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMy)

Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMy) is a programme at Whose Knowledge?.

It is an action to build critical archival knowledge and document archival practices. It brings together a community of individuals, groups, and institutions from across the world to collectively reimagine “the archive” and “sites of memory” as powerful spaces and acts of resistance, healing, and transformation.

Central to the programme are the infrastructures of (liberatory) archives and memory for imagining alternatives to Big Knowledge (archives, museums, libraries and other memory institutions such as academic and publishing) and examine how knowledge, history, and memory are produced, held, and shared.

www.liberatoryarchivesmemory.org

Whose Knowledge?

Whose Knowledge? is a global, translocal multilingual non-profit organisation and a campaign centering the multiple knowledges, histories, leadership, and imaginations of the minoritised majority of the world (including but not only, on the internet), towards collective liberation. We are working towards feminist and plural futures anchored in reparative frameworks and practices at the intersections of epistemic, social, and tech justice.

The Global Majority comprises 3/4 of the online population, coming from Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands. Our leadership, design, and imaginations have rarely been centered in institutions of what we call “Big Knowledge” (mainstream academia, publishing, museums, archives, libraries and memory organisations) as well as “Big Tech” (Silicon Valley and other regionally dominant tech capitalist companies). To address this, we intentionally collaborate with women, indigenous and racialised communities, LGBTQI+ and other minoritised communities from the Global South and its diasporas to represent, amplify and (re)centre our knowledges.

www.whoseknowLedge.org

Introductions

WE ARE HERE because of a sustained commitment to centering, uplifting, and supporting community archivists. We are here to reimagine the archive through liberatory approaches. We begin from the understanding that the archive is not a neutral space — it is a site of contestation, where power operates through inclusion, omission and interpretation. To work with archives is to disrupt and dismantle the conditions through which knowledge is produced, legitimised and remembered. Grounded in feminist, anti-colonial, and community-centered led practices, our work is an act of hope that creates possibilities, unsettles dominant epistemologies, and shifts narratives.

At the Liberatory Archives and Memory programme (LAMy), we work with communities that have historically been excluded from institutional archives. We co-design spaces with our communities through collective processes, conversations, facilitation, and

liberatory archives workshops. We document communities' liberatory archival practices and build networks of support and care across contexts around the globe. This publication is the UK Community of Practice's living archive, a continuation of the liberatory legacies of memory workers, scholars, archivists, and historians who have long understood the power of the archive, its potential, and its afterlives.

LAMy is one of Whose Knowledge?'s interventions to centre the multiple knowledges, histories, leadership, and imaginations of the minoritised majority of the world (including but not only on the internet), towards collective liberation. At Whose Knowledge?, we are Black, brown, queer, trans, Indigenous, Dalit and allied feminists. We are rooted in our Global Majority (GM) communities, with the privilege to move between Global North and Global South technology, civil society, policy, and academic spaces.

We break the silos between knowledge and technology spaces; resist and challenge narratives of erasure, violence, and marketisation perpetuated and sustained by Big Tech and Big Knowledge; and prototype and re-imagine equitable, liberatory knowledge producing and archiving practices and technologies.

The UK Community of Practice began to take shape three years ago. An invitation was sent to African-descent and other minoritised memory workers in the UK to gather for a one-day event in Bristol, co-hosted with the Black South West Network. Together, we asked: where and with whom do you do your memory work? What are your favourite archival/memory frameworks and practices? What are we dismantling? What are we dreaming of, and towards? These questions — and our responses — did not end there. They unfolded across four further convenings — online, in Bristol, Birmingham, London and Brighton, held with a committed constellation of advisors, co-designers and participants. Beginning our global conversations of liberatory memory practices from within the United Kingdom, was intentional and critical, given its colonial histories that impact most of the Global Majority world, and the complicity of its GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, museums) institutions with oppressive systems of power.

We would like to acknowledge and thank:

Kelly Foster, who initiated and conceptualised Whose (Digital) Archives? with advisors Abira Hussein, Amanda Egbe, Hannah Ishmael and Sado Jirde (Whose Digital Archives? was the former name for LAMy UK).

Anasuya Sengupta, Whose Knowledge? Co-founder and our ED for supporting the conceptualisation of LAMy, co-strategising and co-facilitating the early convenings.

Our Brighton convening

co-designers: Dr. Carol Ann Dixon, Danni Ebanks-Ingram, Japheth Monzon, Dr. Savita Vij, Dr. Tola Dabiri and Tony Kalume.

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Shout out to our team at Whose Knowledge? especially our finance and operations team, Ashima Bhardwaj, Bareya Khan and Constanza Verón. We thank Azar Causevic, for providing an extra hand whenever needed and for reviewing the publication. We thank our colleagues, and friends who held and supported the LAMy team.

We hope you enjoy the publication; our archival proposal serves as a reminder of our plurality, and that there was never one narrative.

*The Liberatory Archives
and Memory co-leads,*
Ezrena Marwan and Sally Al-Haq

EDITORIAL:

*Overview
of the
LAMy
Knowledge
Production
Series*

By Dr. Carol Ann Dixon

Co-creating an inclusive community of practice

FOLLOWING THE APRIL 2025 convening on Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMy), hosted by *Whose Knowledge?* in Brighton, participants at that gathering and other previous learning circles were invited to contribute to a new series of knowledge pieces showcasing progressive approaches to archiving, curatorship, heritage education, community-based storytelling and other aspects of memory work.

An open call for authors and other documentarians was issued to achieve these ambitions:

- To transform the UK LAMy network from an events-focused collective into a dynamic community of practice through which to exchange information, reflect on past outputs, learn together and discuss work-in-progress.
- To provide an inclusive online forum that supports and facilitates collaborative working, ideas exchanges and further knowledge co-production.
- To widen access to the LAMy community, its events and its online resources — moving beyond ‘word-of-mouth’ invitations towards more transparent and open methods of communication and participation.

“An archive may be largely about ‘the past’ but it is always ‘re-read’ in the light of the present and the future... Thus it is extremely important that archives are committed to inclusiveness, since it is impossible to foretell what future practitioners, critics and historians will want to make of it.”

— Stuart Hall (“*Constituting an Archive*,” 2001, p. 92)

Diverse perspectives and thought- provoking narratives

This inaugural series of knowledge pieces showcases a diversity of artistic, educational and socio-political narratives about heritage and memory, presented in a variety of formats — from review articles and photo-essays, through to collaborative anthologies of poetry and prose, dialogical writing and evaluative project reports.

Collectively, the contributions explore thought-provoking issues and themes related to decolonising museums and archives, analysing the language of memory work, artistic expressions of cultural heritage and identity, research ethics and social justice activism.

The series opens with Dr. Savita Vij's engaging reflections on the LAMy Brighton convening — titled, ***We, the Living Archives***.

Two insightful photo-essays showcase examples of transnational, diaspora-related research, linked respectively to the Caribbean and Vietnam: ***Black Geographies of Kings Hill, Dominica***, by Nathaniel Télémaque; and ***Family Photographs from the Vietnamese Diaspora Set in Motion***, by Cârô Gervay.

Other contributors present poignant narratives about family history, inter-generational heritage dialogues, kinship and ancestral commemoration — as featured in Dr. Marcia Michael's moving essay, ***Mother, Memory, History***.

“Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another.”
— Stuart Hall (*“Constituting an Archive,”* 2001, p. 92)

Reflecting on the earlier LAMy convening held in Birmingham (June 2024), a selection of articles analyse and reference the theories and archives of the renowned Jamaican-British cultural studies scholar Professor Stuart Hall (1932-2014) — including: ***The Politics of Black Cultural Memory***, by Lisa Amanda Palmer; and ***“Mind the Gap”: Heritage Work in a Fractured Present***, co-written by JC Niala and Johanna Zetterström-Sharp.

Anti-discrimination struggles and social justice activism recur as important points of focus throughout the series — centralising the life stories, collective actions and knowledge systems of historically marginalised communities. For example, essayist Corrd Marcus Brown's writing on ***“Joy/Resistance”*** exemplifies the healing, self-actualisation and emancipatory power of ‘Black Joy’ expressiveness, drawing from his own lived experiences of change-agency, within and beyond the arts and heritage sectors.

Collaboration, new developments and future growth

In addition to individual knowledge pieces, collaborative knowledge co-production is showcased in a provocative anthology of narratives about decolonising museums and archives — addressing the question “*Who does the work?*”; and also exemplified in a co-authored report, *Thematic Threads*, discussing the benefits of peer-to-peer partnerships.

The series concludes with project summaries about how funding from *Whose Knowledge?* is supporting new and experimental strands of established heritage initiatives. These include: the development of a digital, AR prototype educational resource linked to the *Tapestry of Black Britons* project, conceived and directed by Paula Ogun Hector; funding for History Trunkies to create a digital walking tour and archives-related storytelling experience exploring anti-racist community activism in the West Midlands — titled, *Smethwick 1964 — Tracing the Routes of Resistance*; and funding for Diversity Lewes to undertake a community-informed, heritage protection project in Sussex and co-produce a *Cultural Heritage Protection & Healing Toolkit*.

The sharing of these published pieces offers free access to a growing hub of LAMy-related learning resources, a warm welcome to the community of practice and an open invitation to add additional perspectives to this expanding series on liberatory archives and memory.

SERIES EDITOR

Dr. Carol Ann Dixon

REFERENCE

Hall, Stuart. (2001) “*Constituting an Archive*.” *Third Text*, 15(54), 89–92. www.doi.org/10.1080/09528820108576903

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Dr. Carol Ann Dixon is a cultural geographer and education consultant with research interests in African and Caribbean diaspora histories, geography-art alignment, museology and the politics of heritage. She blogs at Museum Geographies: museumgeographies.com.

Essays

“We, the Living Archives”

By Dr. Savita Vij

Familiar Strangers

Over 30 memory workers, mostly from Global majority backgrounds walk into a room in Brighton on a sunny Saturday morning for a weekend together. What's the punchline? Reflecting on the LAMY Brighton gathering in April 2025, our subconscious memories of the impact were activated as a team of co-designers. Having met a number of times virtually before the event, we had consciously designed for discovering links between “us”; hosting participants from different localities and niche projects. The intentions were to give space for attendees to co-create the experience — yet in a climate of digital, often hybrid working, making these connections in practice was not taken for granted. We shared the familiarity of working in heritage, yet mostly as strangers to each other's work.

Open-Mic Curating

A highlight and the subject of this musing was the open-mic “spotlights”, where participants stepped up and curated their work. They provided audio-visual trailers of archival projects, immersive experiences and thought-provoking questions. Creative interpretations of various archives were poignantly presented as guided local heritage walks, poetry, photography and the re-imagining of objects as part of customs rather than (colonial) cupboard curiosities.¹

Devika curated “**Uncomfortable Oxford**” tours in which she uses *play* to engage her audiences in being curious about the colonial nature of curiosity itself. This is to navigate tours of collections classified as part of the 16th century “age of discovery” like the Pitt Rivers and Natural History Museum.

Photography was also playfully illuminated in Carô Gervay's practice. A co-director at “The Gate Darkroom” based in South East London. She organises collaborative projects and intimate gatherings where family photographs are **re-framed** from stillness to the stories around them. The provocation was of self-curated images of Vietnamese women in the diasporic space questioning what was beyond the frame? This was explored

1 [See article by Devika 2024. 'On Tour Development: From Curiosity and Colonialism to Unnatural Histories'.](#)

in collective gatherings and conversations around their own photographs and experiences.²

Whilst Marcia Michael, exhibiting her work at the Midlands Art Centre Birmingham, brought her mother (who has passed away) into the room as part of her current archival work, titled **“The Family Album”**. Poetry was used to communicate the dilemmas encountered of holding on to your core and body amongst patriarchal relationships.

Carol Ann Dixon raised other conflicts as she viewed the work of Carrie Mae Weems, notably **“From Here I Saw What Happened and Cried”**. As a lens-based artist, Weems dialogues with the photographs taken of enslaved people of African descent in the American South during the 19th century, as well as early-20th century archival images depicting the Jim Crow era of racial segregation. Whilst Dixon asks us about the educative potential and also harm of witnessing this documentation?

What struck me most in processing the impact of these sessions was an amplification of what I experience when immersed in archival spaces — being aware of deep emotional investments. I experienced this as an audience member in links between projects and personal lives with family members or ancestral ties. Geographies that archivists/curators connected with whether rural England or ancestral areas such as Vietnam or the Caribbean. Identifying issues that brought to the fore strong feelings. And the bringing to life of what can often be invisibilised, “closed”, restricted or merely an abstracted collection of objects/texts.

‘We’, as living archives

It is in these non-transactional moments of relating to participants as curators, sharing and unpacking their archival journeys and questions that I described in the post-reflection that as memory-workers “we are living archives”. Living Archives, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes are:

“...present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended. The new work which will come to constitute significant additions to the archive will not be the same as that which was produced earlier....This notion of ‘living’ is strongly counter-posed to the common meaning accorded to ‘tradition’, which is seen to function like the prison-house of the past.” (Hall, 2024 p89)

2 See Gervay’s work Reframes www.carolinegervay.com/reframes

I use this term to capture participants' being immersed in their work, where the boundaries between archival work and self-investments are blurred. Such as Nathaniel Telemaque's production of a "**Black Geographies**" newsletter — engaging with place-based research of the landscape of Kings Hill, Dominica, using photography, research and local conversations; distributed back into these places.³ The past and archival sources can be seen as "companions" in the way Azoulay (2019, p16) describes it, rather than knowledge conquests. There is an instinctive sensitivity towards being ethical in the research. Redefining contact with institutional archives and heritage spaces which can confine and imprison the past; whilst active and playful readings through the camera lens or physical travel actively attempt to release it. In expansion of Hall's notion, it is also thinking about how archives also live within and pass between us.

Emotional Inheritance

I connect it with psychotherapist Galit Atlas's work on *emotional inheritance*. Feelings, unspoken, and unresolved traumas that pass on inter-generationally, can appear unexpectedly. In this space of memory work, it can show up as grief of losing heritage when ancestors pass or discussing violence behind the photo frame. In the case of this reflection, it especially relates to the emotions that arise when sharing histories of slavery, colonialism and the changing faces of racism. Venturing into the archives brings up the discomfort of navigating our own histories held in "official" archives. Or even knowledge withheld.

Iman Khan, takes the spotlight and inquires into her angst of **academic institutional archives**. She explores the links universities have with reproducing violence through ties to weapons production deployed in regions which reflect ancestry. There is an acknowledgement about the lack of conscious awareness of the links our own institutions may have. Whilst Nadine Aranki, as part of "**Curate Brent**" reflects on how to decolonise the museum space without reproducing being objectified — complex histories turned into, lets say, a porcelain teapot, which we collectively problem-solve in relation to common experiences of this.

3 Black Geographies of Kings Hill Dominica

Was this coincidental? In designing for connecting we thought expansively about bringing our whole selves in. The unintended impact was the exchanges of experiences that enable living and emotional inheritance to breathe. Being hosted by LAMY to process and question not just what we think, but what we feel about our work was priceless.

Atlas in her therapeutic practice speaks of how the “ghosts of the past are alive in our unconscious. To some degree, we are all gatekeepers of the unspeakable” (Atlas, 2022. ‘Emotional Inheritance’, p233). When memory workers from global majority backgrounds connect over our own histories, the punchline of the event for me is in the possibilities of archival work in the face of what may have been unspeakable. To speak through the archives, activate them as dynamic spaces of social connections. In doing so, this can hold space for traumatic legacies. Engaging in healthy bickering over the interpretations of tradition (which we experienced in Brighton). And, most importantly, gain the opportunity to connect collectively with the past and the struggles which go on.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Savita Vij is an educator and researcher focusing on community histories. She runs the platform History-Trunkies designing and facilitating learning experiences. She studied Cultural Studies at Birmingham University and her career has included working in the space of documentary-dramas, research, policy work and journalism. Current projects include ‘Antiracist Histories of Birmingham’ 1940s – 2025 with BRIG (Birmingham Race Impact Group) and commemorating the project ‘1964: Making History’ – Malcolm X’s visit to Birmingham through the archival histories of the Indian Workers Association.



Brighton Convening, April 2025.

Mother, Memory, History.

By Dr. Marcia Michael

A Voice Unfolding

Through my creative practice, I challenge the presence — and often absence — of the Black subject within the family album by constructing, using photography as my exploration point, an archive of reclamation. Drawing on series such as *The Study of Kin* and *The Family Album* (2009), *The Object of My Gaze*, which began in 2015 where I photographed my mother and myself, became the basis of my PhD research. This intergenerational visuality enabled me to engage in a black feminist discourse of memory, and African diasporic traditions, where I reimagined and restructured history through the empowered, political, and self-loving Black body.

Matrilineal Roots: When and Why My Mother Became Central

My mother's stories formed the backbone of my understanding of myself as an artist and my practice. I absorbed the fragments of laughter, grief, and resilience. Over time, I recognised that these narratives carried the weight of histories denied by dominant accounts. My interest in my matrilineal history crystallised when I witnessed how my mother's body and voice awakened my sense of belonging and presence: she taught me not only family names, but gestures of being and knowing. In photographing her, I learned a methodology that, through research, I understood as Black Matrilineage. My camera became a tool to recover fragments as "rememories" that reside in the body and mind. I came to see my mother's body as an archive: a vessel through which multiple histories speak. This realisation transformed my practice. The question "How do I speak what has been unspeakable?" became central. I questioned how, through a Black Matrilineage, the transmission of histories from mothers to daughters of the past can be both a methodology and a manifesto.

Visual Acts of Recovery: Photography and Poetic Witnessing

Photography became an act of refusal and re-embodiment, a space where past and present collapsed. Repeated poses and gestures blurred temporal boundaries, revealing what Toni Morrison (1994) calls “rememory,” a thought picture that emerges across generations. I do not apologise for confronting painful truths; rather, I invite viewers to witness: to hear echoes of ancestral voices and feel the tension between what history has obscured and what surfaces through our flesh-to-flesh connection.

Extending into various media, each offering another layer of the story, I wrote to hear histories of refusal, ways of knowing that resist erasure. These offerings ask: how might our cultural memories intertwine, and how might we, together, re-narrate a world that has long silenced certain voices?



Partus Sequitur Ventrem from the series *The Object of My Gaze* (2015–2025),
Digital photograph, 60 x 20 inches © Marcia Michael.

Presenting at LAMy Brighton

At the LAMy Brighton convening, I presented work grounded in matrilineal voice. I offered voices waiting to be remembered, I positioned myself to echo (hi)stories. In return, I felt the potency of collective witnessing: shared attention affirming each story. As I spoke, I made eye contact with each practitioner, singular connections forming a circle of solidarity. This reminded me that individual recovery is entwined with communal solidarity: when one voice rises, it supports many others.

Centring My Mother's History: The Power of poetry and presence

I read *My History, Breathe and Listen*, from *My History is in Her(e)*, (2022), from the series *The Object of My Gaze* (2015-2025).

The first, an introduction, *My History*, was presented as a means to explain my birth story. The title of the next poem was poised to deliver a poignant response to the last sentence of the first poem, allowing the audience to take a *breath*, to believe my questioning of my mother's experience of having me. I spoke with honesty. The last poem, *Listen* is where I urged from a place of vulnerability the need to be heard. At times, I paused and repeated questions, extending the sense of endurance that Black histories carry, whilst directing my gaze at an individual. This was important. It had to be a person and not just space.

I used gestures to emphasise the connection of embodied experiences. Extending words not on the page, holding eye contact, and believing that shared silences (tied by an invisible thread that I had drawn with my breath and my history) underscore that recovery happens in a community.

I offer a sample of the three poems.

My History

Mother

She gave birth to me.

She birthed

me

no!

I was pulled, yanked out of the trapped furnace of her,
she gave birth to me.

(the last line)

I am sure that in the past, in her history she was happy.

Breathe

Why do the silenced remain silent?

When they have voices to be

heard.voices.to.shake.the.nations.

and.narratives.to

perform, receive, return and retrieve.

Why do the silenced — hmm?

Why do I remain silent?

Listen

I have decided that the time for you to hear my story is now.

No more waiting

no more fear

no more thinking that time will correct the past,

without my voice.

I am concerned for the new voices silenced by this master narrative.

Reflections on Presenting at LAMy Brighton

As I spoke these matrilineal stories, I wondered how comfortably witnesses sat. These narratives can unsettle, while beckoning deeper empathy and collective responsibility. Though I spoke without images, the visual act of mother-daughter matrilineage permitted these words to manifest. At the convention, feminist discourse emerged as a theory of recovery: considering what one might reclaim in an embodied family archive to understand self, family, collective, and culture.

I hoped that this offering would enable them, in their own way, to become part of a conversation that would dismantle patriarchal narratives and re-embody marginalised pasts. To understand oneself, family, collective and culture.

My practice is my testimony.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Marcia Michael is an artist of Caribbean and African heritage, born in the UK. Her multidisciplinary practice centres and extends from photography. Michael challenges the presence of the black subject within the auspices of the family album by constructing an archive of family reclamation through her practice. www.marciamichael.co.uk

**Black
Geographies
of Kings Hill,
Dominica:
*A Photo-Essay***

By Nathaniel Télémaque





Above:

35mm "Kings Hill Post Office"

Previous page:

120mm "9/10 Houses Kings Hill"

DURING THE SPRING OF 2024, I visited Dominica for the first time in my life. This was a trip and a body of work I had long endeavoured to create; however I simply did not have the capacity to commit to, being ensnared in the everyday happenings of life in London. Nevertheless, having the opportunity to commit myself to an autoethnographic practice-based geography project taking place in Dominica, I turned my lens towards the aims of framing ideas of home, heritage and belonging. By 'autoethnographic practice-based geography', what I really mean to say is that I situated my personal experiences, observations and perceptions of visiting Dominica at the heart of this geographic project. The practice-based aspect of this project lies with me using audio-visual art activities in photography, film and soundscapes, to support my observations. This body of work can be read as a positioning of myself as a Black British and Dominican subject caught between islands, an individual whose home lies both with the imperial metropole of London and the verdant green, beautiful gardens and savannahs of Dominica.



Black Geographies of Kings Hill, Dominica, is a project I had initiated upon my first visit to Dominica. I wrote approximately 27,000 words of reflective fieldnotes, made a series of analogue photographs, montage film clips and soundscapes, thereby situating these activities as forms of Black creativity that underscored my framings of Kings Hill Dominica. As a Black British individual of Dominican descent, this project was more akin to 'heartwork' and or 'homework' than it was fieldwork in the 'traditional' sense. The audio-visual activities I took up were all advanced as artistic practices oriented to making genuine connections with Dominica's people and places, whilst depicting the beauty of Dominica's poetic landscapes.

I purposefully chose to position myself as the subject of my practice-based geographic research and audio-visual art activities, as opposed to hastily making superficial connections with Dominica's people on my first visit. By doing so, I genuinely believe that photographing people on my initial visit to Dominica would have led to my enabling and engaging in extractive processes of knowledge production. In light of this moral and ethical dilemma, I chose not to photograph Dominica's people unless they explicitly requested this, or it was a photograph taking place in a public setting, and I was informed that it was appropriate for me to do so. This kind of slow and more considerate audio-visual arts practice allowed me to enact a politics of refusal in my research and artistic activities taken up in Dominica, a politics which actively resists neoliberal capitalist means of producing knowledge.

Finally, it is by sharing a series of photographs and handwritten reflections in this photo-essay that I hope to demonstrate that knowledge pertaining to geographic locales exists in a myriad of forms. Thus it is, in viewing snapshots of these Kings Hill Dominica and beyond, that I hope this photo-essay encourages readers to reflect on their own everyday notions of home, heritage and belonging.

The following reflections were handwritten and transcribed during my first visit to Dominica. These reflections share my ideas of home, heritage and belonging.

[03/04/2024]

I come from a council estate in North West London, called St.RAPHAEL'S hence my artist name St.Peso. Perhaps in another reality, I was born and raised in Roseau in Kings Hill where I then became a kings hill boy. This idea of originally coming from a Kings Hill intrigues me as it expands my global Black Geographies beyond city based experiences. In Kings Hill I'm being situated a lot more closer to nature.

[08/04/2024]

This embodied experience of returning "home". Or going to my mother's and grandmother's home. This idea I have of belonging to a place I've never been up until now and yet almost immediately being capable of reckoning with the facts of my situation. All of it, today my thoughts and feelings, my grounded experiences of stepping of the plane and walking around a small yet deep section of Kings Hill. It's everything I anticipated, but at the same time could not be further from what I expected I would feel. These ARE my geographies.

[16/04/2024]

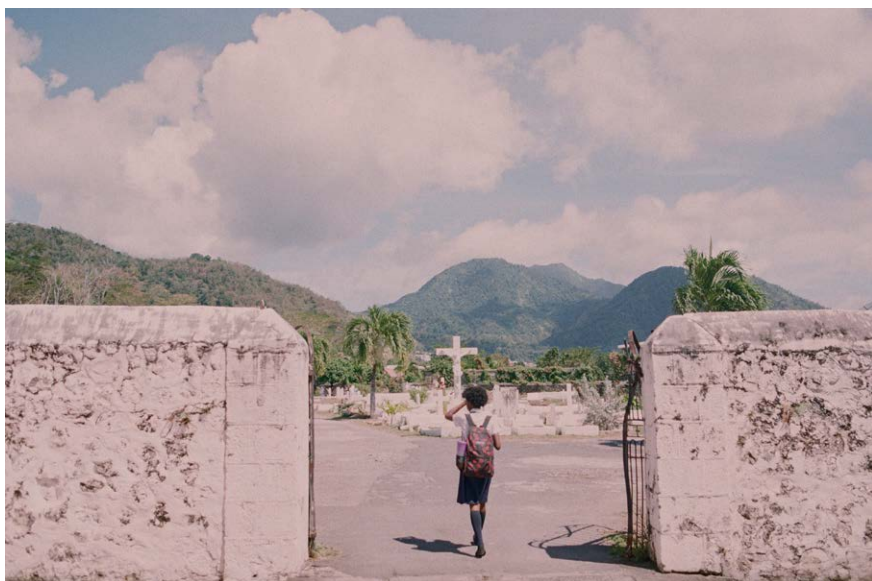
I spent the entire day on Kings Hill visiting and spending time with family who've also come to visit Dominica. This family previously lived on the island, so it's something of a grand return. There are grandparents, parents and children, so there generations in all who have here for a wedding.

[17/04/2024]

How can the fieldwork be the "field" for one when this is the place my ancestors were taken to through the advancement of the transatlantic slave trade. My existence and positionality have come about through a synthesis of Dominica's and the U.K's histories or more generally/widely the histories of the Caribbean. I am potentially my ancestors wildest dreams or their wildest nightmares.

[23/04/2024]

My heritage lays with these natural kinds of places in Dominica just as much as it lays with the kinship/ people who called the island home before I came into this world. I'm now discovering the idea of how heritage can extend beyond the notion of people onto the notion/ idea of place.



Above: 35mm “Kings Hill Post Office”

Subsequent spread: “View of Roseau, From Morne Bruce View Point”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathaniel Télémaque AKA St.Peso is a Northwest London-born and raised visual artist, writer and researcher who photographs, films, records and writes about ‘everyday things’ in various urban settings. He is 1/3 of the Pesolife Arts Collective. Bearing witness to mad cities and maverick livelihoods inspires his audio-visual practices. His lenses focus on the experiences of young Black adults, creative peers and notions of urban change in cities. He completed his Geography (practice-related) PhD at University College London in 2023 and is now a Lecturer in Geography and Social Justice at King’s College London University. Being highly interested in archival research practices, Nathaniel engaged with LAMy’s convenings and learning circles as a means of sharing his work and practices with fellow memory work focused practitioners. You can view Nathaniel’s audio-visual works at: pesovisuals.com.





Tapestry of Black Britons: *Communities & Digital Space*

By Paula Ogun Hector



Background

Tapestry of Black Britons is an act of cultural remembering — an unpicking of the empire’s seams and a re-threading of the stories that have always been here.

This evolving artwork stands as a testament to the interconnectedness of human experiences, emphasizing that the richness of British history is incomplete without acknowledging and paying tribute to the profound contributions of people of African descent.

Growing over time, this diasporic multi-participant project currently includes two woven tapestries: a Yoruba creation story; and a tribute to the overlooked role of Black servicemen and servicewomen in World War II. Myth and memory are not opposed — they are threads of the same cloth, celebrating ancestral knowledge, storytelling and resilience.

Tapestry, an ancient art form spanning cultures and centuries, has evolved into a dynamic medium that bridges tradition and innovation. Today, the integration of digital technology invites diverse perspectives and skills into the creative process, offering interdisciplinary ways of understanding the past and showcasing the latest in digital design and craftsmanship.

Photo by Sharon Wallace

Tapestry of Black Britons

— community business

Tapestry of Black Britons is a community interest company, Paula Ogun Hector founded in order to present a more accurate history via an interdisciplinary, art, poetry, woven and digital lens. This approach appeals to different learning styles and offers audiences multiple points of access, which enables more impactful engagement with this knowledge.

This project is an anti-racist strategy designed to bring diverse communities together by shining a spotlight on the African and Caribbean contribution to Britain for nearly 2,000 years — together with African and European textile legacies and histories.

Tapestries are created in collaborations with creatives, schools, universities and communities around Britain and the Diaspora. There is strong exhibition demand ahead across Britain.

Whose Knowledge?

The recent Liberatory, Archives and Memory Convening hosted by Whose Knowledge? in Brighton in April 2025 brought together innovative scholars, practitioners, artists and memory workers each responding to the urgency of preserving what's being lost and cultivating unique processes and practices in order to preserve our communities' histories in effective and inclusive ways. (Image credit: LAMY)

Learning more about this shared commitment to centre community-led processes helped enable me to decolonialise the tapestry co-creative process by ensuring local communities are: consulted at all stages of the process; decide the content and shape exhibition interpretation; lead engagement workshops; add mixed media embroidery; and provide content for digital tapestries. This helps ensure tapestries are relevant to the audiences that will interact with them.

Engaging with this network has not only improved artistic practise it has enabled the Tapestry project to grow a network of like-minded collaborators in Britain and internationally. This is vital as the project had been driven mostly solo.



Photo by Paula Ogun Hector



The digital future of Tapestry of Black Britons

Guided by the shared commitment to centre the community-led process of our network, Tapestry of Black Britons would like to:

1. Initiate a global call out for WWII stories for the digital tapestry
2. Utilise archive footage to create augmented reality in order to help bring history to life in the woven tapestries.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Ogun Hector is a Jamaican-Haitian-British artist, curator and educator whose work explores the global African diaspora. She is the founder of Tapestry of Black Britons, an ambitious evolving artwork honouring African and Caribbean contributions to Britain from the Roman era to the present day.

Launched at international gallery the Arnolfini in 2025, with a 'Yoruba creation story' and 'World War II' tapestry – new sections continue to be woven into this living narrative, including 'African Romans in Britain' – and 'Carnival: African Roots' set to premiere in summer 2026.

The tapestry was inspired in part by John Agard's poem *Checkin Out Me History*, which highlights the absence of figures such as Toussaint L'Ouverture from history education.

Paula has presented inclusive histories for over 20 years firstly in TV (BBC Black Britain; BBC When Black Became Beautiful); then PR (Commission for Racial Equality, Centrepoint, British Film Institute's Black World Season) and as a Teach First ambassador, establishing and leading a provision for neurodiverse 11-16-year-olds and as a teacher of English.

Booked in exhibition venues ranging from museums, libraries and galleries until 2028 so far, this touring project is inspiring schools, universities and creatives to pick up a needle, paintbrush or a tablet – and get involved.

Reach out to Paula via LinkedIn:
www.linkedin.com/in/paula-ogun-hector-78b58019/

www.tapestryofblackbritons.com

Instagram:
[@tapestry_of_black_britons](https://www.instagram.com/tapestry_of_black_britons)

Next tapestries to be produced, subject to sponsors/funding include:

1. Carnival in Britain
2. WW1
3. Plant knowledge
4. Wealth
5. Uprisings

Mother Tongue

— *Language,
Memory and
Heritage*

By Dr. Tola Dabiri

Introduction: Conversations about Mothers

During the Liberatory, Archives and Memory Convening in Brighton in April 2025, I was struck by the number of references to mothers, their languages and stories mentioned in the group discussions, as well as reflective memories about participants' conversations with their mothers shared during presentations and lightening talks. These references seemed to be a literal representation of our 'Mother Tongue', demonstrating the importance of language and memory.

When we talk about a 'Mother Tongue', it means more than just our first language, our 'mother tongue' is also the language of our mothers, our families and the language of our cultural heritage. It can also be the language which is used to preserve and transmit intangible cultural heritage through generations, migrations and diaspora experiences.

However, there is an alarming decline in the number of global languages and indigenous dialects being spoken and even fewer being used to disseminate information or used in published works. This crisis has been recognised by UNESCO and declared 2022 to 2032 as the Indigenous Languages Decade and is promoting safeguarding initiatives to protect indigenous languages.¹

Global Changes in Language Diversity

Conversely, UK and American English, Spanish, Mandarin and Hindi languages continue to dominate written and spoken global communication, with English being the most popular language for book publishing and information production.² Therefore, knowledge of English is essential to access the information sources and discourses which are produced globally.

The impact of the dominance of English in particular, and this disparity of language use, continues to have a devastating and devaluing impact on the indigenous languages of the world. It also weakens our ability to preserve, transmit and access cultural heritage and memories.

1 www.unesco.org/en/decades/indigenous-languages

2 www.ethnologue.com/insights/most-spoken-language/

Examples of Language Loss, Preservation and Safeguarding

One example of this is the French Creole or Patois, which was once spoken all over the Caribbean by the descendants of enslaved Africans. Linguistically patois is a mixture of many African, European, Arawak and Kalinago languages, and the exact composition of the languages changed across the region depending on enslaved, planter and indigenous populations of the time.³ Once spoken everywhere, patois has almost died out on many islands, including Grenada and Carriacou. During the 1960s and 1970s, the elders used Patois as a secret language, and did not teach it to their children and grandchildren. As a result, the language, and the access to the memories stored in patois, has been almost lost to many. Big Drum and Nation Dance are important examples of the intangible cultural heritage of the Africans once enslaved on Carriacou. The dances and drumming patterns of 13 African nations are preserved, transmitted and performed on the island, along with traditional songs performed by chanteuse. However, many of the songs are in patois, and as very few people now speak or understand the language, the meaning and connection with the ancestors has been lost, along with the information contained in many of the songs. Edwina Ashie-Nikoi (2007)⁴ identified food advice for newly arrived enslaved Africans, and stories about destruction and resistance by the enslaved on the Belmont estate. Big Drum songs act as invaluable historical records, giving access to the lives and experiences of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean over three centuries ago. However, without greater understanding of patois, these records will remain incomplete.

A more hopeful example of preservation of language and cultural heritage can be found in Georgia, USA. Amelia Dawley's Gullah Geechee and Senehun Ngola song, was first recorded in 1933 by Lorenzo Dow Turner. Dawley didn't understand the language of the song or its content, but sang the words as it had been preserved by her family.⁵ A field research trip to Senehun Ngola (Sierra Leone) by Schmidt, Opala and Koroma in 1990 found Biandu Jibati, who also knew the Dawley song. Despite the physical separation from their heritage and homeland, the Dawleys had preserved their identity through the language and the song.

3 www.steelpanconference.com/volume-5

4 Ashie -Nokoi, E., (2007), *Beating the Pen on the Drum: A Socio-cultural History of Carriacou, Grenada 1750 - 1920*. [Doctoral thesis]. New York: New York University.

5 www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-the-memory-of-a-song-reunited-two-women-separated-by-the-trans-atlantic-slave-trade-180983864/

Hope for the Future: Educational and Legislative Interventions

However, safeguarding can work, as can be seen in the triumphant reassertion of the Welsh language in the UK, after almost facing near extinction in the 1970s. With the support of the Welsh Language Act (1993), it is now the first language (or mother tongue) of many people, taught in schools, and used in all government and administrative departments. In Grenada, French Creole classes are being held and a textbook has been written for children in schools by Dr. Marguerite Joseph and the French Creole society. And so, there are reasons for optimism for the success of the UNESCO initiative.

Concluding Reflections

Our mother tongues allow us to control our own narratives and our own interpretation of our histories, which is essential if we are to effectively resist the encroachment of predatory technologies which reinforce existing inaccurate, Eurocentric and Western versions of global histories. Our mother tongue grants us access to our memories and ancestors, and most importantly our sense of belonging.

As Winston Relaford (a Dawley family member) said when discussing the importance of preserved Mende song with Dawley family of the Gullah Geechee community:

*'[it] solidifies my identity because I know where I came from...
I know who I am'*

Winston's poignant words reflect the views and experiences of many. Our Mother Tongues tell us *all* who we are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tola Dabiri is a consultant and academic, who has worked across the cultural sector in libraries, archives and heritage. Tola has delivered innovative community heritage programmes including the Carnival Archive Project and Carnival in a Box. Tola has a particular research focus of orality, intangible cultural heritage and British Caribbean Carnival and has published a number of papers and articles on the subject.

**Family
Photographs
from the
Vietnamese
Diaspora
Set in Motion**

By Carô Gervay



Photographing a digitally printed paper negative from a photograph taken by Alpha Dieu in 1977. The sun beams enter the frame which in turn helps the window reflect my yellow shirt and red darkroom apron. Photo: Carô Gervay, May 2025.

Intro

In this piece I set the scene by considering some aspects of the relationship between Vietnam, its diaspora and photography. I then reflect on an artistic intervention which takes as its starting point the unfinished history of 204 Vietnamese children brought to Livø, an island in Denmark in 1975. Its title: *Sensitive Matter*.¹ My reflections draw from a practice that has developed over the past 15 years through my work as a freelance photographer / artist, workshop facilitator and co-director of a community darkroom, exploring the potential of analogue photography to open up spaces of connection, repair and critical action.



One of the collages presented in a notice board as part of the *Sensitive Matter* installation on Livø island. Close-up on the subsequent spread. Photo: Carø Gervay, May 2025.

1 *Sensitive Matter* is a photographic installation by Carø Gervay. It is organised by lim collective, curated by Qwin Werle & Bella Normark with graphic design by Atakan Kara and Rikke Ehlers Nilsson, and generously supported by Statens Kunstfond, Region Nord, and Vesthimmerlands Kommune, Fjord Tours og Livø Feriecenter. lim collective is an experimental platform in Northern Jutland, Denmark, dedicated to alliances between contemporary artistic practice, health, and care.

Vietnam and photography

Many artists from Vietnam and the diaspora have commented on the media's influence on our communities. In the curatorial note of the exhibition *Ký Ức Lan Toà A Radial System*,² Minh Nguyễn reminds us:

“By 1967, hundreds of accredited photographers from various nations were stationed in Vietnam. (...) The volume of images was so immense that Associated Press built Saigon's first private satellite station solely for transmitting photographs, while commercial airlines operated daily flights to transport film to Tokyo laboratories. Each week, an estimated 80000 photographs emerged from the conflict”.

This has led them to revisit historical moments on their own terms. To name just a couple, Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn created a project about vernacular photography by POC in Canada;³ while Dinh Q Lê was known for his sculptural work made of photos left behind during the war.⁴ Vietnamese-Canadian scholar Thy Phu refers to those millions of family photographs later on sold by the kilo at Saigonese markets, as “orphan images”.⁵ The collective Matca,⁶ based in Hanoi, have undertaken the task of critically bringing together fragments of that photographic history, by prioritising the work of Vietnamese nationals.

2 *Ký Ức Lan Toà A Radial System* is an exhibition that took place at Dogma Gallery, Hồ Chí Minh City 28/02/25 – 12/06/25 in partnership with “Sensing Photography: Vietnam and Vectors of Global Photography”, a symposium organised by Trâm Lương (Fulbright University Vietnam) and Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn (Konstfack & KTH Royal Institute of Technology)

3 “The Making of An Archive (2014–ongoing) records the everyday life by Canadian immigrants and amateur photographers in order to address an absence of representation in the official narrative of multiculturalism of Canada as well as explore how to build a community based archive”: cargocollective.com/jacquelinehoangnguyen/The-Making-of-an-Archive

4 www.ricegallery.org/dinh-q-le

5 Thy Phu, *Warring Visions, Photography and Vietnam*, Duke Press University, 2021

6 www.matca.vn





Sensitive Matter: a photographic intervention⁷

The context

On 30 April 1975, 204 Vietnamese children were brought to Livø, an island in the northwest of Jutland, Denmark. They arrived in the wake of the island's fraught history as a state-run custodial institution for men deemed 'socially unfit', marking a continuation of Livø's role as a site of exclusion and control. (...) Their arrival constituted the largest migration of non-European refugees to Denmark at the time, leaving the Danish state unprepared and, at first, unwilling to offer protection. (...) In a visual dialogue between the landscape and archival material, Gervay traces the fragments of their story through photographs kindly offered by Alpha Dieu,⁸ who documented his peers during their return visit to Livø and the surrounding area in 1977.⁹

⁷ *Sensitive Matter*, 01/06/2025-15/08/2025, is a photographic installation by Carø Gervay. It was programmed by lim collective, curated by Qwin Werle & Bella Normark with graphic design by Atakan Kara and Rikke Ehlers Nilsson, and generously supported by Statens Kunstfond, Region Nord, and Vesthimmerlands Kommune, Fjord Tours og Livø Feriecenter.

⁸ More photographs taken by Alpha Dieu can be seen at Immigrantmuseet (Migration Museum of Denmark), in Farum.

⁹ Curatorial text by Qwin Werle & Bella Normark.

Encountering photographs

My installation is an invitation to remember a moment in time. When I first learnt about the *Drengene fra Saigon*¹⁰ (boys from Saigon), I came across an article¹¹ featuring 3 black & white photographs that caught my attention. With the help of an interpreter, I started a conversation with the photographer, who was 18 years old at the time. Some photographs had been taken by Danish photojournalists, but those 3 were of a very different tone. They had an intimacy to them, and I could really feel that someone had wanted to hold onto those moments.

What can starting a dialogue between 2 photographers from different generations be an opportunity for?

Sensitivity in creative and social approaches

The term “sensitive” refers to the quality of the material I work with: silver gelatine paper, cyanotype chemistry. Photographers are now more informed on the ecological damage caused by the photographic industry; I have recently used less toxic printing techniques. Nuances of what can be seen or not are achieved through several strategies: an interplay between positive and negative, changes in size, repetition of details, inclusion of non-developed prints. The paper is still reacting to sunlight and other elements, so the images keep changing. Some cyanotypes were toned with organic matter such as twigs, leaves and petals carefully collected in the area.

How does the landscape witness and remember us?

10 Title of the documentary made in 1997 by the Danish public-service radio and television broadcasting company DR: www.danskkulturarv.dk/dr/dr-dokumentar-drengene-fra-saigon/

11 www.tv2east.dk/slagelse/henning-becker-er-doen-han-reddede-vores-liv



The collaborative opening event of *Sensitive Matter* included a picnic on the island. Photo: Reasat Jyoti, May 2025.

The collaborative opening event of *Sensitive Matter* organised by *lim* collective¹² included a children's rights workshop for local families, followed by an excursion to Rønbjerg Harbour and the island of Livø. Working site-specifically through engaging with the current ecology of Livø was important to me, especially because photographs often decontextualise situations.

¹² The collaborative opening event was realised in collaboration with the local creative writing group "Open Your Window" run by Murshida Zaman and Reasat Jyoti; and teacher and children rights advocate Mette Toft Nielsen. *lim* collective is an experimental platform in North Jutland in Denmark, dedicated to alliances between contemporary art practice, health and care. *Sensitive Matter* is part of *lim* collective's collaborative programme with Vesthimmerland Refugee Centres, aimed at curating and developing cultural initiatives in partnership with residents and creative practitioners at the centre, focused on care and practices of resistance through creative organising.



The other side of the shed on Livø island features cyanotype prints of Alpha Dieu's photographs with large blue borders. They are among information boards and signs relating to the activities on the island. A piece of cyanotyped silk from Vietnam bears traces of local seaweed. Photo: Carò Gervay, May 2025.

Sharing this work outside of its context

A friend told me about *Whose Knowledge?* and in April 2025 I was fortunate to take part in their Liberatory Archives and Memory meeting in Brighton. There, our conversations inspired me to think further about our unique contexts and connected strategies. Writing this piece makes me wonder once more: what can a cross-diasporic simple act of remembrance shift? Some photographic practices deliberately move away from shooting, representing and fixing decontextualised truths. My commitment is to bring several layers of engagement between memory, people and the land, through intimate, critical and creative ways.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carô Gervay lives in London where she is a co-director of the Gate (community) Darkroom. She is doing a practice-based PhD at City St George's University, deepening her creative and collective memory work through engaging with family photographs in the Vietnamese diaspora (France/UK). www.carolinegervay.com

**Heritage and
Ephemerality:**
*The Politics of
Black Cultural
Memory*

By Dr. Lisa Amanda Palmer

IN STUART HALL'S KEYNOTE TALK entitled, '[Whose Heritage? Un-settling 'The heritage', Re-imaging the Post-nation](#)', the Jamaican born scholar and pioneer of cultural studies asked his audience to take seriously the question of heritage – who has the right to one and whose heritage can too easily become unrecorded, unanalysed and consigned to be expendable.

'Heritage' and Birmingham Central Library (Now the Library of Birmingham)

I had frequently encountered the term 'heritage' working as a library assistant in Birmingham Central Library in the late 1990s. During this period, if anyone visited Central Library, travelled on the escalator up to the third floor to the Arts, Languages and Literature section, you might have caught my colleagues and me on the counter taking request slips for items kept in the corridors and rows of rolling shelves behind the 'staff only' entrance to the stacks. This area was strictly off-limits to the public and as such, it embodied the idea that 'heritage' is both controlled and guarded by institutions.

Many enquiries from enthusiastic public library users, required a trip to this restricted section of the library. On what sometimes felt like a quest to find an item in a maze of shelves, books, trolleys and boxes, I could be asked to retrieve anything from a copy of an art exhibition catalogue to booking an appointment to view a rare copy of Shakespeare's first folio. Whatever the request, the idea of 'heritage' deemed these items worthy of storage, protection and preservation.

Stuart Hall and the politics of memory

My experiences as a librarian prompted me to reflect on whose stories and artifacts were considered valuable and in need of conservation and care for future generations. I began to question what counted as heritage and who held the authority to decide its importance, shaping my perspective on the politics of memory. As Hall wrote, the quaintness of the term, 'heritage' had slipped 'so innocently into everyday speech' to refer to a complex set of organisations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts as sites of special historical interest (Hall 1999).

Hall's curiosity and speculative assessment of 'heritage' addresses key critical themes that run through nearly all of his writings, specifically questions about power and authority. As he observed, 'cultural artefacts and works of art have also been closely associated with informal public education. They have become part, not simply of 'governing', but of the broader practices of 'governmentality' — how the state indirectly and at a distance induces and solicits appropriate attitudes and forms of conduct from its citizens' (Hall 1999). Heritage through Hall's analysis is not simply benign, it is always working and tracing the contours of power.

Valuing ephemera

As a librarian, I also encountered the term 'ephemera' as well as items of ephemera within the archive. In contrast to the seemingly robust nature of 'heritage', the definition of 'ephemera' has a more fleeting quality. Its meaning is rooted in things that were not meant to exist for too long but to be enjoyed for a short time, a short life span, and for a short-term purpose. Think of the disposable nature of business cards, leaflets, pamphlets, menus, bus tickets, postcards and the broader spectrum of what is more likely to end up in our rubbish or waste rather than stored and archived. Ephemera's short-lived nature means these objects can be overlooked in official archives, raising important questions about whose experiences are preserved and whose are lost to time.

In this short article, I invite us to think about ephemera and ephemerality as they exist in relation to documenting, preserving and presenting contemporary histories of race and resistance, specifically archives that capture the lives of African Caribbean people in Britain and how our stories relate to and move beyond the rigid boundaries of heritage.

Vanley Burke's Archive

For example, [Vanley Burke's](#) archive, held in the Library of Birmingham, is internationally renowned for its collection of photographs documenting Caribbean communities in Birmingham since the 1970s. Alongside his photography, Burke's archive contains ephemeral materials that he collected in Birmingham, including Caribbean takeaway menus, local business cards, posters and flyers found in telephone boxes and food shops. These disposable materials not only provide a rich contextual and

intertextual layer to Burke's photographs, they also record the everyday events that mark how African Caribbean people were negotiating, making and creating their own Black diasporic cultural spaces, social events and political movements in the post-industrial heartlands of Britain.

Ephemerality and Black popular culture

In 'Whose heritage?', Hall was concerned about the ephemerality of African Caribbean cultures in Britain. He referred to African Caribbean young people during the 1990s as being, for a time, the vanguards of cultural practices, the 'multi' in multiculturalism. He saw them as 'cultural navigators,' moving between music genres such as 'ragga, jungle, scratch, rap and electro-funk.' However, Hall was also concerned about the politics of archives and heritage in relation to engaging with these new forms of Black diasporic popular culture. Noting that these forms of popular culture were some of the most important cultural developments in shaping and defining modern Britain, he speculated as to whether these cultural practices would be 'archived' or become part of a 'post-nation' narrative that needed to reimagine heritage. Hall was certainly concerned that these new cultural forms needed to be documented by apprehending that they were at risk of being, 'consigned to the ephemera of [their] day — expendable' (Hall 1999).

I would hope that the recent groundbreaking success of the [Beyond the Baseline](#) exhibition held at the British Library in 2024, led and curated by Aleema Gray and Mykaell Riley, would provide some relief in response to Hall's question. It may also offer answers to his assessment of the politics of heritage as it relates to documenting aspects of Black peoples' histories, lives, and outputs of cultural production in the UK. However, the urgency of Hall's question of whose heritage remains a pressing concern.

My aim here is to invite us to think about questions of ephemerality and heritage as they relate to the precarity of funding, documenting and preserving marginalised and radical histories and the symbiotic relationships between ephemerality, marginality and Black people's everyday lives. We might even think of the practice of archiving Caribbean histories in Britain as an inherently ephemeral practice in the sense that unless we act not only to protect and preserve our heritage, but to also do so critically in radically different ways, our stories and our narratives are still at risk of becoming ephemeral and expendable.

Whose heritage? Our heritage?

Hall's prescient question, "Whose heritage?", is not merely an academic exercise. It is an urgent call to action that echoes in the disposable menus, the faded flyers, and the cherished photographs that document lives otherwise on the verge of being forgotten. These items are not always disposable; they can be the very texts of a living history, recording how Caribbean people, and indeed all marginalised communities, have negotiated, made, and created their own ways of *doing* heritage in the face of consistent erasure. Without deliberate, community-led action (see [DTA](#), [Opal22](#), [Dig Where You Stand](#), [Nottingham Black Archive](#)), they vanish, taking irreplaceable chapters of our collective stories with them.

The corridors and stacks of the old Birmingham Central Library, with their imposing silence and regulated access, are now gone, proving that what once seemed robust can also crumble. That specific architecture of official heritage has been demolished, both literally and figuratively. But as Stuart Hall anticipated, the work of memory, heritage and identity continues, not in those hallowed halls, but in the vibrant, often precarious spaces created in and by communities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

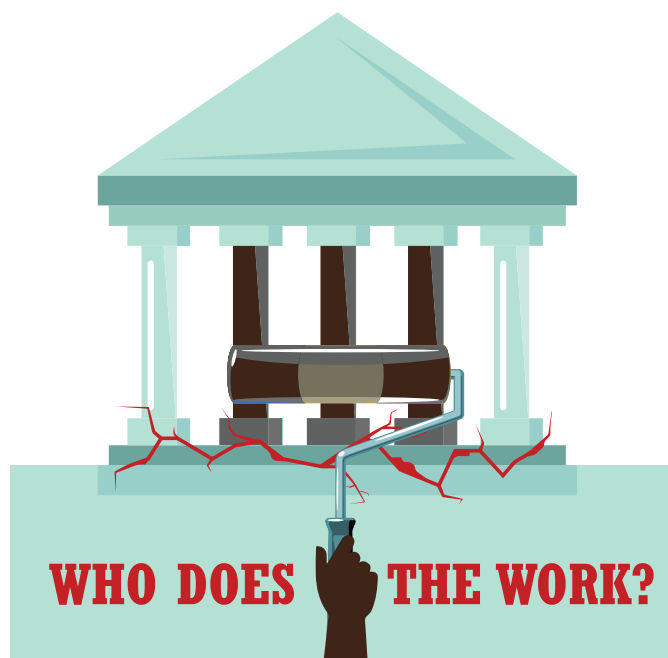
Dr. Lisa Amanda Palmer is cultural theorist and independent scholar. Her writing is interdisciplinary and includes the gendered and sexual politics of Lovers Rock music, the production of local community archives, blackness and green spaces, racism and the misogynoir faced by Black women in British public life. She has a keen interest in working with community archives, specifically, the Vanley Burke Archive in Birmingham.

**Who does
the work?**
An Anthology

*By Erinma Ochu,
Nadine Aranki, Tosin Olufon
and Abira Hussein*

Foreword

For this article, we came together as British-based researchers and artists with diasporic and Indigenous links to the global majority world. We wanted to reflect on our experiences of progressing issues of decoloniality within memory and heritage work. Following initial discussions at the 2025 LAMy convening in Brighton and then some of us attending [Remix: Race & Representation](#) in Bristol, we decided to co-produce a four-part narrative to address themes that emerged from our conversations, including GLAM¹ workforce representation, practices of refusal, care and solidarity, alongside digital preservation of ancestral stories and community-held archival practices.



Who does the work? © Tosin Olufon

1 GLAM = Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums

‘What I come across in the newspaper articles, doctor’s records, the infirmary register and even recent scholarship on Paul,² are instances of relentless misunderstanding... these poems and experiments, then can only ever be a record of my search for parts of myself in the archive.’ — Remi Graves, Coal

The labour of decolonising UK archives rests largely on the shoulders of racialised people. This inequitable demand places an expectation that we will hold the space for the necessary repair work. This labour often drains the energy needed to imagine and build our lives, spaces and communities. Informed by ongoing discussions after the LAMy Brighton convening, we asked ourselves what happens when we stop trying to decolonise, how do we make space for self-development, and what community-held alternatives exist?

The wrong vibe

by Erinma Ochu

Over a decade ago, I directed a public initiative where my office was based in a university museum. Some local community members refused to meet me there: the museum had ‘the wrong vibe’. Instead, we’d meet on a bench outside, or I’d visit folk on their patch. Over time, this refusal built connection and local investment. At an evening event for museum professionals, I experienced this wrongful vibe when encountering a sculpted head of a Benin King at a Norfolk museum. I was captivated yet felt watched. A curator rushed to my side, glass of wine in hand, gushing to tell me its history. I blurted out ‘Sorry, I don’t want to hear that story’. Museums are supposed to bring people together, but this schism silenced us both. Must we always cut through an atmosphere of pride in White privilege? How do we reconcile the colonial ruptures of diasporic and Indigenous heritage in the present?

2 Paul Downing was a Black American trans man from Georgia who lived in England. Known for travelling as a sailor and farm labourer before he was arrested in London in 1905 for acting erratically while looking for his wife. Paul is the subject of ‘Coal’, Remi Graves’ experimental and poetic excavation of Paul’s life, which examines Black transmasculine fugitivity and the remnants of a fragmented life.

Why are you here?

By Tosin Olufon

“Until the lions have their historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” (Chinua Achebe, 1958).

As diasporic and Indigenous communities, we are already rich in talent and story. Why spend our emotional energy defending our right to preserve our stories within colonial infrastructures that are slow to act or change, when some of the stories are mirrors that they would rather not face?

When someone came to our door when I was little, and my father didn't approve, he would ask, 'Why are you here?'. As an Indigenous artist and researcher, I ask myself the same question in the digital space. Why am I here? Why have I chosen immersive technologies, like Virtual Reality, to preserve my heritage? What cost does silence bring? In the hands of the right craftsman, a digital tool could move mountains. Immersive technologies empower me to authentically represent my ancestors' voices as a form of decolonisation. To be absent from this space risks another form of colonisation.

Big tech companies and heritage institutions often rethink their strategies when their profits or investments are at stake. Repurposing the master's tools by designing systems of cooperation that acknowledge colonial history and redistribute value to benefit both parties, where the communities most affected receive a greater share, could offer a path to mutual liberation. As digital archives become subjected to the extractive logic of Artificial Intelligence we might also look to Care principles for Indigenous Data Governance as a means to consider Indigenous Peoples rights within and interests in digital archives.

Finding solidarity

by Nadine Aranki

Producing exhibitions in an attempt to decolonise archives on limited time and often without safeguarding for what you will be exposed to in those archives, we have to ask what's the point? Doing decolonising work often feels like rubbing salt into a wound, as the Arabic proverb says **حط ملح على الجرح** ḥuṭṭ miliḥ 'alā al-jurḥ. Decolonisation is essential and must be done with Indigenous people with care, creativity and critical thinking. Without these practices, the process distracts from fighting real atrocities like genocides, and human-made starvations, but decolonisation remains an act of recognition and acknowledgement. So, we push through, decide to do it. And yet, we have to look after ourselves and support our families in our homeland.



Mural of George Floyd painted on the Israeli apartheid wall in Bethlehem on the Palestinian side. Photo by Nadine Aranki.



The shadow of artist Nadine Aranki with other museum workers looking at the sea in the distance to which they had no access to due to checkpoints/ movement limitations. Photo by Nadine Aranki.

Poetry offers a way to navigate the difficulties that we have talking about oppression, and is a space to create bonds.

From the belly of the beast

From the belly of the beast
You can say the least
They care about everyone
But your life doesn't matter
Especially when you go east
If you talk about the empire
You need to be subtle
Who said anyone's an oppressor?
No need to mention attacks then
No need to mention attacks now
'Cause the new empire doesn't see you now
Like it did not see your ancestors if
You looked back
I wonder who became a settler in Canada?
Who worked on erasing its Indigenous
People?
It's too "sensitive" to say their name upfront
I wonder how children in Palestine lose their
Life?
It's a mystery but hush hush
The murderers' emotions will be hurt if you
say it blunt.

Often the alternative for me is to foreground Indigenous people and ways of life: to place that above the colonial archive. For one exhibition, I placed herbs alongside the colonial object, and invited audiences to smell them. Decolonising archives then becomes a way to decolonise the senses.

Whose knowledge counts

by Abira Hussein

To exist in museums and archives, you have to be exceptional. These spaces are not easily accessible; conferences, networks, and opportunities may be open theoretically, but the routes are uneven, costly, and demanding. There are so few of us here, and those who are must navigate the weight of visibility and constant tests of legitimacy. My Somali heritage work has been shaped by long periods of unpaid labour. It taught me the contradictions of this space: having agency recognised and denied in the exact same moment; being expected to show gratitude for objects taken from our histories.

'The structural racial, class, and gender inequalities that exist within the museum echo the global structural inequalities born out of slavery, colonisation, racial capitalism, and imperialism... Requests for the restitution of objects arise from a long history of dispossession that echoes extraction as a logic of racial capitalism.' — Françoise Vergès (2024)

These experiences are structural, not incidental. Job interviews and rejections are less about capability and more about whose knowledge counts. Community-held and lived expertise is often delegitimised unless reframed to fit institutional language. As scholar, Ramon Amaro observes, our presence is mediated by systems that decide what it can mean, even in digital form.

Facing page:

Old Port in Mogadishu.

Image courtesy of Barni Qassim

© Harry J Mason 1982.



Glissant's Poetics of Relation suggests another approach: opacity as a form of autonomy, relation without assimilation, recognising that what makes us unique cannot be fully understood. Perhaps the question is not how to better decolonise the archive, but how to stop trying and, instead, create spaces that belong entirely to us. An example of this is the Culture House in London, the first permanent Somali exhibition space, 'presenting narratives of origin, displacement, migration, and new belongings' within Somali culture and reconnecting British Somalis via community-donated objects and fostered by the Anti-Tribalism Movement. Another example is the UnMuseum, developed by the Black South West Network (BSWN) in Bristol. The UnMuseum aims to serve as a 'decolonial reconceptualisation' by empowering those whose stories have been marginalised or erased.

'Ultimately, building for liberation is not a style but an orientation. It situates architecture within long struggles against empire and captivity, and calls contemporary practitioners to continue that lineage — to design not for control, but for the expansion of freedom itself.' — Amahra Spence

We conclude that whether we are creating new museum spaces, breaking through or transforming existing or emerging systems, centering lived experience using creative tools that offer self-development and community building is a way to offer liberatory alternatives.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Nadine Aranki is a Palestinian curator, cultural worker, facilitator, coordinator and content producer based in London. Aranki works in the fields of culture, human rights, and education. She is the author of the report 'Conversations with Culture, Heritage and Tourism Actors in Palestine: Needs and Challenges within a Context of Extreme Military Violence'. She co-curated *The Many Lives of Gaza*, a 2024 touring exhibition that has been shown in London, Birmingham and Norwich.

Abira Hussein (she/her)

Abira Hussein is a researcher and curator of Somali heritage, based in the UK. Her work explores how digital technologies, including virtual and mixed reality, can transform engagement with colonial-era archives and reconnect diasporic communities with their heritage. She uses participatory methods to co-create community-driven archival spaces, challenging dominant historical narratives and fostering inclusive, culturally rooted remembrance. Hussein has collaborated with institutions such as the British Museum, Barbican, and The National Archives. Her projects include the VR experience *Coming Home* (2017) and the Mixed Reality NOMAD project (2018).

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Tosin is a Yoruba artist and researcher of Nigerian heritage. Her practice centres on reimagining African folklore for virtual reality and 3D animation, using immersive storytelling as a tool for heritage preservation. Through her work, she explores the possibilities of a decolonised immersive archive that resists static preservation and reflects the voices being represented. www.tosinolufon.com
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Erinma is a storyteller and biologist experimenting with collective consciousness as a form of earthmaking. Their poem 'How to read the atmosphere' was shortlisted for the 2025 Disabled Poets Prize. As Watershed's inaugural Researcher in Residence they are enquiring into epistemic justice. They are Wallscourt Associate Professor in Immersive Media at UWE Bristol's Digital Cultures Research Centre, a Stuart Hall Foundation's Scholars & Fellows network alumni and storytelling champion on sustainable computing research initiative, *NetDRIVE*. www.watershed.co.uk/studio/residents/erinma-ochu
www.linkedin.com/in/erinmaochu/

Mind the Gap:
*Heritage Work in
a Fractured Present*

*By JC Niala,
Johanna Zetterström-Sharp*



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN institutions that have traditionally done memory work on behalf of society find themselves facing a society that is itself fractured through loss?

As two people who do memory work within institutions, this collaborative journey with the LAMy community has led us to consider the conjuncture we find ourselves in. Writing in 1999, cultural theorist Stuart Hall issued a call to unsettle dominant national narratives about our shared history and culture, bringing the margins into the centre and carving space for memory work as an active part of living. What we have found ourselves contending with, 25 years later, is a deeper unsettling of expertise and legitimacy. In our roles we often inhabit the gaps within the archive; engaging with what is absent as opposed to what is obviously present. Such gaps often speak directly to loss; and what we would like to be in conversation with here is what is happening when people work to fill those gaps, but can't agree on what it is that has been lost.

Unsettled expertise

For much of the twentieth century, museums, libraries and archives positioned themselves as legitimators of truth about where we have come from, where we find ourselves now, and where we might be going. They were places society might turn to for authority, verification and expertise. That authority has been steadily eroded, and whilst this may be liberatory, it is also volatile and unpredictable.

Decolonial critiques have rightly unsettled inherited canons, revealing the exclusions and violences embedded in our collections and narratives. Researchers have questioned who has the power to winkle histories out from incomplete archives, inserting new archival truths and possibilities into the spaces left in-between. This important work has included looking for the archival traces of the indigenous knowledge holders without whose expertise European scientists would have been lost, such as work by Subhadra Das and Miranda Lowe.

However within this work is a tension. The canon is both a site of dismantling and an opportunity to centre what has been overlooked. It has political power as a legitimator of expertise, but these politics can equally be turned around to erode and unsettle trust in those expertise.

As we value liberatory archives, we are also contending with calls to unsettle histories and heritage from populist movements and the far right, within the UK and internationally. As memory workers within institutions have attempted to tell more complex histories, it is the idea of expertise

itself that is challenged; rather than telling historical truths, this work is framed, and discarded, as the momentary politics of the present.

We are working through a moment where trust in expertise and the power to authorise historical truths is shifting from archival institutions, to a process unfolding in public. This makes this work even more precarious and driven by both personal and professional risk.

Society fractured around loss

Beneath these debates lies something more visceral: loss. Everyone feels it, but not in the same way, and not with the same legitimacy in the public eye. Memory work often sits in this space; in its reparatory potential to deal with loss.

For many, this loss is historical. It sits in the intentional absences within legacies of enslavement, and in the colonial dispossession of land, belongings, and ancestors. For others, it is the loss of a cultural and national identity, imagined as slipping away in an uncertain and unfamiliar present. The loss of Britain's industrial working-class bubbles under the surface as both legitimisation and denial of a shared struggle; a space to return to and close the door on.

Whilst loss is universal, its public recognition is not. And when one community's loss is acknowledged, while another's is delegitimised, the result is anger, defensiveness and fracture. Institutions of memory are caught in the crossfire, asked to hold space for mourning while being mistrusted as arbiters of whose loss matters most.

As we have discussed in our own conversations this is the 'gap': the space between what is materially present in collections and what is absent; between what communities recognise as their truth and what others dismiss as politics; between the past people want to remember and the futures they hope to secure.

The gap can be fertile — an opening for new languages, solidarities and ways of seeing. But it can also be volatile, easily weaponised as speculation, nostalgia or denial.

In 2020, in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd and the activism of a resurgent and global Black Lives Matter movement, many institutions responded to demands for change with bold statements about anti-racism and decolonisation. Sector leaders attended anti-racism training and engaged in policy reform with a confidence that they understood enough of the gap to resolve it. But the follow-through often fell back on existing plans or framed reform as a question of resources. What emerged was a





sense of fragility: a desire to believe the work had been ‘done’, coupled with ethical impatience to ‘fix’ things once and for all. The problem is, there are no fixed solutions to necessarily roving problems.

What Stuart Hall offers

Stuart Hall’s work has become invaluable to us in navigating this unsettled terrain. His insistence on understanding cultural struggle as conjunctural — shaped by the particular political, historical and ethical dynamics of a moment — prevents us from seeking false fixes.

Hall recognised the value of working within institutions as opposed to dismantling them. He spoke of a ‘slow motion revolution’, one that holds onto the structures necessary to make change sustainable at the scale of nations. For heritage professionals, this is vital. It is through institutions that we can recuperate loss in ways that endure.

Hall also sharpened our sense that legitimacy is always cultural. People search for familiarity, recognition, a sense of home. This helps explain why nostalgia remains such a powerful force in heritage, and why radical new languages of repair and decolonisation so often meet incomprehension or resistance.

Our practice

Through our LAMy community, we have been exploring Hall’s ideas in practice — collectively reading, reflecting and testing them against our projects. Working with milk as a lens of colonial history and cultural heritage has been one case study. Milk is familiar, intimate, ordinary. Yet as we’ve shown elsewhere, it is also deeply politicised, entangled with colonial power, economic survival and ideas of belonging.

In our project *Milking It!*, we’ve found that milk evokes the very tensions we grapple with in heritage work: the pull of nostalgia, the contradictions of global systems, and the contested meanings of care and identity. It shows how loss can be both deeply personal and structurally produced and how institutions are asked to speak into that gap.

Mind the gap

Where does this leave us?

Perhaps heritage work today is not about resolving fractures, or offering closure. It is about learning to sit with the gap — where absence, loss and unsettled expertise converge. It is about resisting both nostalgia's false certainty and reform's quick fixes. And it is about cultivating the kinds of slow, collective, convivial practices that make it possible to keep negotiating the fractures of our time.

Heritage cannot repair every loss. But it can help us acknowledge that loss exists, that it matters, and that how we deal with it will shape the futures we build together.

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Dr. JC Niala
I am Head of Research, Teaching and Collections at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford, and also a theatre maker, poet, and nature writer. My work sits at the intersection of history, heritage, and contemporary practice, where I use creative and interdisciplinary approaches to explore how we understand the past and engage with it in the present. Collaboration is central to my practice, and I often work across institutions, communities, and countries to create projects that connect scholarship with everyday experience.

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Joy / Resistance

By Corrd



Introduction / Non-Binary Thinking

There are many leaders, exponents, and supporters of the Black Joy Movement, and one of the common themes expressed is that the Black Joy Movement is the new wave, and serves us better than the movements before. This binary thinking, that serves to put up one thing against another in order to create opposites, is one of the intellectual tools, and Eurocentric constructs, that we need to just give back. Binary thinking programming doesn't serve us, particularly those of us from marginalised communities.

Black Joy isn't juxtaposed to other forms of resistance. Most of the portrayals of Black Joy centre on the perception of its oppositional positionality to things like Black Love, Black Power, Black Rage, Black Exceptionalism. We, as Afrikan Heritage people, have had to fight for every inch of real estate that we presently occupy, in art, culture, in the current societal fabric, yet our contribution has always been more than our occupancy, whilst being used to add value to mainstream culture, it is consistently undervalued, in and of itself.

By pitting Black Joy against other forms of resistance, we detract both from the power of each, and the accumulative power of them combined. This contributes to the fallacy that we need to qualify what we do in order to afford it a certain level of legitimacy.

Distillation

The Black Joy Movement is a misnomer. Black Joy is not a movement. It's not marches, it's not protest, it's not even showing up. It's not our art, nor our cultural expressions, though these things can serve to induce it. But to attach it to these things obscures it, diminishes our recognition of it, extracts from its true power. The mendacity of cultural hierarchy belittles Black artistic and cultural expression, marginalises it, references it to 'ethnic', and makes it orbital to Whiteness, by centralising the edifices of Eurocentric cultural expression, and by extension, the nature of personhood. So Black Joy becomes this thing, like power, that's referenced and indicated in things that allow its display, but are not actually it.

One year I attended Notting Hill Carnival. As can happen, I walked into a crowd, close to a large Sound that was playing no music, that was so dense that no one could move. After a few minutes of everyone trying to push their way through, the energy in the crowd shifted. People were agitated, tempers started to flare, there was that 'something is about to go off' feeling in the air. Suddenly, the sound came on, and we heard '1,2,3,4!', and James Brown singing 'Sex Machine'. Instantaneously, all angst was released, the crowd, as one, fell into ecstasy and, just for that moment, everyone was attuned to each other's Joy.

Non-Action / Non-Orbital

Black Joy isn't an action. It is a feeling, an experience from within, that can be shared, and connect souls in the moment. It isn't something that can be projected into the future, nor can it be experienced retrospectively, though a retrospective look can invoke that Joy.

Black Joy is the one form of resistance that is neither proximal nor orbital to Whiteness. The impact of Black Joy is vast, from its expression and reflection in its participants, to the unifying nature of its shared experience, and the legitimisation and validation it affords to both the cultural output that inspires it, and the people who experience, express, embody it.

Its experience allows us to heal against the wounds that occur from the violences and the microaggressions that we experience. It allows us to tap into, and remember, our genetic knowledge. It resurrects ancestral memories of a time before we had our current experiences, and allows us to lean back into our ancestral lineage when our souls knew what it was to be free. When we find it, and connect to it, it fills in a loss so deep, it's almost forgotten. It takes us to the space where we remember ourselves.

Resistance / Surrender

The resistance from Black Joy is twofold. One which inhibits us, and the other empowers. As we develop our layers of self-identity, we simultaneously also develop layers of self-protection. This aids us in not allowing ourselves to be in positions that leave us too exposed and vulnerable. These layers, or walls, afford security, and whilst Black Joy is something we instinctively tap into when young, as we grow older, in our various modes of protectionism, we learn to, without thinking, lessen our exposure, and in the process lessen our ability to that frequency, and tap into that part of ourselves. That resistance to allowing ourselves to access and fall into our Joy can be lessened, for example, when we're away from the White Gaze.

The vigilance that comes from our learned protectionism reminds us that we aren't safe, and it's in the remembering of ourselves situationally, whilst experiencing Black Joy, that we can collapse back into our everyday self, and into the reality where we're not fully free.

Fulljoy / Erasure

However, when we find ourselves in a place where we are comfortable to release our layers, and fears, and let ourselves to fall into Black Joy, it requires us to give our tacit consent to submit and surrender, and in that surrender, fully expand. Rastafari uses the term ‘fulljoy’ to describe this. In that moment of surrender we expand and fully occupy ourselves, and bring into being our resistance to Whiteness, by making it absent. The surrender IS the resistance. and in that moment, the resistance becomes effortless.

It is resistance in the moment by absencing whiteness, in fact it defies its very existence, because it says that in this moment, in this universe, I exist, and I’m free, I’m whole, and Whiteness, by its absence, is a non-factor, and a non-consideration. The resistance becomes erasure, and the self-actualisation that happens when experiencing Black Joy is the fullest expression of self.

When we surrender, and fall into that space, we not only allow ourselves to fully expand, and absent Whiteness, but we also open a space inside that is far deeper than ourselves, that connects to the poetry of like souls, and our ancestral memory. This empowers us, through the action of non-effort, to self-actualise, and in the specificity of that experience, make our expression of self-expansive, whole, universal, and free. If only in the Present.

Active practice is active resistance.

FURTHER READING

(not that experiential knowledge is trumped by academic text, but for further insight, you can check out...)

Overstanding Idren: Special Features of Rasta Talk Morphology
www.researchgate.net/publication/326816207_Overstanding_Idren_Special_Features_of_Rasta_Talk_Morphology

Embracing Black Joy:
A Radical Act of Resistance
reconciliationsa.org.au/stories/embracing-black-joy-a-radical-act-of-resistance

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Corrd is a systems translator, creative consultant, cultural strategist, socio-political thinker, broadcaster, writer, revolutionary agitator. He is co-founder and director of the think tank Signifer, and Vice Chair of Ujima Radio.

The Organising Poster

By Nancy Salem

The following piece is a reflection on the cultural production of political movements encountered through the archive, the book, and the library. Conversations at the Liberatory Archives and Memory (LAMy) convenings respond to questions on how the past should be represented, accessed, and remembered. This year, I came across three archives that held visual material from historical political movements, each case raising questions of their political economy: why they were made, how they were made, and in what way they should be kept and remembered. I reflect on engaging with these archives and the questions they, and the LAMy network raise for cultural practitioners, organisers, and memory workers, particularly in light of new technologies and digital practices.

Atelier Populaire

Paris (1968)

In May 1968, a group of artists, workers, and students formed the Atelier Populaire, *Popular Workshop*, to produce visual material as part of the now infamous student and worker strikes. I choose the words — part of — carefully. It has become my shorthand to say that posters like those created by the Atelier (**IMAGE 1**) were made in *support* of movements. But the word support introduces a distance between the material and the movement that the group would likely object to. The production of the posters reflected a process: “the radical students and artists re-examine their points of view by allying with the workers.”¹ It was a chance to rethink ideas about individual artistic creation to what it means to produce together, “projects for posters worked out in common after a political analysis of the day’s events or after discussions at the factory gates...” Through the visual, the students and artists inquired, is this political idea sound?

In compiling texts and posters from ‘68, the Atelier wrote a note to readers that the posters were not for decorative purposes, for display in cultural institutions, or even for historical evidence; not an outcome or outside of the protest. They hoped instead that bringing together the posters in a publication that would inevitably end up in libraries and archives would serve as “inducement for finding,” forging “new levels of action both on the cultural and the political plane.” Not record, but encouragement. The posters’ rightful place was the centre of movements where they are forged, the streets and walls of factories, the note reads, but bound together in a book they appeared in stasis, waiting for their return.

There is something very striking about how the production of these posters was described as tightly interwoven in the daily routine of the commune, as a means to think through its activities. Their production represented something that communicated inwards as well as outwards. I begin to think more concretely about the process of production, a thought that carries to the next archives I explored.

1 Atelier Populaire (1969) Posters from the Revolution: Paris, May 1968.



Image 1. Mai 1968. Notre lutte continue. Atelier populaire ex-École des Beaux-Arts, 1968, author unknown. Public domain. Source: Wikimedia Commons / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Silkscreen Training Project

Johannesburg (1964)

In the Mayibuye Archives in Capetown is another book of movement posters, *Images of Defiance: South African Resistance Posters in the 1980s* that charts the history of 300 images of popular resistance. **IMAGE 2** represents the poster South African Scooter Drivers Union printed in 1984, remembering the history of independent trade unions in the South African liberation movement. The editors in this book refer to the posters as “reflections of a people and a fight”² that also recall a process. The book discusses projects like the Silkscreen Training Project (STP) founded in Johannesburg,³ conceived around workshops for activists to produce their own print media, and simply a facility to print material. The STP would handprint posters using a silkpress, sometimes images and sometimes just information.

2 AWO (1991) ‘Review of Images of Defiance: South African Resistance Posters of the 1980s’, Mayibuye, November. Available at: <https://sahistory.org.za/archive/images-defiance-south-african-resistance-posters-1980s> (Accessed: 2 April 2026).

3 Poster Book Collective of the South African History Archive. (1991). Making posters in South Africa: Shattering the silence. In *Images of Defiance: South African resistance posters of the 1980s*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

The posters from that period can be accessed as part of a [Virtual Exhibition](#) using material from the South African History Archive,⁴ with excerpts of the book that highlight the history of the press: “Silkscreening allowed for full participation by the newly recruited membership of UDF [United Democratic Front] organisations, involving up to 20 people at a time in preparation and printing. The process permitted short ‘runs’ at relatively low cost, which proved perfect for publicising hundreds of local meetings and activities.”⁵ This history would go on to include wrecked and confiscated machines and the detaining of workers that eventually led them to go underground.

A theme was beginning to emerge in my engagement with this material, that was very much concerned with the ability of people to create their own material. In some ways, it reminded me of the discourse around the early days of social media, the ability for anyone with an internet connection to create, share, and connect. While ideas around the egalitarian ‘free’ nature of social media platforms (we pay three-fold with our data) have muted, some of these connotations seem to remain, that we are somehow connected and able to produce. But these projects had a very different imagination of what it means to *own* the means to produce media and its circulation. This led me to a slightly different case study, not a reflection on the posters and the politics they produce, but a reflection on a *plan*.

4 South African History Archive (2026) Telling the story of resistance using posters. Available at: www.saha.org.za/imagesofdefiance/index.htm (Accessed: 2 April 2026).

5 Poster Book Collective of the South African History Archive. (1991). Making posters in South Africa: Shattering the silence. In *Images of Defiance: South African resistance posters of the 1980s*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.



Image 2. SFJP. (2016.). South African History Archive poster collection. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



The Lucas Plan

Sites across the United Kingdom (1976)

In 1976, workers across seventeen Lucas Aerospace sites in the U.K. organised to propose an Alternative Corporate Plan. Facing massive job losses due to automation, offshoring, and defence budget cuts (almost half of their production went to military contracts) workers (organised together as a Combine) developed a plan to produce socially useful products. It was absurd, the workers wrote, that they were out of a job when they could produce urgently needed machines for other sectors. If governments could buy arms from Lucas Aerospace, why couldn't they buy medical equipment? It was their right to produce products that are constructive to their communities, work they want. Today, the Mayday Room Archives in London holds a large amount of newsletters, meeting minutes, newspaper cuttings, and exhibitions and campaign materials from the Combine.

They remain as inducements, as the Atelier Populaire suggested, to think again about what else our work could do. They also represent, from a different lens, what it means to produce our own representations of the world, its possibilities, and futures.

THE SOCIALLY USEFUL SHOW

WORK WE WANT

Sylvia Hagben

STOP — just for a moment — and think about employment and unemployment in a new way.

ISN'T there something odd about having hundreds of thousands of building workers unemployed when there is massive housing shortage, or that hospitals are closed down when the waiting list for beds grows daily? There are many more unfulfilled needs like these from proper public transport to vehicles for the disabled. Yet millions of pounds are spent on such products as Concorde and super sophisticated weapons, which benefit no-one or only a small group of people.

Most of us consider the social injustices as the way things are 'or put them down to 'economics'. However decisions about what products are made are the result of complex political and economic policies. The 'games' on the next panel attempt to explain this. The display then takes a new look at 'economics' and shows how some people have reconsidered the whole basis of their employment and have come up with practical alternatives.

The ideas in this display although simple are quite dramatic and challenge some of the assumptions we make every day about work.



Image 3. Lucas Plan Archives Exhibit Material, Mayday Rooms Archive. London, 2025.

Concluding Thoughts

The push to write this post came, somewhat paradoxically, from my research on Generative AI and production. I have been thinking about what often seems like discursive misdirection: questions about measuring, capturing, and identifying AI creativity, the capacities of new technologies to augment, make more efficient, and speed up production. It does not always seem clear to me that we need to entertain the questions of whether AI is creative at all. These technologies are the result of exploitative systems that require massive amounts of precarious human labour and natural resources. If we reflect on the questions of these archives, what creative process could result from these algorithms? The groups that produced the materials explored in this piece speak powerfully about what it means to produce, what happens and what is contained in the material process of production, and what cultural production is for. Conversations at the LAMy convening and within the community of practice are so often concerned with these fundamental questions, amidst much misdirection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nancy Salem is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cambridge. Her PhD research examined how futurity, crisis, health, and the body are articulated in relation to emerging technologies. Her recent work is focused on the entry of 'big tech' into emerging biotechnology markets, drawing from approaches in STS, cultural studies, and political economy. Salem holds a BA from the American University in Cairo and MSc from SOAS, University of London.

**Thematic
Threads:**
*Reflections on
a Peer-to-Peer
Partnership*

*By Dr. Carol Ann Dixon
and Danni Ebanks-Ingram*

FOLLOWING THE LIBERATORY ARCHIVES AND MEMORY (LAMY) convening in Brighton, 25-26 April 2025, multidisciplinary artist and producer Danni Ebanks-Ingram (pronouns: they/them) and cultural geographer Carol Ann Dixon (pronouns: she/her) established a peer-to-peer partnership through which to explore and discuss shared interests in the oeuvres and art-political activism of contemporary artists who use their creativity to highlight and draw attention to issues of socio-economic, racial and environmental injustice worldwide. Over the course of five, one-hour online conversations the interlocutors presented and exchanged ideas, research resources and artistic case studies in response to the overarching theme of “Art as Resistance.”

In preparation for the first e-meeting, both contributors proposed a set of key questions and sub-themes they wished to explore in reference to the portfolios, publications and campaign activism of specific artists, curators, arts scholars and cultural commentators. Images from the poignant photographic installation “*From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*” (1995/6) by the internationally renowned lens-based artist Carrie Mae Weems were used as a departure point for considering the following issues:

- Care and self-care practices when researching archival texts and images that include challenging historical content about enslavement, imperialism and colonialism
- Negotiating and resisting dominant expectations that prevail within the West to negatively impact artistic self-expression and acts of resistance by creatives and cultural producers with African heritage
- The politics and poetics of re-mediating archival materials via the visual and performing arts
- Intergenerational artistic co-production of knowledge
- Ways to resist, disrupt and push back against the marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination experienced by Black, LGBTQI+ and other minoritised creatives working within and beyond the UK arts, heritage and GLAM sectors.

This report summarises a selection of the discussion points, portfolios of work and creative ideas aired during the five meetings, presented as a co-written reflective review by the two participants: Danni Ebanks-Ingram (DEI) and Carol Ann Dixon (CAD). Some of the artworks, poetry and art-political quotations cited by both writers feature as creative “interludes” and “thematic threads” connecting the sub-sections.

'In humanity, quiet is our dignity... Quiet compels us to 'explore the beauty of the quality of being human,' not only our 'lives weighed down by the suppositions of identity.' It is this exploration, this reach toward the inner life, that an aesthetics of quiet makes possible; and it is this that is the path to a sweet freedom; a black expressiveness without publicness as its forebearer, a black subject in the undisputed dignity of its humanity.' — Quashie, 2012, p. 26

Art as Resistance

CAD: It was a pleasure to work alongside Danni as a fellow co-designer of the LAMy Brighton convening, held in April 2025, and I welcomed the opportunity to continue discussing arts and heritage matters with them via this initial series of peer-to-peer e-meetings. One of the theoretical underpinnings of our opening conversation involved reflecting on the writing of African-American literature scholar Kevin Everod Quashie. In his seminal text *The Sovereignty of Quiet* (2012), Quashie observes that many Black artists have historically been expected to focus solely on issues of identity, race and racism expressed and represented in overtly political ways. Over time, therefore, Black artistic production has tended to become synonymous with public protest, with many artists only receiving mainstream attention and validation when foregrounding the history of collective struggles against racial violence, inequality and injustice. Quashie's use of the term "an aesthetics of quiet" as a metaphor for representing the full spectrum of human lived experiences via the arts in very subtle, nuanced and poignant ways is a conceptual framework — and an alternative terminology — that both of us found insightful and liberating.

Challenging the “Deficit Paradigm”

CAD: Danni’s commitment to challenging the “deficit paradigm” is something I wholeheartedly support and strive to emulate within my own work as a researcher and educator. We both recognise the impact of systemic inequalities as the root causes of the many disparities we observe and encounter in the UK, and internationally. I welcomed Danni’s inclusion of artistic playfulness, creative experimentation, decolonial disruption and unruly behaviour within their own and others’ performance installations as powerful counter-responses to the prevalence of societal stereotyping.

DEI: Morosky touches on challenging the “deficit paradigm” in ‘Notes,’ where he describes what I interpret as a method of recognising, shifting from this deficit paradigm into centring ourselves, as multi-layered. We do not have to stop at the first label we are given (or give to ourselves) if it is not fit, we can enter into our intersectionality.

‘The art of cutting and pasting is maybe the theme of my life. The intersectionality of my existence — existing between several different groups and cultures — almost demands it; especially in a society that needs you to be one thing and one thing only.’ — Morosky, 2021

Re-mediation — Learning from Carrie Mae Weems

CAD: Our shared appreciation for African American lens-based artist Carrie Mae Weems' portfolio of work prompted thought-provoking discussions about the role of the artist as a “witness” who helps audiences understand and learn from difficult histories through their creative re-mediation of archival material. We were both moved by the brilliance of Weems' re-mediation of a collection of racist 19th century daguerreotypes to create her seminal photographic installation “*From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*” (1995/6). Weems' careful copying, enlargement, cropping, tinting red and re-framing of these problematic archival images — and then her overlaying of the portraiture with texts and musical scores that reference the long history of racial injustice in the USA — transformed a traumatising visual archive into a poignant memorial piece commemorating anti-racist resistance. This seminal installation is now part of the New York Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection, viewable online at www.moma.org/collection/works/45579.

DEI: The remediation in this piece also brought up the importance of looking back, but doing so in a way that allows the viewer to reconsider the image. Weems displays this wonderfully and brings back the dignity and humanity that was initially missing in the original archival images. While discussing this work both Carol and I touched on the importance and poignant action of being able to look back at painful and dehumanising archival practices, while not allowing ourselves to be re-traumatised. Weems has given some viewers that opportunity, while still holding space for the original intention to set in its subtext.

Intergenerational Knowledge Co-production

CAD: Listening to Danni describe the artistic collaborations co-developed and performed with their Nan, Chearine Ingram — titled “*To you, from us*” — revealed so much about the importance and value of intergenerational knowledge co-production. Reflecting on this personal case study also led to broader social and health-related considerations about ways to prevent the levels of fatigue, weathering and burnout that can arise from fighting the everyday impacts of structural discrimination, inequality and injustice. Recognising “rest as resistance,” as well as engaging with other forms of self-care, care-giving and wellbeing support within our respective kinship groups and community networks became a recurrent theme that informed our follow-on discussions about individual artists and collectives known for addressing these topics via their artistic practice. For example, Danni shared details about the installation piece “[*Black Power Naps: La Biblioteca Is Open*](#)” (2023) — performed and recorded at MoMA, New York, by the artistic duo Navild Acosta and Sosa. Relatedly, I celebrated the portfolio of Dutch-Sudanese filmmaker Bibi Fadlalla — specifically citing her groundbreaking documentary film about the working lives and challenges of young African-heritage Netherlanders, “*Get Up! And Rest*” [Sta Op! En Rust] (2025).

DEI: Throughout this peer-to-peer partnership, the recurring theme of collaboration, distributive knowledge and disrupting the deficit paradigm came together in discussing ‘*To you, from us*’ and [*Black Power Naps: La Biblioteca Is Open*](#). Both pieces of work centred rest and rebellion to capitalist, grind culture status quo. ‘*To you, from us*’ did this in its process, we had to embody and adapt the same energy through the lens of intergenerational co-production especially where long-term illness and fatigue are present in the everyday life of my grandmother, Chearine, and Black power naps outwardly in presentation and call to rest for its audiences. Collectively, both pieces look at what has been taken and the long-term effect of that.

'Like Colonialism, a lack of sleep was used to break will, to break sanity and the possibility of dreaming about being free. That still is carrying through, generations after. It hasn't been that much time, so it's still resonating in our bodies and our reality. What happens when we don't dream is a question that Black Power Naps seeks to answer.'

— Navild Acosta

Artists in Focus

CAD: Although we had shared interests in the work of a number of high-profile creatives — including Carrie Mae Weems — I was pleased to be introduced to several artists, their portfolios and publications I had not previously researched. In particular, photographer and poet Kevin Morosky's body of work was completely new to me and helped expand my understanding of "*flânerie*" ("strolling"), a concept explored by Cecile Emeke as an artistic practice. For my part, it was a privilege to recount my first encounters with the work of creatives such as African American multidisciplinary artist [Sanford Biggers](#), Gabonese artist-curator and conceptualist [Anguezomo Nzé Mboulou Mba Bikoro](#) (aka Anguezomo Mba Bikoro) and Sierra Leone-born poet, filmmaker and performance installationist [Julianknxx](#). One of the works we appraised together was the sculptural installation "*Blossom*" (2007), by Sanford Biggers, on permanent display at the Brooklyn Museum, New York. A particularly moving and affective aspect of this powerful mixed-media piece commemorating the history of anti-lynching activism in the USA, was Biggers' inclusion of the Jazz-Blues song "*Strange Fruit*" (1939), recorded by Billie Holiday, as the work's soundscape.

DEI: The exploration of Kevin Morosky's work was through his physical media; a [card deck](#) of 'Affirmation for your head top and other things to say to yourself,' and his book '[Notes](#)' described as cut and paste prose. I've followed Morosky's work for well over a decade. There is a limitless sense of freedom to how he approaches filmmaking, writing and his art practice. This feels special and tender in the way his work centres liberation for those who are pushed to the periphery, but have the right to be in the centre. This is a topic that came up quite early on in conversations with Carol and myself, around allowing our stories to be at the centre and questioning and challenging the systems that are at play.



**"Blossom" (2007) – by Sanford Biggers,
displayed at Brooklyn Museum, New York.
Photo: Carol Ann Dixon.**

Concluding Reflections

CAD: Recognising our post-Brighton e-meeting discussions as a peer-to-peer partnership of reciprocal ideas exchanges was the key to their success. I was inspired by every conversation with Danni, which helped to broaden my knowledge and understanding about a wide range of artists who demonstrate creative courage, freedom, respect for difference and a strong commitment to equality and justice via nuanced aesthetic practices and activism. Additionally, I also valued the trust that was demonstrated by Danni, who generously shared insightful information about their own creative and critical body of work as an artist and producer. I'm very pleased to have participated in this collaboration and look forward to future dialogues.

DEI: Having the opportunity to work with Carol as a peer to exchange, connect and share knowledge has been a pleasure. For me there is a deep sense of commitment from Carol to stay connected and curious, and that in itself is exciting. Being part of the LAMy network and seeing how co-creating the Brighton convening has strengthened my sense of community building; specifically from a care-led approach has been an honour experience.

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**Playing
with the Past:**
*Encounters with
the Archive*

By Devika

WHEN SALLY AND EZRENA invited the Brighton convening members to give short lightning talks, I hesitated. Having worked across several community archive projects with distinct themes and approaches, I was not sure what story was mine to tell. In trying to weave a cohesive narrative, I realised a recurring idea was direct access and engagement with the archives. Almost never behind the glass but always handled, touched and interacted with, in real time. I thus framed the presentation and this piece through the concept of “play,” playing with the past through handling archives.

***What does it mean to “play” with the past?
Far from frivolous, “play” can act as a powerful
pedagogic participatory and political tool for
re-encountering the past.***

Archives often sit behind glass or institutional walls. Treated as sacred, untouchable, and beyond question. Drawing from lived experience, I ask: whose knowledge do archives hold, and for whom? What happens when we shift from reverence to relationship?

Rather than treating archives as fixed, holy repositories, I urge for a participatory approach that brings archives into conversation with the communities they represent. This reframes respect: the archive’s power lies not in its exclusivity, but in use. When archives are only valued as rare or sacred, we risk centering preservation over people, and record over relevance.

Through personal encounters with the archive, I reflect on what it means to play with the past: to handle it, question it, and sometimes, reimagine it. I share my experiences from three community-centered projects: *We Are Our History*, *Uncomfortable Oxford* and *Becoming Brent*. Drawing on playful formats, participatory activities, and reimagining of what counts as “the archive,” I’ll reflect on how these projects have sparked new conversations, challenged historical silences, and helped communities see themselves as part of the record.

Play as Method: Holding the Archive Lightly

Working as the associate researcher on Bodleian libraries' *We are our History: Towards Racial Equity* project allowed me to ask, through our community work — who is really allowed to handle the archive? Who gets to respond to it? Who is preserved and who is silenced? What narratives are missing and why?

Traditionally archival practice centres the object and its untouchability. However the historically silenced need intimacy, not more distance; a sense of the archive as a space for encounter, questioning and the presence of their histories. And here, “play” provides an entry-point. We displayed and passed archival material around, asked critical anti-racist questions and drew responses.

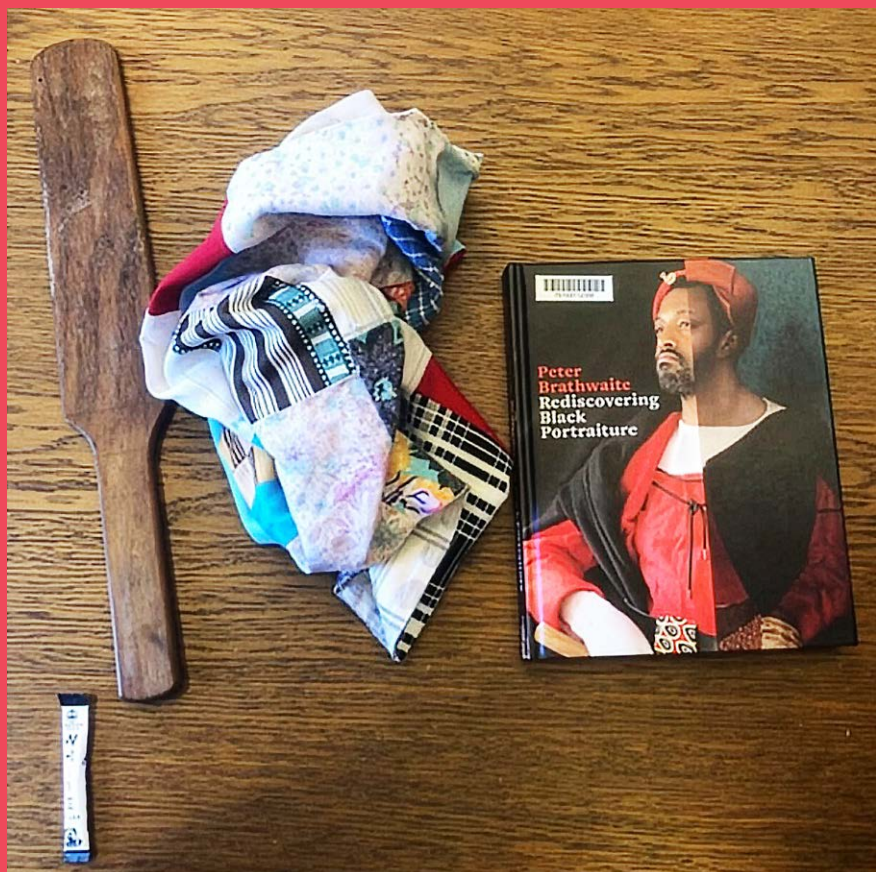
Peter Brathwaite's story of encountering his ancestors, enslaver and enslaved, in the Bodleian archives showcased the importance of intimacy with archives and how they can transform and are transformed by who holds them.

Peter responded to the archive in many ways — he sang songs of the enslaved in the library, centred the tales of his great-grandparents as people rather than as “items” in a catalogue. His exhibition — *Mischief in the archive* questioned what counts as an archive — the official record of the enslaved as property or his great grandmother's pillowcase, the book of “slave” songs or him making us sing them aloud in the Bodleian's quiet rooms?

Peter embodied “play” and opened a world of possibility in the archives. Once frozen and silent, the Bodleian archives became porous and came alive.

At its heart playing with archives as a method means prioritising people and their lived experience and stories over the paper record. Peter's interaction revealed the creativity and transformation released when people are allowed to “play” with the archive. The future of the archive does not just depend on conservation but on connection, the living relationships built in the present.

Play reclaims agency, insisting that the marginalised are not merely subjects of history but agents in how it is told.



Peter's book and his cou-cou stick, pillowcase and sugar packet to represent his ancestors.

Questioning Historical Authority

For those whose lives are still shaped by legacies of empire and exclusion, the “past is the past” is a fallacy. These legacies persist in our spaces, education curriculum, house policies, systems and archives. As a senior guide for [Uncomfortable Oxford](#), we confront these persisting legacies not through lectures but participatory walking tours that invite discussion, provocation and even play.

At every stop, participants receive complete, historically grounded researched accounts of figures like Cecil Rhodes, class issues and the town-gown divide of the city and then are prompted to ask their own questions. In my experience as a guide, individuals often laugh at the absurdities of the empire even as they are horrified by what is hidden in plain sight. Spatial exercises such as asking “who is missing from these statues”? help literally see power and absence built in their environment.

Collaborative discussion encourages participants to form their own interpretations rather than receive conclusions from a guide. Play here lies in shared exploration and openness. I understand our roles here as dismantling the false authority of the historian and making room for dialogue.

This also echoes bell hook’s notion of engaged pedagogy that values dialogue, community and mutual transformation (1994). The past is not set in stone but an ongoing conversation and play creates the conditions for this conversation to be honest, messy and generative.

To play is to engage — to handle — to question — to negotiate and to criticise — not keep the past on a pedestal averse to all such interactions.

Archives Without People Have No Future

The British Empire Exhibition (B.E.E), one of the largest events in the history of colonial Brent, took place from 1924 to 1925. The official aims of the exhibition were articulated as to stimulate trade and reinforce imperial connections when Britain was increasingly being challenged by powers on the global stage. In reality, it reflected the exploitation of colonised peoples and resources. The archives mirror this extractive reality in their silences and inclusions.

As the decolonisation consultant for Brent Council's project *Becoming Brent*, one of our most engaging community activities addressing the B.E.E. "[Postcards in Perspective](#)." We created facsimiles of postcards from the 1924-1925 exhibition and invited community members to tear, remix and create new postcards reflecting their present realities. Brent, one of the most diverse areas, came alive through these creations.

By handling facsimiles, non-specialist participants made the past tangible — literally touching and transforming it. The resulting postcards contributed to a new exhibition, challenging the original imperial images and forming a counter-archive.

My call to play with the past is not a rejection of history but a commitment to a more ethical future. It demands methods that centre humanity over hierarchy. A refusal to let dusty inaccessible manuscripts be held in higher regard than the communities who engage with them.

The archives are not the only thing we preserve. We have to preserve dignity, relationship and accountability.

Play here becomes a decolonial method, interrupting reverence to reimagine whose histories matter and how we tell them. It treats the past with both creativity and care.

Conclusion: Playing Forward

In a time when memory is contested and history weaponised, we need methods that resist this rigidity while allowing pain and possibility. And play, is one such engaged method. Play insists that the past belongs to all of us, not as reverent observers but as engaged participants.

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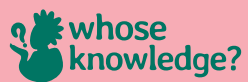
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devika is an education consultant and research practitioner whose passion and research focus on how people engage with knowledge, especially libraries, archives and museums. She firmly believes that archives come alive through their people, a principle at the heart of her ongoing doctoral research at the University of Oxford and professional practice. Her approach is driven by a commitment to equity-based methodologies and fostering inclusive spaces for reflection, dialogue, and creativity.



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