

Toxic Monuments and Mnemonic Regime Change

ANN RIGNEY

Utrecht University

This article takes as its point of departure the recent wave of contestations relating to colonial-era monuments in Europe. While the toppling of monuments has long been a part of political regime change, recent attacks on monuments need to be understood instead, not as celebrations of a change that has already occurred, but as attempts to affect 'mnemonic regime change' as part of a larger struggle for racial equality and social justice. Monuments are materialisations of larger narratives that operate within a broader culture of memory; at the same time, they have a particular role to play in mnemonic contestations since they offer a physical platform for public performances of adherence to, or dissent from, dominant understandings of collective identity and memory. Using insights from the field of cultural memory studies, this article illustrates these dynamics with detailed reference to the controversy around the Edward Colston statue in Bristol. It argues that its dramatic toppling in June 2020 was part of a much longer and slower two-track process whereby the narrative underpinning Colston was undermined and an alternative narrative of Bristol's complicity in the slave trade was unforgotten. It concludes by reflecting on the importance but also the limits of memory activism focussed on statues.

Keywords: cultural memory, counter-memory, iconoclasm, memory-activism nexus, Edward Colston.

In recent years, monuments relating to the legacy of European colonialism have been the subject of very visible public controversies across the world. Starting with the highly mediatized “Rhodes must Fall” movement in South Africa in 2015, multiple ‘must fall’ movements have been targeting public expressions of the historical domination of Europeans over brown and black people. To date more than 190 statues to the Confederacy have been removed across the United States (94 of them following the murder of George Floyd in 2020).¹ In Mexico City, as in many other locations across Latin America, the statue to Christopher Columbus has been removed after protest by indigenous activists.² In Canada, a monument to Queen Victoria was upended in Winnipeg as one among many attacks on symbols of the oppression of indigenous peoples.³ In Belgium, King Leopold II’s bust was removed from a park in Ghent in June 2020, while his statue in Brussels has become a site of regular demonstrations for greater racial equality in Belgium.



Figure 1: Vandalized Monument to King Leopold II, Ghent, Belgium, 2 June 2020. Photo: Wannes Nimmegeers. ID/Photoagency.

Last but not least, the dramatic image of slave-trader Edward Colston being toppled into Bristol harbour hit the international headlines in June

2020.⁴ Seeing the often-cheerful faces of the crowds on these occasions there is no denying that monuments matter a lot – perhaps never more so than when they are being literally and figuratively taken down from their pedestals. As the confused public debates indicate, however, many people are struggling to understand why monuments evoke such anger and why their destruction might be more than the mindless spoiling of material heritage. The present article aims to provide some answers.

It starts by noting that there is nothing new about iconoclasm. Surprising as it may seem given their reputation for durability, monuments are in fact routinely subject to being relocated, demolished, and reworked into new objects.



Figure 2: A mob pulls down a gilded lead equestrian statue of George III at Bowling Green, New York City, 9 July 1776. Painting William Walcutt, 1854. Wikimedia Commons.

Historical examples lead from the *damnatio memoriae* tradition of the Romans, to the destruction of the statue of George III in New York in

1776, to attacks on icons related to the ancien regime during the French Revolution (for which the Abbé Grégoire coined the term ‘vandalism’), to the wave of Lenin removals that cascaded across post-Communist Europe after 1989, to the highly orchestrated and mediated toppling of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003.⁵ Particularly relevant to the case at hand, albeit less well-known, was the wave of monument removals that accompanied decolonization.⁶ These included the destruction of the statue to Jan Pieterszoon Coen (director general of the Dutch East India Company) in Jakarta in 1943, the relocation of Queen Victoria from post-independent Ireland to Sydney, and the ‘repatriation’ of various statues of Joan of Arc from Algeria. Recent research has shown that colonial statues were repatriated to save them from being beheaded, destroyed, or otherwise desecrated at the hands of the newly independent peoples.⁷ Of course, one could also ask what Joan of Arc was doing in Algiers in the first place or Luís de Camões in Macau. Their presence outside of the metropole is testimony to the fact that colonialism meant settling both people and memories in occupied territories (I’ve referred to this elsewhere as ‘memorial colonization’).⁸ The toppling of colonial statues to mark independence had its own dynamic, but it too fits into a long-standing association between monument-building and the exercise of power, and between monument removal and political change.

Current debates about colonial-era statues thus stand in a longer tradition. It should be noted nevertheless that recent attacks on colonial statues have not typically been the by-product of *political* regime change on a par with the fall of Communism or Algerian Independence. Instead, recent iconoclasm has arguably aimed for *mnemonic* change within civil society. It is not in the first instance about overthrowing a government or celebrating the fact that one has been overthrown, but about engineering a change in the collective narrative and, indirectly, of social relations in the present. In what follows I refer in this regard to ‘mnemonic regime change’: concerted efforts on the part of memory

activists to effect a sea-change in the memorial landscape, in this case, by bringing memory into play as part of an ongoing struggle against racism and inequality.⁹ As a result, the decommissioning of monuments, the taking away of their power to command respect, can be seen by stakeholders both as an end in itself and as a means towards a larger goal.¹⁰ As we will see, this makes the contestation of statues structurally ambivalent.

Suffice it here to note that challenging the power of colonial era monuments to dominate public space is part of a multi-layered struggle and not just a reflection of random aggression towards heritage objects. Studying its dynamics can add to our understanding of the memory-activism nexus and the ways in which remembering the past and contesting the present can work together.¹¹ It is already clear that iconoclasm is not construed here in merely negative terms (as destruction), but also in a positive way (as a resource for effecting change). This approach takes its cue from a recent study of commemorative practices in ancient Rome which argues that the obliteration of the memory of fallen tyrants was also a creative process in that it allowed the new ruler to profile his own role in the downfall of his predecessor.¹² How do the current attacks on monuments help in the transition to a new narrative and, linked to this, to social transformation? In what follows I attempt to answer this question using the conceptual tools of cultural memory studies and with specific reference to the case of Edward Colston. Where monuments have tended to be discussed both in the literature and in the media as autonomous phenomena, cultural memory studies offers a more holistic approach that situates both the erection and contestation of monuments within a larger dynamic.

The Dynamics of Cultural Memory

The interdisciplinary field of cultural memory studies takes as one of its central concerns the interplay between stories (narratives about a shared past) and collective identities (a sense of belonging together as a family, city, nation, region, and so on). In contrast to the related term 'heritage', which has traditionally been used to refer to a fixed and often material legacy, the term memory refers by definition to something dynamic. Cultural memory, as Astrid Erll defines it, refers to 'all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in socio-cultural contexts.'¹³ Being always a work in progress, cultural memory is continuously subject to revision thanks to the existence of a feedback loop between storytelling and changing 'social frameworks', to use the influential term coined by Maurice Halbwachs.¹⁴ Collective narratives are periodically adapted, albeit often under duress, to fit the needs of a changing present. This can occur after major historical events, but also in response to the demands of hitherto marginalized groups who, as they become more vocal, also demand better representation in 'our' narrative. For this reason, as I have argued elsewhere, memory studies should be concerned not only with how stories are preserved, but with how dominant narratives change over time and how that change is negotiated.¹⁵ Understanding what Cardina and Rodrigues have recently called 'mnemonic transitions' has become all the more urgent at a time of increasing global entanglements which put pressure on established national narratives and their purported representativity.¹⁶

In explaining how collective narratives change, it is useful to recall that remembering and forgetting always go hand in glove. Not only because memory needs to be selective to be meaningful, but also because the sense of a shared past and shared present can only be created if people

are prepared to paper over historical cracks. As Ernest Renan famously wrote:

The essence of a nation is that its members have many things in common, but also that they have forgotten many things. [...] every French citizen has to have forgotten the Saint-Bartholomew and the thirteenth-century massacres in the south of France.¹⁷

As this passage makes clear, forgetting is not merely a negative condition. Seen in positive terms, it makes possible solidarities in the present by occluding those conflicts whose memory could be divisive. This is easier said than done in a practical sense, of course, and it is also fraught with huge ethical problems. Ordering someone to forget – forget the Saint Barthélemy, don't talk about the war – is itself a reminder. Moreover, it risks imposing a false and unsustainable unity on the past by erasing injustices which, from the perspective of their victims, should be collectively remembered and their perpetrators called to account.

Considerations like these have led memory scholars to identify different types of forgetting as the structural counterpart of remembrance. Notable here is the distinction made by the philosopher Paul Ricoeur between active and passive forgetting.¹⁸ As the term suggests, active forgetting occurs when repressive regimes erase records or occlude a story that was once known but that is now hidden from sight; or when post-conflict societies agree to a 'pact of forgetting' as occurred in England in the seventeenth century and in Spain in the post-Franco transition.¹⁹ Passive forgetting, in contrast, can best be described as forgetting by default. These are the things forgotten because they are considered unimportant or, more insidiously, because they are simply invisible. They are the unknown unknowns. The term 'aphasia' has been used to capture this condition as it affects the memory of colonialism. Defined by Ann Laura Stoler, aphasia is an inability to make sense of evidence relating to colonial violence and connect it to the dominant

narratives that have hitherto shaped European identities.²⁰ As a result of such aphasia, huge swathes of history have been forgotten in the commemorative arts, not because their traces were actively occluded (though this too can happen) but because people, as Stoler puts it, were not even aware that these ‘disabled histories’ ever occurred or that the people affected ever existed. Since they did not fit into the ‘systems of relevance’ defining what was important, they were simply unmemorable.²¹ So what makes change possible and how does unforgetting occur?

Historical research has shown that societies become periodically aware that things have been left out of received views of the collective past (a case in point is the newly ‘recovered’ memory of the participation of colonial troops in World War 1).²² This transformation of the collective memoryscape can be referred to as *counter-memory*, in the double sense that it gives public expression to an hitherto occluded story and challenges the authority of dominant narratives.²³ Countering is by definition relational. As I have argued elsewhere and will argue further here, stories emerge in dialogue with the ones already in circulation as part of an ongoing dialectic.²⁴ This means that counter-memory is as much about undermining the power of the old narrative as it is about proposing a new one. Indeed, the new is often modelled on the one it replaces (a case in point is offered by the recent substitution of the statue of an indigenous woman in Mexico City for one of Columbus).²⁵

The dynamics of contestation are linked to what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called the ‘coming into appearance’ of hitherto marginalized and overlooked groups.²⁶ Debates about public commemoration – who and what should be publicly commemorated? – are deeply entangled with social, political and economic mechanisms of exclusion. In recent years, the contestation of dominant narratives has gravitated towards monuments – for reasons that will be set out below – but cultural memory studies has taught us that monuments never stand alone; that

collective narratives are never dependent on just a single medium either for their emergence or for their demise. They are mediated and remediated, repeated and adapted, and recalled both in shorthand and in longhand, as they move across different media and platforms: texts, images, museums, performances, music, and monuments.²⁷ Crucially, memory is never just located at any one of these sites but gains traction in society by dint of being repeated with variations across these different cultural forms and practices. It is only thanks to the operation of 'plurimedial networks' that narratives find public uptake and remain in circulation.²⁸

Recognizing the multimedial character of memory provides an important corrective to the tendency in recent public debates to treat monuments as if they were isolated phenomena whose toppling could effect radical change in the world – be that for better or, as the defenders of the monuments imply, for worse. That being said, it is clear that monuments do have some distinctive features that need to be explained if we are to understand their power and the hopes and fears vested in them.

How Monuments Matter

Academic studies of public monuments have by and large taken an historical approach and traced their changing aesthetics within specific contexts.²⁹ Theoretical reflections have mainly consisted of critiques of monumentalism as a totalizing and monologic mode of remembrance.³⁰ While critical reflection on future alternatives remains crucial, it is also time for a more fundamental theoretical reflection on the nature of monuments as a cultural medium. Is it possible to generalize about the way statues and other sculptural works operate as carriers of memory? How do they generate meaning and trigger affect? In what follows, I

show that monuments can be reduced neither to their referent (the person or event they depict) nor to their aesthetic form (their character as works of art). Building on insights from actor-network theory,³¹ I propose instead to view monuments as actants in shifting assemblages that bring together material objects, narratives, locations, and human actors in changing constellations.³² Three aspects of the monument-as-assemblage deserve special attention here.

Firstly, *monuments evoke narratives*. Where other media, such as text or film, can present an individual's life in a detailed way, monuments by and large give a condensed or shorthand version of a story that has been told in more detail elsewhere. They can thus be seen as nodal points in a plurimedial network, their meaning in part dependent on other media of remembrance with which they resonate. At the same time, they also *add* something distinctive to cultural memory by giving events or historical figures a singular material shape. Just as there is a history of textual genres, so too is there a history of monumental forms, a plastic language of commemoration that has changed over time. Two columns erected in 1806 and 1808 respectively illustrate this principle: although the column to Napoleon in the Place Vendôme in Paris and the column to Nelson in Dublin were dedicated to arch enemies, they both took the form of a military leader standing on a classical column. There was apparently a shared language of commemoration at that time, which differs from the one which shaped the monuments erected in the wake of the two World Wars. As various studies have shown, there has been a major shift in the language of public monuments in the twentieth century, affecting both their form and their subject matter.³³ Exemplified by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington (erected 1982), this sea-change in monument-building entailed a shift away from the celebration of exceptional heroes to the mourning of 'ordinary' victims, from upward-looking to downward-looking designs, and from figuration to modernist minimalism in the aesthetic form. This paradigm shift coincided with a

gradual change in nomenclature. Increasingly the term ‘monument’ (often synonym for ‘statue’) has been replaced by ‘memorial’, the latter referring to a piece of public sculpture aiming to provoke reflection on victimhood rather than awe at individual achievement. It is important to note that the statues currently being contested are not usually referred to as memorials: they belong instead to the monumentalist ‘great men’ tradition of public sculpture. Many of them date from the decades preceding World War One, a period which also coincided with the high point of colonialism and its commemoration.

Secondly, *monuments are material presences* and, as such, generate affect in a very physical way. They take up space and those in the monumentalist tradition are often located in city centres where, as large objects, they force traffic to go around them. They not only give symbolic expression to the values with which the depicted figures are associated, their very physical presence is itself a way of imposing those values on society while claiming to speak on behalf of the community at large. Since having access to money and power is a precondition of their existence, they have traditionally been erected by the victors and not by the defeated, by the empowered rather than the precariat. Because of the costs entailed in their erection, moreover, monuments are usually late comers in the dynamics of cultural memory. A large monument is rarely in the vanguard of cultural and social change, but rather consolidates the memory work done in other media by translating particular narratives into a lasting, if not permanent form. Through the very durability of its materials, a monument seeks to fix memory and, in doing so, also lays claim to remembrance long into the future (often indeed, in the form of time capsules buried in the foundations).³⁴

A prime location is key to impact. Since city space is a limited resource, commemoration through monuments is arguably more prone to a competitive logic than other mediated forms of commemoration, and more dependent on access to power and resources. A monument’s often

highly public presence helps to passively forget alternative narratives and, on occasion, to actively forget those alternatives by recycling earlier structures. The gigantic monument erected to Stalin in Budapest in 1951, for example, used some 40,000 tons of bronze recycled from older Hungarian statues which had been melted down for the purpose of imposing a Soviet-based mnemonic regime and displacing the nationalist one; the very materials used as well as the sheer size of the monument bespoke the power of the Stalinist regime (it was subsequently destroyed in the 1956 uprising).³⁵

In short: monuments as material presences have a performative force that exceeds their symbolic meaning. To use Jane Bennett's term, they constitute 'vibrant matter', not least because they are often very large.³⁶ In their very materiality, they are designed to edify, generate awe, display power, inspire enthusiasm or, as in the case of more recent memorials, quiet reflection. Recognising the vibrancy of monuments as material objects helps explain why they can become so profoundly offensive in the cityscape: toxic presences. The Paris Commune formulated this toxicity in a striking way when they decreed on 12 April 1871 that the Vendôme Column be destroyed on the grounds that it was '*an affirmation of militarism, a negation of international law, a permanent insult to the vanquished on the part of conquerors, a perpetual attack on one of the three great principles of the French Republic – fraternity [emphasis AR]*'.³⁷

As the highlighted words indicate, the Column's presence was experienced in agentic and performative terms, that is, as having the power to impact on conditions in the world; in this case, to insult supporters of international fraternity by celebrating the memory of militarism. The Column was experienced as toxic to such a degree that huge resources were directed to its solemn removal on 16 May 1871, at a time when the Commune itself was under fierce attack from the government forces.

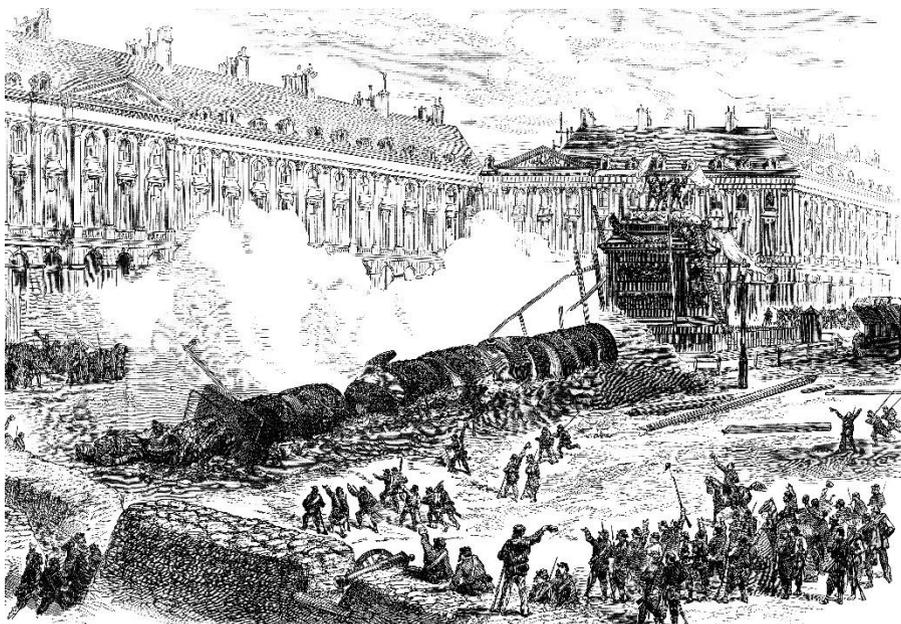


Figure 3: Destruction of the Vendôme Column by the Commune, 16 May 1871. Contemporary drawing: anon. Alamy Stock Image.

The highly dramatic, and widely broadcast, demolition of the offending column provides a striking example of the vibrancy of monuments and the importance attached to their destruction as a marker of political and mnemonic regime change. Moreover, its timing (one week before the Commune ended in wholesale slaughter) suggests that the symbolic importance of its physical removal transcended military expediency.

But apparently not all monuments are vibrant all of the time, and this needs to be recognised too. ‘There is nothing in the world as invisible as monuments’, Robert Musil famously wrote: ‘conspicuously inconspicuous’, they repel our attention ‘like water droplets off oilcloth’.³⁸ This was echoed by the historian Reinhart Koselleck, who claimed that monuments were actually a first step towards oblivion:

once the memory of a person or event was outsourced to an object, he argued, people would start to forget them.³⁹ A recent survey among Parisians suggests that many people indeed overlook monuments in their neighbourhood and often are not even aware of having seen them at all.⁴⁰ Once the initial buzz around their erection has passed, they can fade into invisibility and inertia. That this undeniably happens makes it all the more fascinating to know why, in certain cases and at critical moments, monuments start to vibrate again. They then step out of the urban wallpaper as it were and become objects of concern. This happens, I will show, when their presence becomes toxic and, linked to this, when an alternative narrative becomes available.

Third, *monuments offer a material resource for counter-memory*. As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, the history of iconoclasm provides multiple examples of monuments being destroyed, relocated, and recycled in new contexts. Despite outcries to the contrary, recent iconoclasm has rarely led to the actual destruction of physical monuments, but instead has brought into play a whole range of decommissioning practices that deprive the monument of its power to offend. This includes *reframing*, when monuments are moved to museums where they become objects of historical curiosity, ‘display objects’ rather than political forces.⁴¹ It also includes *resignifying*, when monuments are over-written with new plaques, graffiti or laser displays, or juxtaposed with another monument in such a way as to take on a new meaning.⁴² Best practices are still being worked out. Suffice it here to point to the practical importance of a toxic monument as an actual resource for bringing into visibility the events and actors it had, actively or passively, forgotten. The old provides a leg-up – and often a physical projection screen – for the new and for the ‘coming into appearance’ of minoritized groups.

Finally, *monuments are platforms for dissent*. They offer a physical location for the playing out of disagreements about shared memory and

collective identity. This has to do in the first instance with the fact that they are structurally anachronistic. If their material durability means laying claim to the future, it is also what allows them regularly to outlive their moral sell-by date and ability to command respect. Precisely because they have been built to last, they can also outlast the context in which they were produced and the cultural values that led them to be erected. As alternative narratives emerge in other more rapid response domains, monuments end up serving as the visible, public, and tangible reminder of an outdated mnemonic regime. If their erection is often belated (as mentioned earlier, they come late in the dynamics of cultural memory), so too is their contestation: they are often one of the last relics of an older regime. Contesting these mnemonic fossils accordingly provides the capstone to a slow process of transformation in ideas about who 'we' are, allowing the changes that have been prepared in other media to be consolidated in a very public and dramatic way.

In this process, materiality and locatedness are key. As multiple episodes in recent years have shown, toxic monuments provide a physical point of assembly where activists gather to voice their dissent. Gestures of *disrespect* towards the monument (in the form of graffiti, paint, slogans, and physical attacks) are designed precisely to undo their historical claim to command respect. Such gestures of disrespect are thus a way of publicly performing mnemonic change in the mode of what Victor Turner has called a 'social drama': rituals of transition that help a society move from one identity to another.⁴³ Even for those who resist such change and defend the old regime, the monuments provide literally a common ground for staking out differences. In the words of Sarah Gensburger, they help create 'a shared political space – even if that space is conflictual'.⁴⁴

In what follows, I propose to bring these theoretical considerations to bear on a particular case: the toppling of the statue to Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020. In doing so, I will show the larger dynamic in which

the toppling was positioned, and then use the case to ponder further how mnemonic regime change relates to social transformation.



Figure 4. Demonstrators throw the statue of Colston into Bristol Harbour, UK, 7 June 2020. Photo: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo.

Erected/Rejected by the Citizens of Bristol

The story of Edward Colston (1636-1721) is by now well known. A merchant operating from the city of Bristol, he was a member of the Royal African Company (1680-92) and, as such, a key player in the Atlantic slave trade of the time. Having become extremely wealthy, he became a benefactor to the city where schools and hospitals long carried his name. From the eighteenth century onwards his munificence was celebrated in an annual ‘Colston day’ that gave special buns to children

and, later, a free day to workers. In 1895, more than 150 years after his death, a statue was ‘erected by the citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the most virtuous and wise sons of their city’, as the plaque put it. The larger-than-life effigy of Colston depicts its subject in a contemplative pose, looking down from his considerable height. The statue itself was 2.64 metres high and it stood on a 3.2-metre plinth: a big presence in a very central spot in the city. It was paid for by public subscription.⁴⁵ The statue, while depicting Colston, also indirectly evokes the memory of ‘the citizens of Bristol’ who erected it in the last years of the nineteenth century.



Figure 5: Statue of Edward Colston, Bristol, UK, 24 June 2019. Photo: Simon Cobb. CC0.1.0

So what exactly did ‘the citizens of Bristol’ want to remember (and to forget) when they put up this tribute to Colston? The memorial plaque directed the viewer towards remembering Colston as ‘a virtuous and wise man’ and hence above all as a philanthropist and city father. Within the broader memory culture of the time, this celebration of a merchant-cum-benefactor can be seen as a way of asserting the rights of the middle and mercantile classes to be immortalized in public statuary and hence of criticizing the long tradition of celebrating only military heroes and members of the aristocracy.⁴⁶ A recent study has established, moreover, a link between the promotion of Colston by the city elite and labour unrest in the early 1890s.⁴⁷ From this perspective, the statue was an attempt on the part of the local elite to re-assert their role as benefactors in face of the growing importance of organized labour and demands for workers’ rights by literally making their fellow citizens ‘look up’ to Colston. Both explanations are plausible and mutually compatible. Whatever the exact combination of factors that led to the monument, there is every reason to assume that Colston’s role in the slave trade was not a central part of the discussion and that colonial aphasia allowed people to disconnect his role as philanthropist from the violent origins of his wealth.

Since then there has been a sea-change, however, with the current English Wikipedia article on the statue describing Colston in the first instance as a ‘Bristol-born merchant and leading slave trader’.⁴⁸ Once a ‘wise and virtuous man’, Colston is now a symbol of Bristol’s shameful complicity with slavery; his statue an anachronistic reminder that there was once a time when a slave-trader could be honoured as a philanthropist. Over the course of a century, the same object acquired a different meaning: framed no longer in terms of class as it was in the 1890s, but of race. How did this happen?

The dramatic image showing the statue of Edward Colston being dumped into Bristol harbour on 7 June 2020 hit the headlines as a

sudden explosion of iconoclastic anger that made sense in the protest-filled weeks following the death of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. This context was indeed an important catalyst of the events that afternoon in Bristol. However, research shows that the toppling itself did not come out of the blue for locals though it might have been new for outsiders. As Ana Lucia Araujo and others have shown, there had been long-term demands to have the statue to Colston removed which predated the 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement.⁴⁹ As early as 1998, the words 'slave trader' had been written on the monument, while in 2007 it had been painted red. In parallel, there were concerted efforts, spearheaded by a group of activists called 'Countering Colston-Campaign to Decolonise Bristol', to have the name and image of Colston removed from public buildings (this had led, in 2017, to a decision to rename the concert hall and, in 2018, to remove Colston's portrait from the mayoral office).⁵⁰ There had also been lengthy negotiations about the wording of a new plaque, which had nevertheless failed to reach agreement on how to formulate the nature of Colston's involvement, and hence the implication of the city, in slavery.

Although Colston was the most visible target of these campaigns, they were not ultimately only about downgrading him. Crucially, the anti-Colston campaign ran in parallel to a series of milestones linked to the recovery of knowledge about Bristol's past as a slave-trading hub. New historical research revealing the extent of Bristol's indebtedness to slavery was made available through the local museum and civil society organisations, including a Slave Trade Action Group founded in 1997. This revised narrative of Bristol's history entered into the public sphere, slowly but surely, across different media. These included Philippa Gregory's novel *A Respectable Trade* (1995) and its adaptation by the BBC to a four-part TV series in 1998, a commemorative plaque to the victims of the slave trade (1998), the naming of the Pero bridge after one of the few named victims (2007), and a permanent exhibition on slavery

in the city's M Shed museum (2018). The national Anti-Slavery Day (inaugurated in 2010) also regularly provided an occasion for memory activism, including most notably an installation from 2018 which highlighted Colston's complicity with the slave trade by adding the outlines of a slave ship to the pavement around the statue: dozens of supine figures were lined up within the boundaries of the virtual hold while a link was established to contemporary forms of slavery through labels such as 'domestic servants' and 'fruit pickers'.⁵¹ The toxic Colston ironically provided a platform for showcasing these alternative perspectives on the past and present of the city in ways that were more arresting, if less durable, than the addition of a revised plaque might have been.



Figure 6: Installation, Anti-slavery Day, Bristol, UK, 18 October 2018. Photo: Stuart Holdsworth_inspiringcity.com.

As these archival and artistic initiatives suggest, the groundwork for the toppling of the statue in June 2020 had been prepared in other cultural practices. These had helped to reframe the statue by offering a counter-memory about Bristol which explained the source of its historical wealth and the presence of a significant black-Caribbean minority in the city today. In a two-way process, local history was uploaded to the larger decolonial narratives emerging in national and transnational arenas; conversely, these larger narratives helped in reframing local history and in undoing the aphasia that had long affected it. This combination of local, national, and transnational developments provided resources for an alternative narrative about Bristol. Crucially, the toppling of the statue would have been impossible without the availability of an alternative narrative poised to take over the place vacated by Colston. Memory evolves accumulatively and dialectically, meaning in this case that anti-racist activists used Colston's statue as a resource for articulating their alternative narrative of the city. Decommissioning Colston went together with un-forgetting, and the two processes need to be considered together.

Un-forgetting also pertained to the physical statue itself, which provided a public platform for bringing the Black Lives Matter narrative into visibility – in the 2018 installation mentioned earlier, but also in the posters and graffiti with which the statue was bedecked in June 2020.



Figure 7: Empty Pedestal of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, UK, 6 June 2020. Photo: Caitlin Hobbes. CC BY 3.0

This strategy of ‘over-writing’ monuments has many international precedents, especially in the Black Lives Matter contestation of statues in the US. As these examples show, memory activism and antiracism were deeply intertwined. For those protesting the monument and advocating for a greater recognition of the city’s historical implication in slavery, at stake was not the distant past as such but the perpetuation of historical forms of racism in the present. Within the emerging counter-narrative, the statue honouring Colston was not just a reminder that slavery had occurred, and that as late as the 1890s people could still ignore it by considering someone so actively involved in the trade as virtuous. From a certain point on, allowing Colston’s statue to remain standing, despite repeated attempts by civil society groups to have it removed or relabelled, became an aggravated symptom of contemporary social inequalities. To leave it stand with impunity was read as a continuation of the past rather than a break with it. This argument would later be used in the legal defence of the so-called Colston Four who were accused of criminal damage to the statue, but acquitted in January 2022; namely, that instead of being guilty of a criminal act, they were actually ‘preventing a crime’ in toppling Colston since ‘it was a criminal offense to keep that statue up’.⁵² In this way, the statue was being outlawed from the realm of the legitimate to that of the criminal. As a guerrilla retooling of the plaque on the empty pedestal on 11 June 2020 made clear: the statue that was once ‘erected by the citizens of Bristol’ was now ‘rejected by the citizens of Bristol’.



Figure 8: Reworked plaque of the Colston monument, 11 June 2020. Photo: JMF News/Alamy Photo Stock.

At the time of writing (June 2022), a decision has yet to be taken on the future of the empty pedestal (so far the gravitation has been towards temporary installations that avoid the risk of becoming anachronistic).⁵³ The day after the statue was dumped in the harbour, it was retrieved by the city authorities. Since June 2021, it has been relocated to a local museum – now in a horizontal position and still carrying the paint thrown at it by the protesters on the same afternoon it was taken down both literally and figuratively from its pedestal.⁵⁴



Figure 9: Statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston, M Shed museum, Bristol, UK, 4 June 2021. Photo: Zefrog/Alamy Stock Photo.

Displayed in this way, alongside some of the posters left by protesters, it has become a historical curiosity rather than an irritant in the public space. Although the removal of the statue led to some kickback on the part of counter-protesters who saw it as an assault on their heritage and identity,⁵⁵ as well as kickback from the conservative government who has since introduced legislation that envisages severe punishment for damage to statues, the Bristol City Council has taken no moves to have the statue reinstated. In the meantime, a commission set up under its auspices has recommended that the statue be kept in the museum.⁵⁶

Whatever the outcome, it would appear that the dominant view of Colston has now irrevocably changed, and his return to unquestioned pre-eminence in the city is inconceivable. Witness the actual disbanding in September 2020 of the Colston society which had been instrumental

in perpetuating his legacy over a period of almost three centuries.⁵⁷ Witness too the acquittal of the Colston Four of criminal wrongdoing in January 2022, mentioned earlier, which provided a further endorsement of the legitimacy of the campaign against Colston.

Ironically, Colston's statue may have become even more visible since June 2020 than it ever had been before (who outside of Bristol had heard of him?). But renewed vibrancy went at the cost of his becoming part of a very different story and, in the end, a piece of history rather than a toxic presence in the public sphere. The decision to relocate the statue to the local museum, while leaving traces of the protest against him, means that the statue now carries the memory of Colston, the memory of his nineteenth-century supporters and, finally, the memory of his toppling. The result is a more complex and palimpsestic story; it is 'not an attack on history. It is history', as the historian David Olusoga put it.⁵⁸ As such the case exemplifies how memory and identity are subject to negotiation under a democracy. This needs to be emphasized in response to those who have complained that removing a statue means destroying 'our' history and that this, as the recent government proposal put it, is a criminal act deserving of a stiff prison sentence.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The Colston case shows the importance of approaching public controversies about monuments from the perspective of the dynamics of cultural memory and in relation to the social, political, and legal conditions in which it operates. As carriers of stories, material objects, resources for articulating new narratives, and as platforms for dissent, they are actants in the complex process of mnemonic regime change that leads from celebration to decommissioning, and from aphasia to un-

forgetting. This complexity is belied by the dramatic images of toppling that reach the media but occlude the wider context.

There is nevertheless a lot to be said for the idea that statue toppling can indeed mark a crucial moment – a turning point, a point of no return – in the transformation of a collective narrative. In marking the rejection of the old, it consolidates an emergent counter-memory and brings it to a high level of local, national, and transnational visibility. In short, the case of Colston gives a clear illustration of how memory can be profoundly remade,⁶⁰ allowing one to speak of mnemonic regime change by analogy with political regime change. However, it also gives new food for thought on the nature of that transformation and wider impact.

As the dust on the Colston case is settling, voices are being raised about the importance, but also the limits of memory in social transformation. Yes, it is argued, Colston has been de-commissioned and racism is no longer publicly tolerated in the city's monuments; in that sense a corner has been turned. However, there is still inequality in housing and access to resources: so what has really changed?⁶¹ Although the statue was important as a symbol of ongoing racism, and its decommissioning an important activist tactic, its decommissioning has not (yet) yielded the social transformation that is the activists' ultimate goal. Indeed, after a certain point, it became apparent that the Colston monument was a proxy for other concerns. In retrospect – ironically, but perhaps also inevitably – Colston is now not as important as he seemed to be while he was still looking down on the people of Bristol. The downside of putting a particular figure or moment in the past to rest – allowing it to become part of the past rather than of the now – is that it then loses its power as a resource for reconfiguring the present. As long as it was standing, the statue could be a vector in the struggle for social justice, but this back story did not end with its toppling. For this reason, one can predict that new objects of mnemonic contention will come into visibility as a resource for performing dissent and that this, in turn, will produce

kickbacks in defence of a purportedly immutable 'heritage'. In practice, then, social and mnemonic change occurs more slowly than the toppling of a statue might suggest; memory crabwalks towards the future.

I began this essay by suggesting that the current iconoclastic wave seems unique in not being a by-product of military conflict or political revolution, but of contentious politics. They are bottom-up attempts on the part of activists to change the collective narrative as a step towards changing society. In order to fully explain the current wave of iconoclasm, however, we need a better understanding of how cultural memory informs the present: both its importance and its limits. While the Colston case yields many insights into the dynamics of remembering and (un)forgetting, of attacking and defending 'heritage', it also raises new questions about both the value and the limits of mnemonic change as a catalyst of social transformation. Further research in this area will also require a better understanding of the memory-activism nexus and of the various modalities – crises, tipping points, slow swerving – through which mnemonic regime change is slowly played out.

Endnotes

¹[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Removal_of_Confederate_monuments_and_memorials#:~:text=According%20to%20an%20April%202020,the%20power%20to%20decree%20removal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Removal_of_Confederate_monuments_and_memorials#:~:text=According%20to%20an%20April%202020,the%20power%20to%20decree%20removal;); Also M. A. J. Hasian N. S. & Paliewicz, *Memory and Monument Wars in American Cities: New York, Charlottesville and Montgomery* (London, 2020); S. Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham, NC, 2018 [1998]).

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58893051#:~:text=Mexico%20City's%20governor%20has%20confirmed,the%20ated%20to%20tear%20it%20down.>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57693683.>

⁴ For an overview of developments, see <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2021/may/22/racist-statues-monuments-removed-us-world>.

⁵ On the history of iconoclasm, see A. Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues that Made History* (London, 2021); D. Jethro, *Heritage Formation and the Senses in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Aesthetics of Power* (London, 2019); A. Omissi, 'Damnatio Memoriae or Creatio Memoriae? Memory Sanctions as Creative Processes in the Fourth Century AD', in: *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 62 (2016), 170-199; R. Clay, 'Re-Making French Revolutionary Iconoclasm', in: *Perspective [online]* 1 (2012), 181-186; R. S. Nelson & M. Olin (eds), *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade* (Chicago, 2003); D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London, 1997); F.D. Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and Their Motives* (Maarssen, 1985); L. Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme: les monuments détruits de l'art français* (Paris, 1959). Focussing on secular monuments this article leaves aside iconoclasm linked to religious controversies.

⁶ K. D. Alley, 'Gandhiji on the Central Vista: A Postcolonial Refiguring', in: *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997), 967-994; Z. Çelik, 'Colonial Statues and their Afterlives', in: *The Journal of North African Studies* 25/5 (2020), 711-726; D. Hassett, 'A Tale of Two Monuments: The War Memorials of Oran and Algiers and Commemorative Culture in Colonial and Post-Colonial Algeria', in: S. Sumartojo & B. Wellings (eds), *Commemorating Race and Empire in the Great War* (Liverpool, 2018), 151-168; L. Larsen, 'Re-Placing Imperial Landscapes: Colonial Monuments and the Transition to Independence in Kenya', in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012), 45-56; Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols*; Y. Whelan, 'The Construction and Destruction of a Colonial Landscape: Monuments to British Monarchs in Dublin Before and After Independence', in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 28/4 (2002), 508-533.

⁷ Larsen offers a detailed account of the steps taken in the run-up to independence to protect colonial monuments in Kenya; see Larsen, 'Re-Placing Imperial Landscapes'. Hassett studies comparable examples with reference to the decolonization of Algeria; see Hassett, 'A Tale of Two Monuments'. Footage relating to the toppling of the figure of J.P. Coen in Jakarta in 1943 can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-crU3j-XnA>.

⁸ A. Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford, 2012), 150, The commemoration of Joan of Arc in North Africa is discussed in Hassett,

'A Tale of Two Monuments'. The commemoration of Camões in relation to Portuguese colonialism is discussed in P. De Medeiros, 'Whose Camões? Canons, Celebrations, Colonialisms', in: J. Leerssen & A. Rigney (eds), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (London, 2014), 283-294.

⁹ The concept of memory activism is drawn from Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (London, 2022); Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg, 'Challenging the Meaning of the Past from Below: A Typology for Comparative Research on Memory Activists', in: *Memory Studies*, [first online] (2021), 1-17; J. Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Post-War Germany* (Cambridge, 2017).

¹⁰ Where Gensburger and Beiner use the term 'de-commemoration', the term decommissioning has been preferred here (and in Rigney 2022) because of its association with power and the active dismantling of weaponry. See S. Gensburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration: Do People Really Care about Statues', in: *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/the-paradox-of-decommemoration-do-people-really-care-about-statues-141807> [19 August 2020]; G. Beiner, 'When Monuments Fall: The Significance of Decommemorating', in: *Eire-Ireland*, 56/1-2 (2021), 33-61; A. Rigney, 'Decommissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Materialities', in: Y. Gutman & J. Wüstenberg (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism* (London, 2022).

¹¹ On the memory-activism nexus, see A. Rigney, 'Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism Beyond the Traumatic', in: *Memory Studies* 11/3 (2018), 368-380.

¹² Omissi, 'Damnatio Memoriae or Creatio Memoriae?'

¹³ A. Erll, 'Cultural Memory', in: M. Middeke, T. Müller, C. Wald, H. Zapf (eds), *English and American Studies* (Stuttgart, 2012), 238.

¹⁴ M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1994 [1925]).

¹⁵ A. Rigney, 'Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited', in: *Nations and Nationalism* (2018) 24/2, 240-257.

¹⁶ M. Cardina & I. N. Rodrigues, 'The Mnemonic Transition: The Rise of an Anti-Colonial Memoryscape in Cape Verde', in: *Memory Studies* 14/2 (2020), 380-394.

¹⁷ E. Renan, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?', in: H. Psichari, (ed), *Oeuvres complètes d'Ernest Renan*, volume 1 (Paris, 1947-61), 888; see also the discussion of this

passage in B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991 [1983]), 200.

¹⁸ P. Ricoeur, 'Memory - History - Forgetting', in: J. Rüsen, *Meaning and Representation in History* (Oxford, 2006), 9-19. The sizeable literature on forgetting and different forms of amnesia also includes L. Passerini, 'Memories Between Silence and Oblivion', in: K. Hodgkin & S. Radstone (eds), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (London, 2003), 238-54; P. Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', in: *Memory Studies* 1/1 (2008), 59-71; A. Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen, 2016).

¹⁹ Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', 61-62.

²⁰ A. L. Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France', in: *Public Culture* 23/1 (2011), 121-156. For an illustration of the operation of colonial aphasia and its slow overcoming, see also P. Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam, 2015).

²¹ The concept of "systems of relevance" is derived from I. Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1994).

²² The un-forgetting of colonial soldiers is discussed in A. Rigney, 'Remaking Memory and the Agency of the Aesthetic', in: *Memory Studies* 14/1 (2021), 10-23.

²³ The term 'counter-memory' became common currency through the English translation of the essays of Michel Foucault; see D. F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca, NY, 1980).

²⁴ Illustrating this principle, an analysis of key texts written in the 1840s showed how every new history of the French Revolution positioned itself, using forms of 'intertextual antagonism', in relation to earlier ones. A. Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), 53-62.

²⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-58893051>

²⁶ N. Mirzoeff, *The Appearance of Black Lives Matter* (New York, 2017).

²⁷ A. Erll & A. Rigney (eds), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin, 2009); Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*; A. Erll, 'From 'District Six' to *District 9* and Back: The Plurimedial Production of Travelling Schemata', in: C. De Cesari & A. Rigney (eds), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin, 2014), 29-50.

²⁸ The phrase 'plurimedial networks' is borrowed from Erll, 'From 'District Six' to *District 9* and Back'.

²⁹ The changing language of monuments is discussed in A. Saunders, *Memorializing the GDR: Monuments and Memory after 1989* (Oxford, 2018); K. Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 2018 [1997]); J. Leerssen & A. Rigney (eds), *Commemorating Writers in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Nation-Building and Centenary Fever* (Basingstoke, 2014); E. Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feelings in America* (Chicago, 2010); Nelson & Olin, *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*; M. Campbell & J.M. Labbe (eds), *Memory and Memorials 1789-1914: Literary and Cultural Perspectives* (London, 2000); A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford, 1998); K. A. Marling & J. Wetenhall, *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); C. Tacke, *Denkmal im sozialen Raum: nationale Symbole in Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1995); J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995); A. Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero, 1800-1864: Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York, 1988); A. Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments', in: *Oppositions*, 25 (1982 [1928]), 21-51.

³⁰ For critiques of monumentalism, see especially F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1997); A. Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA, 2003); N. Lupu, 'Memory Vanished, Absent, and Confined: The Countermemorial Project in 1980s and 1990s Germany', in: *History and Memory* 15/2 (2003), 130-64.

³¹ B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social : An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

³² My application of the concept of assemblage to monuments is inspired by R. Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times* (London, 2018).

³³ A major shift has been identified in the aftermath of World War One; see Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. The turning point has also been located in the post-Holocaust world; see J. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT, 1993); J. Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (Amherst, MA, 2016).

³⁴ Time capsules, including contemporary newspapers and other items of importance to the monument-builders, were regularly included in statues erected in the late nineteenth century; for examples, see Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*, 74-75; A. Rigney, 'Commemoration by Committee: The National Wallace Monument', in: *Victorian Review* 44/1 (2018), 1-5.

³⁵ On the Budapest monument see Von Tunzelman, *Fallen Idols*; C. Leggewie, *Der Kampf um die europäische Erinnerung: Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (Munich, 2011).

³⁶ J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010).

³⁷ Decree signed on 12 April, published in *Journal officiel de la Commune de Paris, Jeudi 13 avril 1871*; <https://gabrielperi.fr/commune-de-paris/decret-ordonnant-la-demolition-de-la-colonne-de-la-place-vendome-12-avril-1871/>.

³⁸ R. Musil, 'Monuments', in: *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, Trans. Peter Wortsman (New York, 2006), 64.

³⁹ R. Koselleck, 'Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden', in: O. Marquard & K. Stierle (eds), *Identität (Poetik und Hermeneutik VIII)* (Munich, 1979), 255-276.

⁴⁰ Gensburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration'.

⁴¹ The concept of display object is taken from B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley, CA, 1998).

⁴² Examples of these resignifying practices are offered in Rigney, 'Decommissioning Monuments, Mobilizing Materialities'; a striking example of a toxic monument being encapsulated in a new one is offered in Çelik, 'Colonial Statues and their Afterlives'.

⁴³ V. Turner, 'Social Dramas and the Stories about Them', in: *Critical Inquiry* 7/1 (1980), 141-168.

⁴⁴ Gensburger, 'The Paradox of (De)Commemoration'.

⁴⁵ It had actually proved difficult to raise enough money, leaving the principal campaigner to foot a large part of the bill; R. Ball, 'Myths within Myths... Edward Colston and that Statue', in: *Bristol Radical History Group* (2018; updated 2020).

⁴⁶ With thanks to Joep Leerssen for this point.

⁴⁷ Ball, 'Myths within Myths'.

⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue_of_Edward_Colston [accessed 13 February 2022].

⁴⁹ A. L. Araujo, *Slavery in the Age of Memory: Engaging the Past* (London, 2020), 68-87.

⁵⁰ <https://counteringcolston.wordpress.com/>.

⁵¹ <https://inspiringcity.com/2018/10/22/anti-slavery-installation-appears-next-to-edward-colston-statue-in-bristol/#:~:text=The%20installation%20was%20placed%20at,were%20taken%20on%20the%20day.>

⁵² Interview with defense lawyer Raj Chada;

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/jan/06/colston-four-acquittal-raises-doubts-about-10-year-jail-term-proposal>. David Olusoga was also quoted as saying that ‘the real offense was in allowing a statue to a mass murderer to stand for 125 years’. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-59892211#:~:text=Prof%20David%20Olusoga%20said%20the,and%20thrown%20into%20Bristol's%20harbourside.>

⁵³ An alternative statue by artist Marc Quinn (called “Surge of Power” and depicting a black activist called Jean Reid) was put up on the pedestal in the night of 14-15 July 2020; it was removed soon afterwards by the authorities, since no permission had been requested from the city; nor had support been solicited in the antiracist community. More recent proposals can be found at: <https://www.bristolcreatives.co.uk/news/2020/08/31/peoples-platform-submissions-welcome.>

⁵⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/28/statue-of-slave-trader-edward-colston-to-go-on-display-in-bristol-museum>.

⁵⁵ Counter protests in defense of the statue are well documented in the documentary *Statue Wars: One Summer in Bristol*, dir. F. Welch (BBC, 2021).

⁵⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-60247092> (3 February 2022).

⁵⁷ T. Cork, 'Edward Colston – the statue, the plinth and everything that’s happened since it toppled', in: *Bristol Live* (22 August 2020).

⁵⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/08/edward-colston-statue-history-slave-trader-bristol-protest>.

⁵⁹ The recent wave of iconoclasm directed at symbols of British colonialism is largely believed to have provoked the recent government proposal, currently under discussion in the House of Lords, to impose a prison sentence of up to 10 years for the damaging of monuments; <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2839>.

⁶⁰ On remembrance as ‘remaking’, see Rigney, ‘Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited’.

⁶¹ <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/one-year-colston-moment-changed-5493777>;
<https://peoplesplatform.co.uk/Pages/Future.html>.

Acknowledgement

Research for this article was financially supported by the European Research Council under grant agreement 788572 for the project *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe*.