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Casting Stones with Intent: Transnational Interventions towards Ethical and Reparative Memorialisation[1]

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In the summer of 2020, on the wave of the Black Lives Matter Movement, statues and public monuments became focal points of political struggle, perceived by many as symbolic reminders of pervading western imperial legacies. Yet, the debate over public memorialisation is far from new. Starting from the 2020 BLM protests in Britain and going back to previous campaigns, this article contextualises the toppling, effacing and removal of well-known statues of colonial agents in Britain, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and examines artistic interventions which appropriate, challenge and shatter static historical interpretations of imperial figures and events. Our contention is that these interventions constitute diverse forms of performative and re-storied resistance reflecting transnational demands for redress and reparation.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter, Edward Colston, James Cook, Memorialisation, Imperial Amnesia, Artistic Interventions.

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1. Introduction

In his recent book *Empireland* (2021), Sathnam Sanghera ironically argues for the creation of an "Empire Awareness Day" (1) on the grounds that the knowledge that British people have about imperial history is, at best, limited, if not sugar-coated and imbued with a nostalgic colonial rhetoric. Sanghera concedes that many people in Britain learned more "about British imperialism in a few months of statuecide than we did during our entire schooling" (1), but also that the intense debate ensuing from these attacks and the controversies they generated are still insufficient to explain the long-lasting impact of imperialism in Britain. "[I]mperialism" –he concludes– "is not something that can be erased with a few statues being torn down or a few institutions facing up to their dark past; it exists as a legacy [that] explains nothing less than who we are as a nation" (14). The transnational upsurge of protests that swept through the world in 2020, on what could be considered the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement,[1] targeted long-standing statues and colonial monuments demonstrating that protesters perceived them as potent symbolic reminders of the pervading western imperial legacies and, hence, as a focal point of political and ideological struggle.

Crowds rallied around iconic statues, decapitating, smashing, defacing and toppling them, spraying graffiti to re-signify them and expressing feelings of aggravation and anger, ultimately intended to denounce the legacy of racism and colonialism they stand for. In the UK, on June 7, the waters of Bristol Harbour were presented with the toppled 1895 bronze statue of slave-merchant Edward Colston. The event, which was mass-broadcast, reverberated across the country and throughout the world, generating a wave of iconoclasm and public protests of global proportions (Nasar 2020, 1222; von Tunzelmann 2021, 1). In the weeks that followed, statues of Columbus and Confederate "heroes" were graffitied over, toppled, or hurriedly removed from their plinths by the local authorities in the United States; statues of King Leopold II were vandalised or toppled, and subsequently removed from different Belgian cities; and various monuments celebrating Empire "heroes" were similarly targeted by protesters worldwide. In Aotearoa New Zealand, attacks were directed against statues of Sir George Grey, John Hamilton, and Captain James Cook, whose statue, located in Tūranga/

1 A social movement which originated in 2012 after George Zimmerman was acquitted for the shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida (26th February) and which gained considerable national support in 2014 with the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter after the shootings of both Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri (9th August) and Eric Garner in New York (17th July), eventually becoming a global movement in 2020 on what could be considered the second wave of the Black Lives Matter Movement ignited by the killing of George Floyd on 25th May after being pinned to the ground by Officer Derek Chauvin.

Gisborne near the area where he first set foot on the country, was graffitied over with the words "Black lives matter and so do Māori" (Ballantyne 2021). BLM protesters in Sydney also marched towards the statue of Cook in Hyde Park, heavily guarded by police forces to prevent its damage. Their chants "Black Lives Matter!" and "Too many coppers, not enough justice" worked as an ironic and bitter reminder of the police brutality which had not only killed George Floyd a few days earlier, but continues to raise the numbers of Indigenous Australians' deaths in custody (Edmonds 2021, 801-802).

The targeting of statues displayed in public spaces in territories formerly colonised by the British is a long established and well-known story. This is most evidently testified by the toppling of George III in New York on July 9, 1776 to mark the beginning of the American Revolution. This scene was famously immortalised in paintings by Johannes Oertel in 1853 and William Walcutt in 1854, both of which were turned into memes during the BLM protests. One of these memes responded ironically to the commonly held argument that equals the toppling of statues with the destruction of history, wittily remarking that the result of the toppling of George III's statue is that "no one knows who won the American Revolution" (quoted in von Tunzelmann, 2021, 27). Queen Victoria statues have also been repeatedly targeted in various parts of the world as far back as 1876 when in India "two Indian brothers who had been refused places in the army [vandalized it by] pouring tar over its head" (von Tunzelman 2021, 73) and later on in 1905 when other statues of said monarch "were tarred following the unpopular partition of Bengal" (73). In South Africa, the first example of a public intervention on a public monument dates back to 1497 when a stone cross of Vasco da Gama was toppled down by the Indigenous population, an event which shows that "the practice of toppling statues is as old as the practice of erecting them" (Goodrich and Bombardella 2016, 2).

Reinvigorated as it was by BLM protests, the debate over memorialisation is far from new. The 2020 events need to be understood as the continuation of previous discussions ignited, among others, by the Rhodes Must Fall Campaign which began on March 2015 in South Africa, and the Charlottesville controversy in the summer of 2017 over Robert E. Lee's statues. In Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, imperial "heroes", colonial rulers and the ever-present ANZAC memorials have long been in the limelight, although controversy over settler memorialisation resurged with strength in 2018, as both countries prepared to commemorate the 250th anniversary of James Cook's arrival on their coasts (in 1769 and 1770, respectively). Although the material consequences and strategies of the protests might seem the same –the physical interventions on memorials– in the context of settler cultures, the concept of imperial amnesia does not fully address the complexities of entitlement to the land. Drawing upon the notion

of Native Title, we propose the concept of "memory title" to encapsulate the ongoing conflicts between the already pervasive presence of white settler title and the historically obliterated vindications of Indigenous title to the land. This entails bringing settler narratives under scrutiny and opening new pathways for reconciliation. Thus, to restore and re-story the past.

The political, academic, and worldwide social responses that ensued from the global wave of iconoclasm were unsurprisingly polarized along the partisan lines of the culture-wars trenches. Strident voices notwithstanding, these events have shed light back on the roots and aims of imperial amnesia (Sanghera 2021, 73) and revived discussions about the ways to confront it worldwide. This conversation goes beyond aesthetic or formal choices, and must necessarily engage with the multi-faceted effects on those who not only see their experience and contribution obliterated from the official narrative, but also feel affronted by the material vestiges of imperialism. Penelope Edmonds argues that the global replication of the BLM protests has served to highlight the interconnected colonial legacies of slavery and Indigenous dispossession, revealing "how the grand historical narratives signalled by monuments are challenged, subverted and re-storied not only by national events but by mobile, recursive and transnational narratives of protest and memory that are locally inflected" (2021, 804). The 2020 events were thus particularly relevant because they contributed to the redraw and the reinterpretation of a long history of anti-colonial protests and resistance, reinforcing the links between the anti-imperial and the anti-racist agendas.

Starting from the 2020 BLM protests in Britain, and going back in time to previous waves of protest sweeping through former British colonies like Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, this article contextualises the toppling, effacing and destruction of well-known statues of colonial agents and "heroes" as part of a recursive and locally-inflected debate which is far from exhausted. The article frames these events as examples of the "politics of decolonial inquiry" (Mignolo 2021, 2) in practice. These events should thus be understood as part of long-standing and wider demands for decolonisation in public spaces and museums, a complex task which, among other things, "concerns the proactive identification, interrogation, deconstruction and replacement of hierarchies of power that replicate colonial structures" (Giblin et al 2019, 472). The panoply of interventions we explore illustrate attempts to redress imperial and settler amnesia and vindicate "memory title". These interventions include statue defacement, toppling, removal or disappearance from public view, dialogical reinterpretation through the installation of new plaques amending previous historical interpretations, or the relocation in museums, a decision which, in turn, has (re)opened the conversation about the celebratory or commemorative narratives bestowed on museum spaces. We also pay attention to various ethical memorialisation attempts by discussing

both individual artworks and communal initiatives responding to government-sponsored remodelling plans of iconic memorial sites. Collectively, these artistic responses demonstrate that monuments and sites can be "re-storied in theatrical and performative spaces of creative protest" (Edmonds 2021, 803). Performance is intrinsic to the establishment, public unveiling and veneration of monuments in ceremonies or anniversary celebrations (Antonello and Cushing 2021, 749); the artistic interventions we discuss appropriate and elaborate on this performative dimension to shatter static historical interpretations of figures and events and to imagine new forms of resistance in a context marked by transnational demands for redress and reparation.

2. Statues Matter

The toppling of iconic statues in the summer of 2020 conveyed, for many, an overwhelming sense of fury. Media coverage in major newspapers around the world evinced the polarized debate that ensued between those who demonized the toppling of and attacks on statues and those who vindicated the events as long overdue. The sense of saturation and rage that the media seemed to exploit came to displace and downplay the real issues at stake. The outburst was not new and it was anything but merely wanton vandalism. The anger that transpired was not exclusively against the values embodied by the historical figures or events that the targeted statues and monuments represented. What these actions came to stand for were enduring controversies over the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, deep-rooted structural racism and white supremacy, slavery and the exploitation of human beings and land resources, while they helped to rekindle claims for Indigenous sovereignty and ongoing demands for historical reparation and ethical memorialisation.

A case in point of such prior and long-standing debates over public memorialisation was the defacing of British imperialist and colonial politician Cecil Rhodes' statue at the campus of the University of Cape Town in 2015. This act of protest by student and activist Chumani Maxwele resonated globally and sparked the Rhodes Must Fall movement, which echoed in Britain with the demand of the removal of Cecil Rhodes statue from Oxford's Oriel College, as well as further calls to decolonise universities and their curriculum (Knudsen and Andersen 2019; Shilliam 2019). This initiative provoked fierce opposition, particularly in the right-wing media, based on the belief that the figure of Cecil Rhodes should be judged by the standards of his time, rather than by those of today. Yet, defending such a stance concealed the fact that Rhodes was "reviled by British politicians, thinkers, and writers at the time – even at Oxford itself" (Newsinger 2016, 70). The campaign to remove the statue from Oxford was

reignited after Colston's statue was toppled in Bristol. Nonetheless, in 2021 Oriel College abandoned previous plans to remove the Grade II listed statue memorial on the grounds of the financial costs and the complex planning processes involved (Race 2021). Instead, an explanatory plaque to contextualise the college's controversial benefactor has been placed with the following words as part of the larger inscription: "Rhodes, a committed British colonialist, obtained his fortune through exploitation of minerals, land, and peoples of southern Africa. Some of his activities led to great loss of life and attracted criticism in his day and ever since," together with a link to the College's website with further details on the statue and Rhode's background (Contextualisation of the Rhodes Legacy). Such contextualisation has been received by campaigners as an action which further "trivialises the pain and suffering Rhodes caused" (Cecil Rhodes Statue 2021) and continues to memorialise in the public space the legacy of an inveterate imperialist. Maxwele's intervention upon the statue at Cape Town University was indeed primarily directed at the ideological values it represented and he stated that "as black students we are disgusted by the fact that this statue still stands here today as it is a symbol of white supremacy" (Goodrich and Bombardella 2016, 7). In relation to the controversies generated around the Rhodes Must Fall movement, Procter argues that the excessive focus on statues and their destruction has prevented many people from seeing "that the endurance of the statues is merely a symptom, and not the underlying cause" of the racism on which our contemporary societies are built (2020, 217). "Removing a Statue," Procter continues, "is not an end point: it is the start of a bigger project of challenging the social and cultural views that put it there in the first place" (218).

In their symbolic power, statues undoubtedly matter. But as symbols, statues are not history (Carlson and Farrelly 2022, 5; Sanghera 2021, 207), nor do they convey historical truth because they do not represent history: they stand for "what people in the past choose to celebrate and memorialise" (Catterall 2020). Statues that commemorate historically significant figures are not "a record of history but of historical memory" (von Tunzelman 2021, 5). As von Tunzelman reminds us, "statues are not neutral, and do not exist in vacuums. Our reactions to them depend on who they commemorate, who put them up, who defends them, who pulls them down, and why" (4). Statues are thus not only firmly physically situated in public spaces but also ideologically in the dominant collective imagery and cannot be seen as objective, neutral or static representations of an immutable past. They are "contingent, temporally remote, and subject to contestation" (Nasar 2020, 1224), so the symbolic values commemorated through them and their suitability to be displayed in public spaces cannot remain unalterable and unquestionable through time. Statues "mediate a conversation between past and present" (Catterall 2020) and, for that

reason, they should be decoded as indicative of the ways in which contemporary societies see themselves reflected in history (von Tunzelman 2021, 5).

Statues matter, they have "substance," because they are usually created as political tools to reaffirm the values and ideals of the time of their creation, a time in which the moral values of the revered figure are aligned with the values of the establishment which chooses them as symbols. Statues are rarely representations from the historical period they stand for; on the contrary, they embody the principles, morals, and nature of the establishment at the time they were erected, in most cases, long after the historical event memorialised took place and the historical figures they depict passed away. Claire Baxter, in fact, sees them more as archaeology than history, because they tell us not about the subject they celebrate but about the society that chose them as symbols: "These statues are therefore a story of us. Who we venerated and celebrated, what stories we told, and what values we upheld" (quoted in Carlston and Farrelly 2022, 6). It is only logical then that statues have become crucial targets when it comes to the rebuttal of the apparently universal values they originally stood for.

Recognizing the contingency of their historical value paves the way for understanding statues and monuments as historical focal points for political debate in the public space, as "tools in a struggle over race, economy, socio -political formations and cultural affirmation" (Knudsen and Andersen 2019, 253). Thus, monuments or statues can no longer be seen as static depictions of a past literally set in stone. As Ballantyne puts it: "The durable materials that statues are fashioned from encourage us to see them as enduring, but in reality public memory is profoundly dependent on the shifting currents of political debate and cultural sentiment" (2021). More than as rigid versions of the past, statues should be seen as capable of "set[ting] into motion" interpretations of that past, so that we can collectively embark on a "journey towards removal and new beginnings" (Knudsen and Andersen 2019, 250). The act of attacking a statue sets it on a journey; from being an iconic and symbolic object to becoming an *abject* capable of mobilizing citizens (249).

3. Confronting and Redressing Imperial Amnesia

In Britain, several iconic public memorials had ignited debate prior to the surge of global interventions leading to Colston's over-exploited statuecide. Active calls to decolonise public statues of widely celebrated colonial "heroes" such as Henry Morton Stanley and Admiral Horatio Nelson, to name but two, had long been in the public debate. In the wave of the removal of confederate statues in the US in 2017, demands were made in the UK to pull down Nelson's Column, erected in 1813 in Trafalgar Square, central London, grounded on the fact that he was

"without hesitation, a white supremacist [and] used his seat in the House of Lords and his position of huge influence to perpetuate the tyranny, serial rape and exploitation organised by West Indian planters, some of whom he counted among his closest friends" (Hirsh 2017). For its part, Henry Morton Stanley's bronze memorial, at a cost of 31,000 pounds, has stirred contrary emotions since it was erected on March 18, 2011 in Denbigh, North Wales. A group of musicians and residents from Bangor and nearby villages have been protesting yearly against the imperial values the statue represents. Stanley's bronze artefact is, for them, a public acknowledgement of a merciless explorer who opened the African continent to exploitation by European powers. Protesters perceive in Stanley's statue a glorification of the nineteenth-century imperialist hero whose celebration inescapably conceals the darker side of his deeds. Interventions to shed light into Stanley's unaccountable past have included the covering of the statue with a rubber sheath made by local artist Wanda Zyborska which "ceremoniously fit[s] over the statue as part of the annual funeral procession to draw attention to the millions of African people who died or were mutilated as a result of Stanley's exploits in the Congo rubber industry" (Protestors to Cover 2018). In the same dialogical way, Jonathan Jones had earlier suggested that the statue's plinth should be remorsefully inscribed with "The horror! The horror" (2010), the final words of Coronel Kurtz, Conrad's imperialist anti-hero in *Heart of Darkness*, whose fictional account is often considered to have been inspired by Stanley's expedition in the Congo.

As sustained above activist responses to Rhodes', Nelson's and Stanley's statues should be read not as attempts to merely deface, destroy or erase the statues, but as efforts to set these static and self-complacent memorials into ethico-political motion in order to bring awareness of the enduring and transnational grievances that the glorification of imperial figures in public spaces entail. These antecedents help contribute to the understanding of the toppling of statues in the summer of 2020 not as new events, but as part of a continuum for ethical memorialisation, "a recognition that the White heroes of the past need to be put under erasure – a form of global reckoning" (Mendes 2021, 395). Yet, this process of erasure, whether in the form of the physical removal the statue or the contextualisation of its meaning through the installation of new plaques, does not entail "a material erasure of the statue, but instead a *sous rature* [...] where the meaning of the statue is under erasure, crossed out, but legible" (394-395).

The 2020 controversy over Edward Colston's statue exemplifies its physical and symbolic journey from the public space to the waters of Bristol harbour and then from the museum to a participatory survey to decide its future. Since it was erected in 1895, nearly two centuries after his death, the memorial to Edward Colston sculpted by John Cassidy has been the focal point of socio-political and

ideological struggle. This was evident even before the statue was actually placed on its pedestal; James Arrowsmith, the businessman responsible for raising funds to pay for it, initially failed to gather the required amount (Sanghera 2021, 208). Eventually, Cassidy's work was "unveiled during an elaborate ceremony [and], the statue, according to one newspaper article published at the time, was "designed to encourage the citizens of today to emulate Colston's noble example and walk in his footsteps" (Nasar 2020, 1219). These words, which omit references to his colonial activities, show that Colston was memorialised at the time because of his status as a local philanthropist, and a founder of civic and charitable organisations, rather than because of the source of his income. From 1990, however, his colonial connections could no longer be ignored and campaigners first called for the removal of the statue due to his sombre legacy as a slave trader for the Royal Africa Company, purposefully omitted in the plaque that accompanied it, which described Colston as "one of the most virtuous and wise sons of [Bristol]," as well as in the unveiling ceremony, in which the Mayor of Bristol presented him as carrying "business [...] with the West Indies" (von Tunzelmann 2021, 182).

Debates over Colston's role and historical legacy became more audible in the aftermath of the 1996 Festival of the Sea Event, which glossed over Colston's and Bristol's connection to transatlantic slavery by celebrating the city's maritime history with the launching of a replica of John Cabot's ship, the Mathew, used in his 1497 voyage. Bristolian artist Tony Forbes responded to this selective imperial amnesia with "Sold down the River" (1999), a painting in which he dialogically engages with Colston's statue and the lasting legacies of the hegemonic and triumphalist narratives of abolitionism dominant in British historiography. As Forbes wrote: "This festival, encouraged by the Council, funded by big business and hyped by our media, was a slap in the face to the black community and an insult to the intelligence and sensitivity of many Bristolians. It was the weekend that Bristol broke my heart" (Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery). The journey towards ethical memorialisation in relation to Colston's legacy was officially set into motion in 2018 when the Bristol City Council added a plaque to the original one, with an alternative decolonial message that properly contextualised Colston's figure:

> As a high official of the Royal African Company from 1680 to 1692, Edward Colston played an active role in the enslavement of over 84,000 Africans (including 12,000 children) of whom over 19,000 died en route to the Caribbean and America. Colston also invested in the Spanish slave trade and in slave-produced sugar. As Tory MP for Bristol (1710-1713), he defended the city's "right" to trade in enslaved Africans. Bristolians who did not subscribe to

> his religious and political beliefs were not permitted to benefit from his charities. (Edward Colston Plaque 2018)

A year later, in May 2018, activists modified the statue by shackling Colston's legs with a knitted blood-red ball and chain to remind pedestrians of his connections to the Royal African Company and plantation slavery. On October 18, 2018, a hundred clay effigies were laid in the shape of a slave ship's hull beneath Colston's plinth. The purpose of the installation was to draw attention to the ways in which contemporary forms of slavery are inextricably connected to asymmetrical power relations rooted in colonialism: "the bricks that formed the shape of the ship were decorated with jobs that are often at risk of exploitation. Job titles such as 'domestic workers' and 'farmworkers' reminded us of the deafening gap that we still need to bridge in the 21st century to extinguish racism" (Artist Action 2020)

These sustained-through-time initiatives demonstrate that the toppling of the statue, its subsequent throwing into the harbour waters and its placement on display in the M-Shed Museum marked an uncomfortable yet much needed journey "to start a city-wide conversation about its future" (Burch-Brown, Cole, et al.). As Saima Nasar has argued, the toppling of Colston's statue "shed light on the unfinished revolution of emancipation, that is the continued fight for social, cultural, and political equality" (2020, 1224). In an attempt to negotiate a collective reckoning of Bristol's imperial legacies, a temporary exhibition was opened from 4 June 2021 until 3 January 2022 and displayed the statue and the plinth laying down together with a timeline of events and a selection of placards from the protests, an unambiguous instance of *sous rature*, to go back to Mendes' point. Colston's journey resumed in the summer of 2021 when a public survey about the future of the statue was carried out by the Bristol History Commission in collaboration with Bristol City Council Consultation and Engagement and the M-Shed Museum. The results of the survey were published in the report *The Colston Statue. What Next*? (2022), which included a series of recommendations for both the statue and the plinth based on 13,984 participants' responses. Regarding the former, the first, second and third recommendations are that "the Colston statue enters the permanent collection of the Bristol City Council Museums service," that it is "preserved in its current state and the opportunity to reflect this in the listing description is explored with Historic England" and that in the museum's display ensures that history is presented "in a nuanced, contextualised and engaging way, including information on the broader history of the enslavement of people of African descent" (Burch-Brown et al. 2022, 17). As for the plinth's fate, the first recommendation is that a new plaque is installed, alongside the original one to explain "when and why the statue was put up and taken down" (18). The suggested wording reads as follows:

> On 13 November 1895, a statue of Edward Colston (1636-1721) was unveiled here celebrating him as a city benefactor. In the late twentieth an early twenty-first century, the celebration of Colston was increasingly challenged given his prominent role in the enslavement of African people. On June 2020, the statue was pulled down during Black Lives Matter protests and rolled into the harbour. Following consultation with the city in 2021, the statue entered the collections of Bristol City Council's museum. (18)

The recommended inscription not only provides concise and factual details about the original statue, it also acknowledges previous material and symbolic interventions and calls to decolonise the public memorial. In so doing, it contextualises the final defacing of the statue and prevents the passing of simple judgement of the toppling as mere vandalism, prompting instead a more nuanced understanding of the events. In other words, the inscription validates every distinctive leg in Colston's journey; a journey that Britain, as a nation, is prompted to navigate in earnest. Ultimately, Colston's performative removal from the public space can be interpreted as a metaphorical erasure in the country's epic narrative that historians have also been contesting. British plantation slavery not only reshaped the socio-economic life of the Empire's metropolitan centre, but also had a profound importance in the shaping of modern Britain and the lasting legacies of such involvement still have a prominent and tangible presence in the urban spaces of present-day Britain as it has been highlighted by the UCL research projects "Legacies of British Slave Ownership" (2009-2012) and "Structure and significance of British Caribbean slave-ownership 1763-1833" (2013-2015), led by Professor Catherine Hall, or by Corinne Fowler's recent project "Colonial Countryside: National Trust Houses Reinterpreted," which explores the links between colonialism and the National Trust properties and has been the target of fierce criticism. As Arifa Akbar has argued, "domestic history cannot be separated from the vast former empire building, […] which was inextricably bound to the economics of global slavery" (2016). The deeply emotional responses ensuing from the uncovering of this "forgotten" side of British history testify to the fact that there is still much to be acknowledged, explored and negotiated, and, as Sanghera argues, perhaps the starting point should be an "awareness" of these legacies in the urban and imaginative spaces of modern Britain.

4. Restoring and re-storying memory

Controversies over public memorials and attacks on statues of colonial figures in former settler colonies, like Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, go back a long

way and reveal a deep awareness of the links between settler memorialisation and the colonial legacy of destruction, violence and land dispossession against which the countries' Indigenous populations have struggled for decades. It is only logical that the 2020 worldwide BLM demonstrations resonated with Indigenous activists and protesters long engaged in the fight against police brutality, institutional racism or socioeconomic marginalisation, profoundly aware of "the entwined legacies of violence against Indigenous peoples and people of color" (Edmonds 2021, 803), although these links are not always officially recognized. Denying the connections between these forms of oppression, Australian PM Scott Morrison urged protesters to put their demands into perspective and remember that "there was no slavery in Australia" (Edmonds 2021, 803; Murphy 2020), thus ignoring the history of de facto slavery whose victims were the Indigenous peoples used as free labour in the pastoral industry (Murphy 2020) and the South Pacific Islanders who were "blackbirded" and forced to work on Queensland plantations (Doherty 2017). Recent attacks on statues and monuments in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand cannot be taken as mere replications of the 2020 global iconoclastic movement, but must be read as part of a sustained-through-time critique of colonial symbols and celebrations and a renewed collective effort at establishing more equitable forms of memorialisation in these countries.

Particularly intense were the debates surrounding the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of James Cook's arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand (1769) and Australia (1770). To mark this historical landmark, the Australian government announced a series of events, named Endeavour 250, including sending a replica of Cook's *HMB Endeavour* to circumnavigate the country from March 2020, a journey Cook himself never undertook, and which had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was not the first re-enactment of Cook's arrival on Australian shores, nor the first time Indigenous Australians resisted the sanitised and offensive performance of this historical event as made-to-measure foundational narrative for white Australians (Darian-Smith and Schlunke 2020). During the bicentenary celebrations in 1970, Cook's landing was re-enacted in Kamai Botany Bay in the presence of Queen Elizabeth II, while a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people gathered on the opposite side of the bay to lay funeral wreaths on the water as a symbol of mourning (2020). The 2020 commemorative acts were similarly contested with marches and calls to boycott the events (Sentance 2021, 825) on the grounds that they minimised, or plainly ignored, the violent nature and consequences of the encounter, and continued to present Cook as the discoverer of Australia, as proudly proclaimed in the plaques and inscriptions placed on the multiple monuments that honour him.

But these are not new arguments. The statue-war debate in Australia must be read as a continuation of the "history wars" of the 1990s. Some of the messages which in the last years have been repeatedly graffitied over statues of Queen Victoria, James Cook, James Stirling (founding Governor of Western Australia) or Lachlan Macquarie (fifth Governor of New South Wales) capture the most contested and controversial terms of the discussion. The words "Change the Date" or "No Pride in Genocide" sprayed over the plinth of James Cook's statue in Sydney's Hyde Park in 2017 verbalised the dangers of historical amnesia and asked for a reformulation of the narratives of discovery and peaceful settlement. This project must start by considering how the history of the country is narrated, remembered and commemorated in celebrations like Australia Day, which marks the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, and thus continues to sanction the terra nullius fallacy, in turn minimising some of the key achievements of Indigenous activism, including the landmark 1992 Mabo decision which prompted the recognition of Native Title for Indigenous Australians. Celebrating Cook's arrival in 1770 or the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 as foundational moments reveals a failure to establish more inclusive national narratives and continues to put on hold the project of Reconciliation initiated in the 1990s.

Similar controversies surrounded the acts organised in Aotearoa New Zealand under the name Tuia 250-Encounters, emphatically presented not as a celebration but as a commemoration of a key date in the country's history. The Māori word "tuia" –to bind, to weave – was chosen to capture the dialogic spirit of the initiative, to highlight the country's dual heritage, and to redirect the celebratory narrative of European arrival towards a more fluid conversation about the history of two cultures coming together and experiencing both moments of conflict and understanding. The overall aim of the initiative was to strengthen connections between communities in order to construct a shared and more inclusive future, in the spirit of the Treaty of Waitangi. In the words of Kelvin Davis, Minister for Māori Crown Relations, Tuia 250 constituted "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for New Zealanders to have honest conversations about the past, the present and our future together" (*Tuia 250 Report* 2019, 4). Besides a large number of educational and cultural initiatives intended to revise the official narrative of Cook's "discovery," the Tuia 250 commemorations included a main voyaging event which took a flotilla of vessels around some of Cook's landing sites. This event differed substantially from the one announced by the Australian government because, together with the replica of Cook's *Endeavour* and two other European-style vessels, the flotilla was also formed by traditional Māori and Pacific wakas which stood as a physical reminder of their highly developed navigational skills. As indicated in the *Tuia 250 Report* issued by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, this voyage was "devised as a metaphor, a tangible

experience for New Zealanders [who] were encouraged to think about what is unique about our dual heritage, our voyaging traditions and what binds us together as a people" (2019, 8). The events were followed and celebrated by many local iwi, but also fiercely criticised by others who felt that, by reframing this historical events as mere "encounters" the organisers were euphemistically glossing over –and thus implicitly minimising– the violent effects ensuing from Cook's arrival in Aotearoa, which started with the killing of nine Māori men. The Ngāti Kahu iwi refused to allow the *Endeavour*, which Arama Rata deemed "the replica death ship" (Matthews 2019), to dock in Mangonui (Russell 2019), and other Māori protesters called for boycotting the events, stressing the importance of *not* celebrating Cook and his legacy.

For many others, however, the 250th anniversary celebrations demonstrated that it is possible to rethink the country's foundational narratives and to configure what New Zealand historian Tony Ballantyne calls a "changing landscape of memory" (2020). These changes included symbolic gestures, like the expression of regret offered to the Ngāti Oneone iwi on October 2, 2019 by British High Commissioner Laura Clarke on behalf of the British Government for the deaths of their ancestors, killed in their first meetings with Cook and his crew (Graham-McLay 2019). Clarke pronounced her expression of regret at the Ruatanuika lookout on Titirangi/Kaiti Hill in Tūranga/Gisborne, by a sculpture of Te Maro, a Ngāti Oneone ancestor, and one of the victims of these early encounters. The sculpture, created by Ngāti Oneone artist Nick Tupara, was erected in 2019 on the same spot where an older statue of Cook had stood since the 1969 bicentennial commemorations. Informally known as "Crook Cook" because of its inaccurate representation of its subject (Wallace 2019), the statue had been vandalised on several occasions and was finally removed in 2019. Te Maro's sculpture was part of a larger remodelling project of Cook's landing place, now renamed Puhi Kai Iti Cook Landing Site National Historic Reserve, which culminated in 2019 and constitutes an excellent example of how public places can be redefined in agreement with more inclusive and dialogical forms of memorialisation (Edmonds 2021, 811). The 1906 obelisk celebrating Cook's arrival has been maintained, but is now reframed by a new installation formed by several pieces which invites the viewer to question the triumphalist version of Cook's "discovery" and to contextualise his presence in the country as part of a longer and more complex history of navigational prowess which dates back to the Polynesian peoples who reached Aotearoa well before Cook. The site acknowledges the landing site of the ancestral waka or Māori canoe Te Ikaroa-a-Rauru, led by its main navigator Maia, who is represented in the central piece of the installation, as well as the victims of that first encounter in the form of nine tiki figures placed inside paddle-shaped forms (Ballantyne 2021).

As Carlson and Farrelly argue, protesters and defenders of the removal of statues like those of Cook "are not denying or contending the courage, determination, and tenacity of these men, nor the fact that they were explorers" (2022, 5), what they argue is the assumption that these statues celebrate the act of discovery, a problematic assumption that denies the evident fact that places like Australia and New Zealand had long being explored and settled by Indigenous peoples and had displayed the same "courage, determination, and tenacity prior to the arrival of any white explorers" (5).

In a more tepid articulation of the encounter metaphor, the Australian government announced in 2018 a $50-million investment redevelopment plan of Cook's landing place, now known as Meeting Place Precinct at Kurnell, in Botany Bay Kamai National Park. In a media announcement released by the New South Wales Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, the remodelling of the site was presented as "the perfect opportunity to ensure we mark this important occasion and provide a legacy for future generations to reflect and hear the stories of this important place" (2018). In the spirit of reconciliation and dialogical memorialisation, the project chosen to redesign and re-signify the site was formed of a combination of pieces of art designed by two female artists, Julie Squires and Gweagal woman Theresa Adler. Placed on the shoreline are a bronze sculpture of a mother and a baby whale, one of the dreaming totems of the Gweagal people of the Eora nation, and two stringybark canoes, traditionally used by Gweagal women to fish. Further inland, visitors walk past a sculpture of a Gweagal family, showing a grandmother and three children. The remodelling is completed with the Yalabi Dayalung Bora ground, conceived as an outdoor learning space, which can be used "in the passing on of cultural knowledge, as well as the sharing of 'the view from the shore' oral history from the Gweagal people's experience" (ThinkOTS 4). The redevelopment of this site was completed with another piece, "Eyes of the Land and the Sea," by Walbanga and Wadi Wadi woman Alison Page and Nik Lachacjzak, a piece which, as Page explains,

> brings together different perspectives on our shared history - the bones of a whale and the ribs of a ship - and sits in the tidal zone between the ship and the shore where the identity of modern Australia lies. The first encounter between James Cook and the First Australians was a meeting of two very different knowledge systems, beliefs and cultures. The abstraction of the ribs of the *HMB Endeavour* and the bones of the Gweagal totem the whale speaks to the different perspectives of those first encounters, providing a conjoined narrative of two very different world-views. (NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment 2020)

The physical remodelling of these iconic locations has been accompanied by multimedia artistic forms of counter-memorialisation which have served to rethink the history of the encounter from less-known perspectives and to claim "memory title" over those sites and moments. The "songline" documentary *Looky Looky Here Comes Cooky* (McGregor 2020) invites all Australians to look at the Cook legend from a First Nation's perspective, similarly placing the emphasis on the view from the shore. Another documentary, *Tupaia´s Endeavour* (2020), directed by Fijian-born New Zealand director Lala Rolls, retells Cook's voyages around the Pacific by re-enacting the untold story of Tupaia, the Polynesian navigator and high-ranking priest from Ra'iātea (Tahiti) travelling with Cook during his first journey and whose multiple roles as translator, diplomat and artist were crucial for the success of the expedition. Tupaia was also the focus of a graphic novel, *The Adventures of Tupaia* (2019), published by writer Courtney Sina Meredith and illustrator Mat Tait coinciding with the Auckland Memorial War Museum exhibition *Voyage to Aotearoa: Tupaia and the Endeavour* (2019), which was created to highlight the multiple perspectives of the encounter rather than traditional monolithic accounts of Cook's achievements.

Aboriginal and Māori artists have also responded to the targeting of Cook's statues by imagining and re-enacting the processes of removal, toppling or destruction. Sometimes, the toppling has been virtual, as in the work of Gamilaroi artist Travis De Vries, who produced a digital drawing, *Cook Falling, Tear it Down* (2019), of a group of Aboriginal activists pulling down his statue in Hyde Park. On the very day Colston's statue was toppled in Bristol, multidisciplinary Kuku Yanaljni artist Tony Albert launched a project commissioned by Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art (IMA) entitled *You Wreck Me*. Drawing on the mythological figure of the trickster and using parody and humour, he knocks the head off Captain Cook's statues while swinging on a suspended exercise ball in ceremonial paint and singing Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball". Virtual demolition does not compare to the Bristol toppling for media impact, but the subversive drive, the parodical admonition and the cathartic effect clearly serve as a thoughtful critical appraisal. A few years before the global statuecide, Michael Parekowhai, a Ngāti Whakarongo, Ngā Ariki Rotoawe artist from New Zealand, re-stories Cook by removing him from his pedestal in *The English Channel* (2015). Parekowhai's piece is no longer cast of iron or bronze but made of shiny steel, and although it maintains the impressive size of a real statue, it has been made to abandon his commandeering pose and sit on a sculptor's table, with dangling feet, unable to touch the ground, and in a position which suggests exhaustion and even defeat. Placed inside the museum space, Parekowhai's Cook projects the viewers' image as they move around the room, forcing them to consider his figure "not a full stop marking the end of a story but a question mark inviting reflection" (Art Gallery NSW), in the two senses of

the term. These are but three examples in a long list of artworks, installations and performances by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand –which include Gordon Bennett, Jason Wing, Christian Thompson, Daniel Boyd, Vincent Namatjira, Michel Tuffery, Lisa Reihana, Jonson Witehira, or Nigel Brown– who have variously re-storied Cook's statues, portraits and official depictions as well as his triumphant arrival on Australian or New Zealand shores. Collectively, these works demonstrate that the re-storying process should be seen "as a repeated act rather than a single transformation of meaning" (Antonello and Cushing 2021, 749).

A final example which encapsulates the transnational, multi-layered and self-transforming re-storying of Cook's figure is "Shadow on the Land, and Excavation and Bush Burial" (2020) by Alaska-based Tlingit Unangax artist Nicholas Galanin, created for the Biennale of Sydney. As suggested by its title, the work is an excavation of the shadow cast by the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park, whose perfectly delineated silhouette, as the artists explains, "represents a larger colonial shadow that is cast upon Indigenous and Aboriginal lands globally" (Craft in America). The title also responds to a classical Australian painting, *A Bush Burial* (1890) by Frederick McCubbin, which depicts a group of white settlers attending a funeral and idealistically presents the death of the white subject as part of his struggle to tame a land empty of Aboriginal presence. Galanin reverses this classical rendering of settler heroism by fantasizing about the prospective burial of Cook and his legacy. But the word "excavation" does not just refer to a wilful burial of the past realised by the literal digging of a grave for colonial statues and monuments; the work is presented as an archaeological excavation site from a prospective future "where the statues of veneration that mark our public landscape today have long been forgotten, buried beneath the earth. The work rests between a possible past or future burial" (Biennale of Sydney 2020). Galanin's erasure and *sous rature* intervention presents the land as multilayered; the process of excavating speaks of the need to dig into the unknown past, to uncover the lies that have been upheld as truths, and to reveal the many buried histories hidden underneath those layers. The work then "imagines a possible Indigenous future where the land begins to heal colonial wounds while still remembering" (2020). This intervention projects a utopic future which ultimately poses the paradox that for Australian Aboriginal communities "memory title" can only be fully fulfilled if Cook's shadow is indeed erased.

5. Conclusion

The emotional responses to public memorialisation of imperial figures such as Colston and Cook and the active artistic interventions that they have prompted demonstrate various ways of restoring and re-storying history both at an individual

and collective level. The result of these interventions is not a mere erasure of the past but "a way of *engaging* with [it], challenging and alter[ing] a system that is built on Black [and indigenous] oppression and exploitation" (Mendes 2021, 396). The resonance of the global BLM events and the importance of assessing the ways in which memory is dealt with in the public sphere has also been felt in a choir of voices advocating for the end of colonial forgetfulness in academia. Protests, interventions and campaigns such as the ones discussed in this essay avert imperial nostalgia and start genuine conversations about collective memorialisation; echoing the concluding remarks in *The Colston Statue: What next?* report: "a core principle of democracy is not simply tolerating but valuing differences in opinion. The world – and our city – would be all the poorer without differences in the ways we think about the past, present and future" (Burch-Brown et al. 2022, 26). The examples explored here point towards varied phases in the transnational process of memorialisation. Reading them as mere acts of vandalism or superficial artistic interventions minimises their ability to raise public awareness and ignite socio-political change. By contrast, these are dynamic, transformative, multi-layered and meaningful interventions whose potential to address injustices and prompt unwavering acknowledgment and long-overdue reparative apologies must not be underestimated.

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