

# Care Makes the Fragments Stronger: Navigating Affects in Colonial Memoryscapes

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## ABSTRACT

Monuments built to celebrate colonial times can harm. Harm those who live around them, those who know their history, and those whose history has been forgotten. The contentious nature of these monuments has brought them into public discourse, with activists advocating for their physical removal. In light of these developments, it is crucial to analyse the intricate interplay between monuments, the physical spaces they inhabit, and the inhabitants of these spaces. To explore these issues, the article draws on a creative research project carried out in Martinique and Saint Lucia, exploring the affective landscapes within which monuments are embedded. The article reflects on the use of creative methodologies to study the multifaceted meanings embedded within colonial memoryscapes, employing care as a unifying principle to reconcile diverse perspectives. By integrating personal narratives and emotional connections into historical analysis, this study fosters a paradigm shift towards redefining what memory-work is and what forms it can take. The findings of this study shed light on strategies for decolonising public spaces, pushing the boundaries of conventional academic scholarship, and enhancing our comprehension of the complex interplay between memory, place, people and geographies of affect.

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## CRYNODEB

*Gall cofebau a adeiladwyd i ddathlu cyfnodau trefedigaethol niweidio. Niweidio'r rhai sy'n byw o'u cumpas, y rhai sy'n gwybod eu hanes, a'r rhai y mae eu hanes wedi'i anghofio. Mae natur ddadleuol y cofebau hyn wedi eu dwyn i sylw'r cyhoedd, gydag ymgyrchwyr yn dadlau dros eu tynnu i lawr. O ystyried y datblygiadau hyn, mae'n hanfodol dadansoddi'r rhyngweithio cymhleth rhwng cofebau, eu lleoliadau corfforol, a thrigolion y manau hyn. I drin a thrafod y materion hyn, mae'r erthygl yn tynnu ar brosiect ymchwil creadigol a gynhaliwyd ym Martinique a Saint Lucia, gan archwilio'r lleoliadau hynny y mae cofebau'n effeithio arnyn nhw. Mae'r erthygl yn myfyrio ar y defnydd o fethodolegau creadigol i astudio'r ystyron amlochrog sydd wedi'u hymgorffori mewn tirweddau o atgofion trefedigaethol, gan ddefnyddio 'gofal' fel egwyddor all uno a chymodi safbwyntiau amrywiol. Drwy gyfuno naratifau personol a chysylltiadau emosïynol yn ddadansoddiadau hanesyddol, mae'r astudiaeth hon yn meithrin newid sylfaenol tuag at ailddiffinio gwaith cof a'i ffurfiau. Mae canfyddiadau'r astudiaeth hon yn taflu goleuni ar strategaethau i ddad-drefedigaethu manau cyhoeddus, i wthio ffiniau ysgolheictod academaidd confensiynol, a gwella ein dealltwriaeth o'r rhyngweithio cymhleth rhwng atgofion, lleoedd, pobl a daearyddiaethau y mae hyn yn effeithio arnyn nhw.*

## KEYWORDS

Affect; memoryscape; memory-work; interdisciplinarity; Caribbean; decolonisation

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## INTRODUCTION

Saint Lucia and Martinique are two neighbouring islands in the southern Caribbean—on clear days, you can see the coasts of one island from the other. To travel from Martinique to Saint Lucia, you can take *L'Express des îles*, a ferry which links Fort-de-France to Castries in an hour and a half (Figure 1). But there are frequent delays: many travellers undertake this journey with *sacs Tati*, bags laden with foods and goods unavailable on the other side, thereby prolonging the customs process. Amidst this waiting, one discovers that these two islands exist as two worlds apart, with Martinique constituting a French department, and Saint Lucia a sovereign nation within the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, they remain bathed in ‘submarine unity’ (Brathwaite 1974: 64), with the sea holding, the sea transmitting, the sea connecting. With the sea remembering that, historically, both islands were marked and informed by European colonialism and chattel slavery—and by continuous and enduring resistance to their violence.

Walking through the streets of Fort-de-France or Castries today, this history is striking: the streets bear French and British names, the squares and main streets are dotted with curious objects—rusting cannons, abandoned forts, empty pedestals. To comprehend this landscape, this article considers individual and collective stories that offer aural, visual and haptic testimonies to what it means to live within geographies shaped by colonialism and slavery. While these stories evolve around monuments and statues built by European settlers and conquerors, it is not what these memorials represent that interest me here, but rather what they do (Stoler 2013). Specifically, I am interested in their presence within a spatiality where people constantly deploy energy for transformation, that Rose-Redwood et al. (2022: 452) define as ‘memoryscape’.

The memoryscape is the monument, the space in which it stands and the people who live in it. It encompasses the totality and multiplicity of events and people who have transformed the space into what it is today—through sounds, gestures, concerted actions or mere presence. If the history of colonialism is full of silences and erasures (Trouillot 2015), the history of the memoryscape is noisy, cacophonous, and ‘incongruous’ (McKittrick 2021:



Figure 1: Shot from the Express des îles ferry showing someone pointing toward the other island.  
Photo Credit: Mara Chavez

18). It is this cacophony that this paper seeks to lay out—offering a concrete demonstration of what memoryscapes can be, and of what studying them can teach us about memory-work and decolonisation within ‘wounded’ geographies (Till 2012).

Throughout this article, the poetry of Derek Walcott, Saint Lucian author and Nobel Laureate, provides a thematic foundation. In Walcott’s work, each shape, play of light, and stone in the Caribbean constitutes history, whilst the Antilles’ archipelagic formation mirrors the region’s traumas and resilience:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. (Walcott, 1995: 296–297)

The archipelago emerges as a profound metaphor that encompasses both the fragmented nature of historical narratives and the love, care, and imaginative labour employed in their reconstruction. This metaphor, which informs the title of this paper, shapes the content of this article, which explores how colonial monuments are affectively transformed by Caribbean communities who exercise care and love within these sites of historical violence.

## EMBRACING COLLABORATIVE AND CREATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICES

Upon initiating my doctoral studies in 2021, I faced the daunting prospect of committing several years to a project primarily resulting in academic writings. Even though my aspiration was to contribute to the creation of ‘more equitable worlds’ (Blazek & Askins 2020: 465), I recognised that such outputs would likely remain inaccessible to many of the research participants. This concern felt particularly pressing given my intention to highlight individual and non-expert perspectives on counter-memorialisation—making me feel that using ‘standard’ methodologies would constitute ‘an intellectual [and] ethical betrayal’ (Last 2025: 2). However, I also worried about how the university would receive more creative approaches (Last 2025: 3), whether they would be seen as a ‘distraction’ from my research (de Leeuw and Hawkins 2017: 319) or co-opted as part of the ‘impact agenda’ thereby undermining my broader political convictions (Tolia-Kelly 2012: 136–137). It was through these personal and structural tensions—often isolating in nature—that I ventured into geography’s ‘creative turn’, engaging with ‘creative and cultural practices beyond cultural analysis foregrounded during the cultural turn’ (Hawkins 2019: 963). This engagement for me materialised through the co-creation and production of a documentary art-film realised in collaboration with Mara Chavez. Mara and I had maintained a close friendship prior to the project’s inception, our relationship grounded in years of cohabitation as well as shared experiences of navigating the world as queer, racialised (Afro-descendant for me and Latine for her) and diasporic individuals. Consequently, we referred to each other as ‘friends’ more frequently than ‘collaborators,’ whilst the roles we assumed, as ‘filmmaker’ for her and ‘researcher’ for me, resembled new garments we were trying to



Figure 2: 3D scan of our shared room during our two-month stay in Martinique. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois

inhabit, simultaneously endeavouring to fit within them whilst tailoring them to our needs (Figure 2).

This process of adaptation entailed the development of a ‘shared language’, which gradually transformed both my research methodology and its outcomes (Barnfield & Bates 2025: 2). Whilst the professional, material, and emotional challenges encountered within this collaboration merit separate examination, this article focuses upon how employing creative methodologies allowed me to explore emotional connections to colonial landscapes in ways that exceeded my initial expectations. The work provides insights about the ‘potential effects’ of collaboration between two non-established scholars/artists (Tolia-Kelly & Raymond 2019: 4), as well as the possibilities such creative collaboration opens within the specific field of colonial memorialisation and affective geographies.

## METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

In approaching issues of reparations, justice and memory in the Caribbean, I recognise my position as an outsider to these islands. As such, my work respects and acknowledges the scholarship of Caribbean and Black knowledge-holders whose work provides a critical framework for exploring decolonial pathways.

Data for this study were collected during a four-months fieldwork period in Martinique and Saint Lucia. This involved realising direct and participatory observation around monuments, as well as conducting 25 semi-structured interviews with local residents, activists, politicians and cultural actors. The

three creative and experimental methods discussed in this article were used as components of participatory observations and interviews.

All participants were informed regarding the nature of the project, and interviews and observations were audio-recorded and/or filmed following their explicit consent. For the purposes of this paper, only the full names of participants who provided consent for specific quotations have been employed; other participants have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms.

## AFFECTIVE MEMORYSCAPES

Monuments built by settlers to commemorate their agents and celebrate their victories are not neutral objects within the public space. Long after their builders are gone, ‘the rot remains’ (Walcott 1987: 20). Several scholars have established how the material legacy of empires can be analysed as a haunting presence (Auchter 2023; Cherry 2013; Edensor 2019; Gordon 2008), showing how memorials can be at the same time mundane and harmful to those who live around them. Haunting is the unsettling manner in which these monumental ghosts compel the livings, often unexpectedly, to confront the past and its remnants (Gordon 2008). While it has its moments of climax and resolution, such as the resurgence of Black Lives Matter in 2020—as a ‘Kairos’ in the historical continuum of slavery and racism (Atuire 2020: 464)—haunting is a ‘relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation’ (Tuck & Ree 2013: 642). Hence, even after monuments are removed/toppled/decommissioned, their negative presence lingers in the memoryscape, and their violence continues to ‘structure current social and spatial relations’ (Till 2012: 6).

To understand how to repair these haunted landscapes, attention must be given to the ‘corporeal, mnemonic, and sensory engagements’ (Cherry 2013: 3) that arise between individuals and the problematic memorials. Here, what is needed is attention to how certain places shape specific emotional experiences and how architectural settings facilitate embodied encounters (Miceli-Voutsinas & Person 2020). The significant body of literature produced on colonial monuments often centres around the collective and institutional responses to these sites (see for instance De Jorio 2006; Larsen 2012; Sèbe 2014; Whelan 2002); on intentional material interventions onto the monuments (in Martinique, see Curtius 2008, 2015; Marschall 2017; Solbiac 2020); and, relatedly, on artistic interventions (Clette-Gakuba & Vander Elst 2018; Schütz 2020; Siegert 2017; Till 2008). Though these approaches are timely, I believe that integrating individuals and their emotions into the analysis is necessary for articulating a ‘gendered, non-elite, vernacular, and post-colonial’ critique of memory-work and its modes of operation (Waterton 2014: 829). This is particularly important given that memory, just as affect, is a differentiated phenomenon, where different bodies have ‘certain affective responses already mapped onto them’ (Waterton 2014: 829). This means that within the groups involved in the memoryscapes, individuals can and will have different responses to monuments—which at times might seem at odds with what they represent. However, this discrepancy between representation and reaction is characteristic of how people experience affectively spaces, in ways that always exceed ‘authored representations of the past’ (Till 2012: 7). Hence, this article proposes to shift attention to the personal experiences that shape colonial memoryscapes, and to explore how they transform its meaning and challenge its colonality.



To map out these affective relations, I suggest using creative methodologies, as a way to transform the tools we use to ‘dismantle the master’s house’ (Lorde, [1984] 2019: 105). If the Antillean experience is characterised by dispossession—from slavery to colonialism to departmentalisation (Glissant, [1981] 1997: 95) – dispossession is not only a metaphor for times past: it is a continuous process that impacts the way we analyse, research, and look at knowledge holders situated outside (western) academic production (Jazeel & McFarlane 2010). Hence, learning from those who live in the material ruins of slavery and colonialism (Stoler 2013) requires employing research processes that counter centuries-old practices of exploitation and extraction. It demands using methods ‘along the lines of a sitting with, a gathering, and a tracking of phenomena that disproportionately and devastatingly affect black peoples any and everywhere we are’ (Sharpe 2016: 13). Here, using art and experimentation offers ‘a singular mean for understanding reality’ by giving research participants a more open-ended way to share their feelings and emotions about/around contested geographies (Daga & Djimet 2024: 1). This article proposes an exploration of such methods, redefining the boundaries of what memoryscapes are and how they can be transformed.

In conducting these experiments, interdisciplinarity, imagination, and care played a central role. Interdisciplinarity is understood here as the bringing together of diverse forms and sources of knowledge drawn from different temporal and spatial perspectives. This encompasses an array of words, sounds, fabrics, images, and presences that collectively constitute the known and the knowable. As McKittrick (2021: 18) articulates, this approach involves ‘thinking and writing and imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres [that] unsettles suffocating and dismal and insular racial logics’. This notion of interdisciplinarity is exemplified in artist and curator Lubaina Himid’s (2011) Paris guidebook. Rather than simply critiquing existing racist monuments, she engages in a practice of collaging, envisioning alternative monuments that might replace the existing ones. This creative exercise transforms the viewer’s perception of the city, presenting an alternative reality that becomes, temporarily, the reality. Interdisciplinarity thus emerges as a collective collaging practice, weaving together various materials to create a nuanced representation of the memoryscape.

In the face of the ‘loss of history’ in the Caribbean, creativity is a necessity (Walcott 1974: 6). It demands disrupting and disturbing official narratives in order to uncover and construct alternative stories (Glissant 1997). This method means looking at personal histories, alternative records and artistic engagements that construct an image of memorial sites that exceed their colonial legacies (Sharpe 2016). Such endeavour requires care-fullness and care-full methodologies, such as Jeannine Compton-Antoine’s (interview with author, April 2023), executive director of the Saint Lucia National Trust<sup>1</sup>, collecting practice: plastic bags full of broken ceramics, bones, pipes, buttons, vestiges of the British empire. Every time she walks around the Pigeon Island National Landmark, she searches for these shards of the past which are slowly being exposed through wind and water erosion at the site (Figure 3). She brings them back, one by one, organising them by colour. She collects the pieces without knowing whether they would ever fit into a whole, revealing their stories. Her practice reminded me of Derek Walcott’s (1995) vision of the Caribbean archipelago, as a broken geography that care can reassemble. Like Jeannine, I too embarked on a collection process for this project, uncertain whether the gathered elements would coalesce into a coherent whole, yet recognising the intrinsic value of the care exercised in



Figure 3: Jeannine's hand holding items from her collection. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois

their collection as a legitimate form of learning and knowing—as a form of love that can help reassemble the fragments.

### EXPERIMENTS FOR A HEALED SPACE

In this section, I present three strategies experimented for illuminating alternative perspectives, emotions and narratives around and about colonial memoryscapes.

#### Ti banc la

In Martinique, several statues celebrating French settlers and built during colonisation were toppled by protestors in 2020 (see Célestine et al. 2024; Solbiac 2020). Many of those who initiated these actions belonged to a specific demographic: young, well-educated and well-travelled (Tess, interview with author, May 2023). Their actions served to draw attention to (and in some way resolve) the problematic presence of these monuments. But for those in precarious situations who literally live (sleep, clean, drink, dream) in the spaces composed by the statues, these memorials were also familiar bearings in ever-changing spaces (Emilie, interview with author, May 2023). In order to include their knowledge and emotions into the project, Mara and I reflected on how to create a space that felt less formal than the semi-structured interviews I had elaborated for my PhD research.

The idea of using a *ti banc* ('small bench' in Creole) emerged after we visited the first solo exhibition of Martinican artist and designer Diana Tuillier at the Tropique Atrium in Fort-de-France in April 2023. In *Empreintes: les strates de l'invisible mémoire* (2023), the artist presented several pieces that explored historical absences, oral histories, and the pluralities of memories on the island. The collection comprised several *ti bancs* made by the artist, that visitors could sit on to rest, talk or look at the art. A *ti banc* is an (extra)ordinary object: it was one of the only pieces of furniture that enslaved people were allowed to possess. They used it to rest, relax and tell stories: from the *ti banc*, the past could be recounted, and imaginary realities could be uttered. The *ti bancs* were passed on from generation to generation, and new ones were built by uncles, aunties, great grandfathers, making them objects that most Martinicans have in their houses today (Diana Tuillier, interview with the author, April 2023).

As with all *ti bancs*, Diana's *ti bancs* are special—they have their own genealogies. The one that she lent us was made by combining different



Figure 4: Diana Tuillier's *ti banc* (3D scan) – loaned for the project. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois

woods eaten by termites—another example of fragments becoming whole (Figure 4). After being treated, the wood kept the trace of the insects' life, drawing fragile and beautiful patterns in the seat. Additionally, one of the legs of the seat was made with rebar, a material found in most construction and highly visible in Caribbean landscapes. Rebar, in French, translates as *béton armé*—literally 'armed concrete'. This *ti banc* was thus armed. It is strong, indestructible. Care makes it stronger.

Several days in a row, we placed the bench in front of statues' empty pedestals, with a camera placed on the other side, sparking people's curiosity (Figure 5). Seated on the *ti banc*, passers-by shared their stories, each contributing to the collective story of the space. They posed, gazed, and became living monuments themselves. The bench, rich in meaning and allure, prompted onlookers to engage; they admired it, inquired about its



Figure 5: A passerby studying the *ti banc* with interest. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



artist, and posed numerous questions regarding our presence: where we're from, why here, why now. We tried to answer, our positions exposed, the researchers becoming objects of research. Vulnerabilities reversed.

People often recounted personal anecdotes and engaged with the bench in a manner that initially seemed unrelated to the monument's history or political significance. For instance, after expressing curiosity about the unusual setup, Jeremy (interview with the author, May 2023), a male resident of Fort-de-France experiencing economic hardship, took a seat and asked that I play some beats on my phone. He selected a track he enjoyed and began to rap. Through improvisation, he articulated aspects of his life, including the profound grief of losing his mother and the care she provided him, as well as the sorrow of not having had the opportunity to say goodbye to her: *'Maman t'es partie sans que je puisse te dire/Je t'aime/T'étais tout pour moi t'as fait tout pour moi'* ['Mum, you left without me being able to tell you/I love you/You were everything to me/You did everything for me']. By vocalising the absence of his mother, Jeremy transformed the landscape, allowing us to 'find love instead of ghosts' (Wylie 2009: 285). But he also conveyed the harsh realities of street life, reflecting on its challenges and the necessity of resilience: *'la rue n'est pas hyper jolie'* ['The street is not very pretty'] and *'Il faut à tout prix se lever et se battre/Il faut toujours savoir se défendre/Ne t'abandonne pas à la facilité/Chaque jour il faut lutter'* ['You have to stand up and fight at all costs/You must always know how to defend yourself/Don't give in to the easy way out/Every day you have to fight'].

From the *ti banc*, Jeremy's song intricately wove themes of precariousness and pride into the memorial landscape, illustrating how the street transforms into an unwelcoming space for those who inhabit it, while also highlighting the endurance of love amidst adversity. Although his lyrics did not explicitly relate to the monument behind him, they illuminated the intimate and personal within a context steeped in colonial history. Through his performance, he offered a form of 'Black annotation' of the monument, rendering Black lives visible in spaces where they have historically been marginalised (Sharpe 2016: 113). Such personal and improvised expressions unveiled new meanings, facilitating a deeper understanding of what the memoryscapes embody. Rather than presenting a straightforward dialectic of past and present, coloniser and colonised, the performance opened a space where we could witness 'a life, however precarious, that was always there' (Sharpe 2016: 120). It illustrated an invisible aspect of the memoryscapes' fabric, demonstrating that it comprises intimate elements that exceed the colonial history embodied in the monuments.

### Intimate memoryscapes

Although the *ti banc* permitted to record personal stories in situ, observing people's relation to the space was also achieved through the documentation of the environment via film and photography, alongside inviting participants to share their own memories associated with the space. This approach allowed for the integration of various elements—such as objects, songs, or images—into the memoryscape, thereby mapping the myriad events that have transformed the space and its significance. Among the personal memories collected for this project, the story of Gregor and Deirdre Williams emerges as a beautiful testament to the profound intimacy that can exist between individuals and monuments. The couple have had a lifelong commitment to the study of Saint Lucia's history, and I met with them several times to discuss their insights and connections to the Inniskilling Monument, a stark white obelisk on Morne Fortune (literally 'Lucky Hill').

Erected in 1932 by representatives of the Royal Navy, this monument commemorates the Irish soldiers of the Inniskilling regiment who fought during the 1796 battle of Morne Fortune. Whilst the battle officially pitted British forces against the French, in reality, the French forces were composed majoritarily of Black freedom fighters who had, a year prior, abolished slavery and established the region's first multiracial republic (Harmsen et al. 2012). Hence, the victory of the British, secured through the Irish regiment, entailed the re-establishment of slavery and the deportation of the freedom fighters outside the region to prevent the spread of revolutionary ideas. Consequently, what the monument celebrates as heroic victory represents, from a local perspective, the violent suppression of freedom and republicanism on the island. During my stay in Saint Lucia, I was therefore interested in understanding how Saint Lucians affectively and personally relate to this monument, and what significance this site holds for them.

Interestingly, the lives of Gregor and Deirdre were, from the outset, intimately linked to the monument, as one of them is native of Saint Lucia, while the other is from Ireland. Having spent their adult life living by Morne Fortune, their personal story—and all the emotions it carries—was intertwined with the monument. Reflecting upon their early encounters with the site, they both mentioned a rhyme called 'The Grand Old Duke of York' they learnt in school: 4,000 miles apart within the British Empire. Years after learning it, they realised the song was telling the story of the Battle of Morne Fortune—with this English royalty leading troops up and down the hill. Through this joint recollection the generic rhyme becomes something personal: it is about their hill. It does not matter whether the Duke of York actually came to Saint Lucia: the memories and knowledge that have travelled the Atlantic found their resonance here, creating an echo that re(as)semble their differentiated relation to that space. The site becomes a childhood memory, a meeting point between Gregor and Deirdre's life and love story.

As they live near the monument, I went on walks there with them and Mara on a couple of occasions. We spent time there together, chatting, joking, and looking at the beautiful view of the mountains. Mara filmed them walking to the monument and sitting by it, singing the rhyme they had rehearsed for us. I was pleased with the images, the poses, the colours of the sky that day, and the beauty of their voices joined together (Figure 6 and 7).

The day after, Deirdre texted me two pictures taken forty-six years before, in 1977 (Figure 8 and 9). These photos exposed a striking juxtaposition between past and present. Forty-six years apart, Gregor and Deirdre hold the same place on the path, the same pose by the monument. In the 1977 picture, they hold hands while walking toward the memorial, with something carefree in their gait. In 2023, the connection between them, their linked hands, has transformed into the careful gestures that age inspire into bodies: now Deirdre's arm is around Gregor, supporting his walk. In the 1977 picture, they sat on the memorial's steps, posing for the camera. The carefulness in Deirdre's pose travels the years without a wrinkle: her right hand crossed on her left hand; her legs cautiously held together. Only time has assuaged what seemed like a certain alertness in the pose: in 2023, Deirdre is not looking at the camera anymore, she is rested, serene. She leans against the railing as against an old friend and gazes in the distance—her face suggesting both patience and contemplation. Gregor has kept all his style and elegance: the neat shirt and closed shoes, the watch, the glasses (are they the same? did they travel in time?). He is comfortable by the monument.



Figure 6: Gregor and Deirdre at the Inniskilling Monument, 2023. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



Figure 7: Gregor and Deirdre at the Inniskilling Monument, 2023. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



Figure 8: Gregor and Deirdre at the Inniskilling Monument, 1977. Courtesy of Deidre Williams



Figure 9: Gregor and Deirdre at the Inniskilling Monument, 1977. Courtesy of Deidre Williams



He is a regular to the memories inscribed here.

These photographs are echoes and illustrations of what a life by the Morne has been like: gestures of tenderness and care, childhood memories shared, friends and strangers coming for visits with their cameras and projects, looking at the Morne with always new eyes. They draw attention to the unrecorded words, sounds, and gestures that have contributed to the formation of the site as it exists today, thereby providing a valuable example of ‘the ethnographic space of the archive’ that exists within the disjunction ‘between normative rules and how people actually lived their lives’ (Stoler 2009: 32). Through these images, we see Morne Fortune as more than the history of its battle or a monument erected by and for settlers—but as a place of eyes filled with contemplation and joy, songs sung in cross-Atlantic unity, friends and foes bathing in the same light.

### Speculative memoryscapes

I want to think care as ‘an antidote to violence’. I want to think care in the register that Bonnie Honig outlines when she tells us that to care is ‘to cultivate anticipation of another world and to live now dedicated to the task of turning this world into a better one’. (Sharpe 2023: 136)

To anticipate new worlds, to fertilise for renewed imaginaries, to foresee the yet invisible, Mara suggested turning towards digital technologies, virtual spaces where alternative decolonised spaces could be visualised. The idea was to open a space where imagination can transform the landscape, regardless of material, economic or political feasibility. Although the images generated were aimed at visualising alternative memoryscapes within the movie, the process of creating them, as well as the result, presented an opportunity for critical reflections.

Initially, virtual replicas of monuments or their remains were created using photogrammetry software (Figure 10), a technology traditionally used to measure and extract resources, notably in colonial contexts. When used for

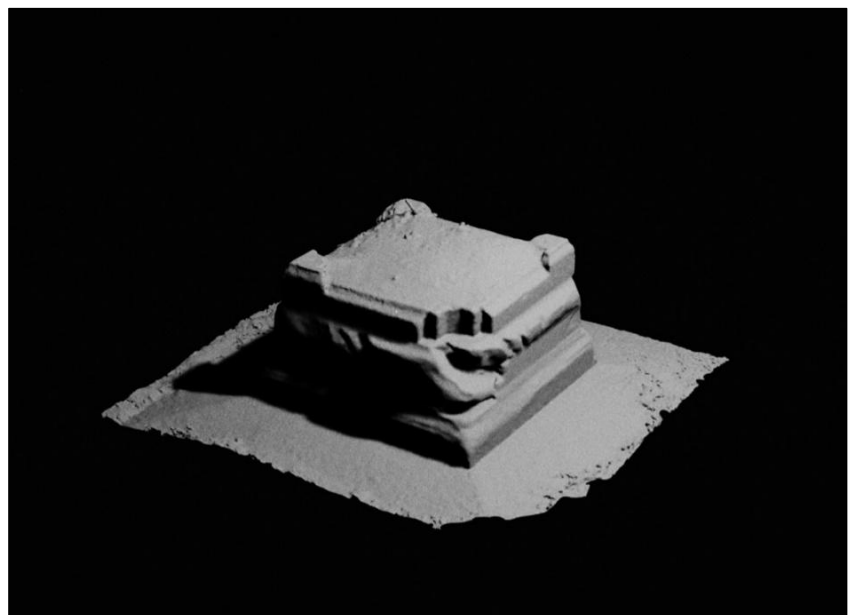


Figure 10: Accurate 3D scan of a pedestal where a racist statue used to stand. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



artistic purposes, it can be subverted into a method of preservation—as demonstrated by filmmaker Suneil Sanzgiri in *Golden Jubilee* (2021), in which the artist virtually renders his ancestral home in Goa to summon ghosts, spirits, and familiar voices, and retell the story of his land. However, within academic settings, this technology can perpetuate colonial logics by rendering places as devoid of human presence, cultural significance, and emotional depth, thus making them commodifiable (Wessels et al. 2023). For this reason, I was cautious of engaging with this technology in ways that acknowledge the ‘limits of affirmationism’ in a geography marked by dispossession and trauma, whilst finding methods for ‘staying with the tension’ that refusal might impose in such places and in the face of such histories—and of my foreignness to these histories (Dekeyser & Jellis 2021: 318 and 323, respectively). Consequently, rather than engaging in a ‘cold analysis’ of the flawless rendering of the monuments (Eve 2018: 115), I focused on the ‘failed’ scans produced by the software, interested to see if technological glitches could be used as accurate representations of the problematic aspects of the sites.

Ironically, these failures were often due to the very design elements chosen to give the monuments significance—their height, materials, or shape. For example, the protective railing of the Inniskilling Monument—which was a condition of its construction (Goligher 1931)—also protected it from virtualisation, as it made it difficult to take all the necessary photographs to construct a 3D replica. In the digital rendering, the obelisk materialised as completely deformed, seemingly melting under the weight of the history of violence and erasure it embodies (Figure 11). The resulting scan, constrained by this physical barrier, actually recontextualised the fence as a ‘counter-memorial of sorts’ (Marschall 2017: 213). This distortion appeared to reveal the monument's deeper meaning as a commemoration that silenced the reinstitution of slavery on the island and the suffering it entailed. The skewed

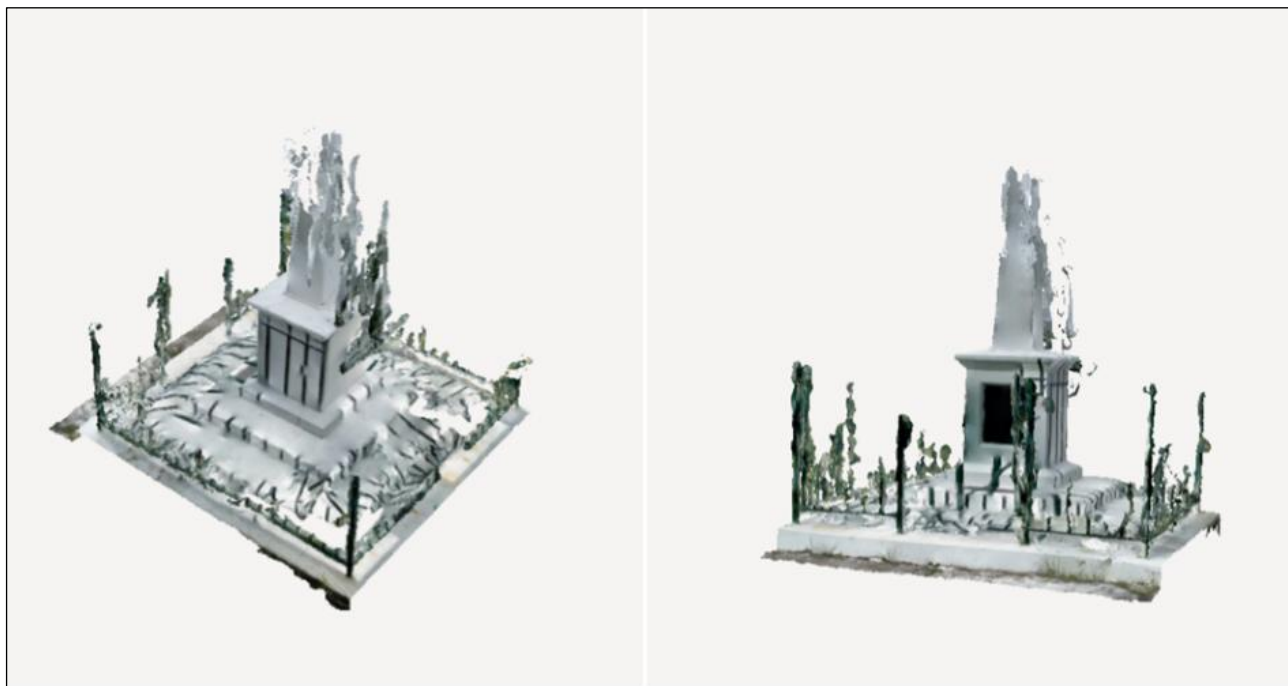


Figure 11: Distorted 3D scan of the Inniskilling Monument. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



Figure 12: Portchester Castle prison registers, accessed at The National Archives, Kew (Navy Board, 1797). Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois

digitisation thus provided a powerful way of visualising the negative affects associated with the memorial.

We also used 3D technologies to construct alternative memorials that would represent people's ideas and wishes for a healed space. This involved first asking participants how they would like the memoryscape to look and what memorials, if any, they would like to include. The responses varied widely, from erecting counter-memorials to transforming the space into an area of tranquillity free of any monuments. Regarding Morne Fortune specifically, most participants wanted the stories and names of the freedom fighters to be included on the site. As those who survived were captured and deported to Portchester Castle, their names were recorded and kept in the British National Archives (see English Heritage 2024). However, these records—located in England—remain inaccessible to most Saint Lucians and to people not trained in archival research. The first step in constructing this virtual memorial was therefore to retrieve these records and transcribe the names of the soldiers, helping to bring their stories back to life (Figure 12).

The second step was to consider how these names could be represented in a way that would convey both their presence and erasure from the landscape. As most of the participants did not want to see the white obelisk removed, it was interesting to consider how the potential of 3D could be harnessed to represent these alternative narratives within the existing memorial. After several attempts, Mara and Gökçe Göbü, our 3D designer, decided to hollow out the obelisk and engrave the names of the freedom fighters into it. This created an invisible second skin for the monument, reversing its value and making the history of the freedom fighters the inner truth of the landscape (Figure 13 and 14). Additionally, water was incorporated into the foundation of the monument, directing the imagination towards the sea that carries and unites the Caribbean islands. In this dream-like reality, the obelisk contained within its depths the heroic and tragic lives of those who fought for freedom and against slavery. The virtual intervention thus transformed the colonial monument from a symbol of imperial dominance into a vessel for subaltern memory, creating a powerful juxtaposition between external colonial signification and internal anti-colonial commemoration. Such imaginary landscapes helped to enact a form of 'regenerative memorialization', creating sites of memory capable of healing and alleviating the traumas associated with racist memorials (Sheehan et al 2021: 323). Although they did not materially transform the monuments, they allowed for a space where expectations and desires could shape the future of the sites according to what already existed in the minds and dreams of local residents.



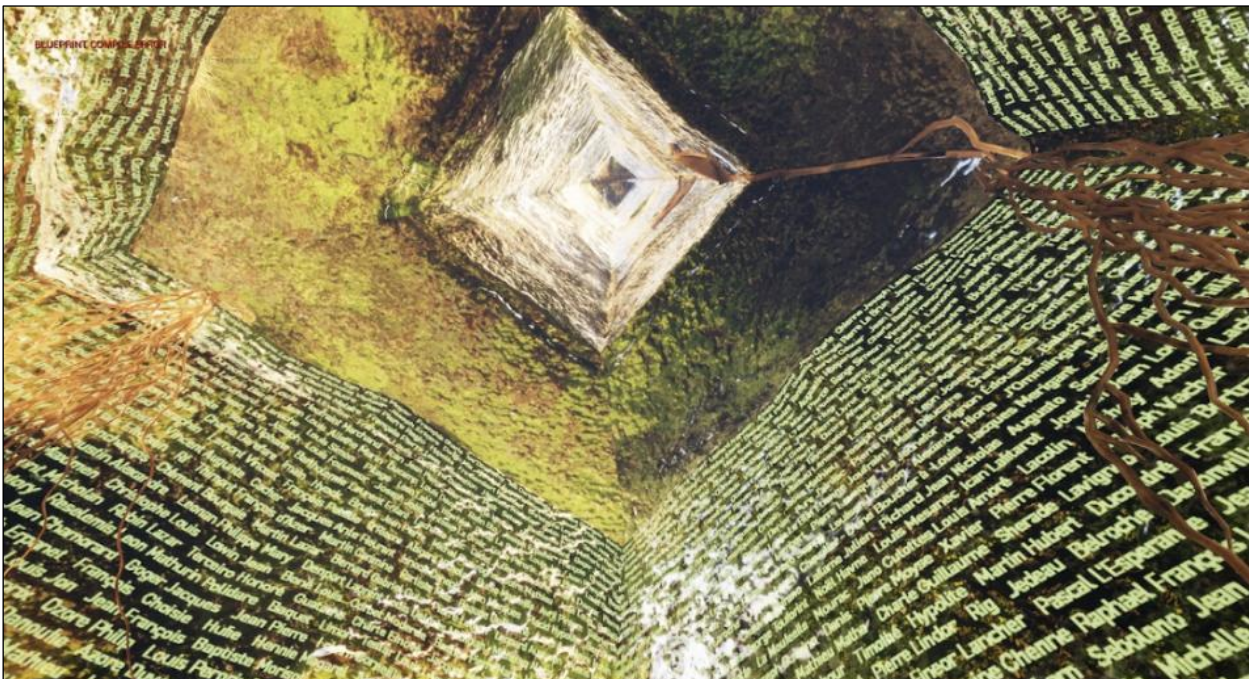


Figure 13: Virtual rendering of a 'healed' version of the Inniskilling Monument. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Gökçe Göbü

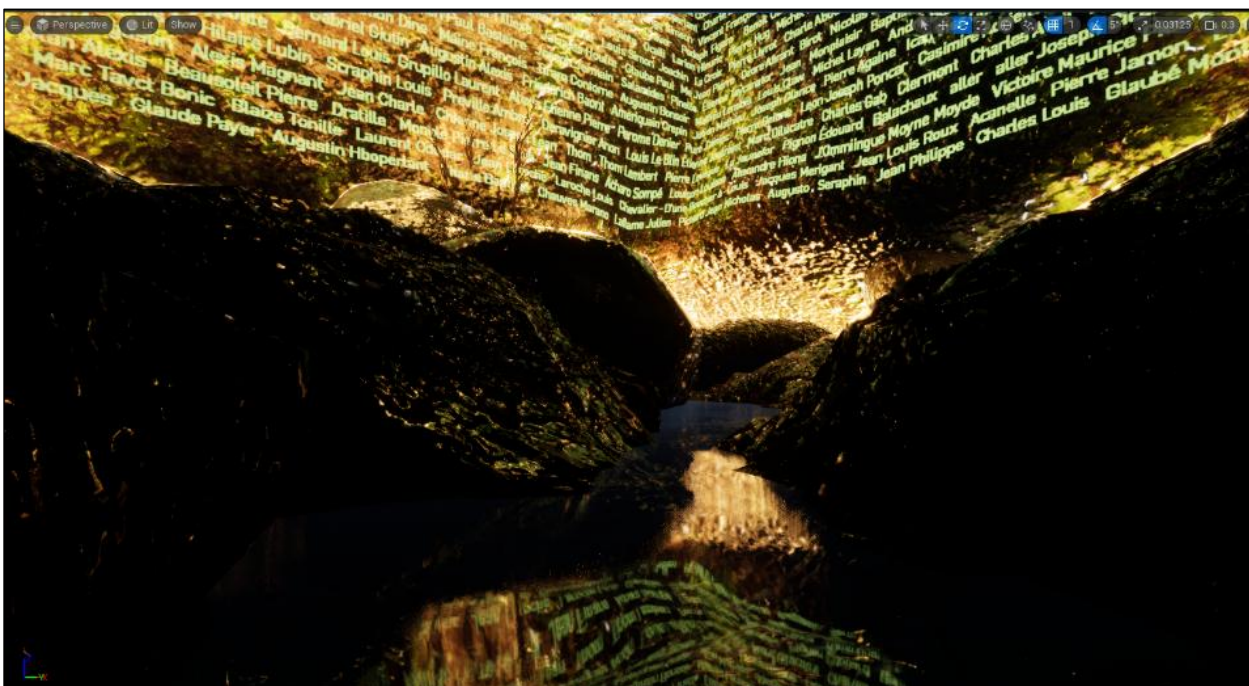


Figure 14: Virtual rendering of a 'healed' version of the Inniskilling Monument. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Gökçe Göbü

It gave space to those affective elements that, while always present in the fabric of the memoryscape, might seem (but never feel) invisible through architectural and historical apprehension alone. Upon viewing the image, Deirdre enquired whether the Saint Lucia National Trust could link the 'real' Inniskilling Monument to the virtual one through a QR code, indicating genuine interest in this type of imagery for reframing the monument. This response suggests that virtual technologies might serve as practical tools for heritage institutions seeking to expand interpretative

possibilities without undertaking (economically and politically) costly physical alterations, thereby offering a potentially viable pathway for memorial transformation that balances preservation concerns with decolonial aspirations.

## THE RESEARCHER OF AFFECT IS AN AFFECTED RESEARCHER

The three experiments discussed above illustrated how creative methodologies and artist-researcher collaboration can help interpret and represent the affective meaning of colonial memoryscapes. These experiments, in particular, highlighted that the meaning of monuments is shaped not only by the harmful stories they celebrate and the institutional and grassroots attempts at transforming these stories, but also by the personal, individual, and intimate relations of people who experience these sites on a daily basis. In this light, colonial memorial sites emerge not only as sites of contestation and trauma, but also as intimate and transient geographies that defy the imposition of any particular or coherent meaning. In this context, decolonising monuments requires more than physical alteration or removal. Rather, it demands a radical rethinking of memory-work in line with the complex nature of memoryscapes, involving personal and emotional engagements with memorial landscapes that unintentionally but effectively marginalise their coloniality.

But it also demands reconsidering the role of researchers and their ability to transform and impact the geographies they study. As mentioned earlier, I carried out this project as a foreigner and thus, as an ‘external observer’ of the memoryscape. Yet, I quickly found myself embedded in its fabric, transforming its meaning in ways I had not imagined. For example, I regularly communicate with Deirdre via WhatsApp to discuss ideas about my research. On 22 April 2024, she replied to one of my messages saying: ‘every time we are up the Morne for our evening dog walk (nearly every day) I think of you and mean to write’. Later, on 3 September 2024, when I enquired about her and Gregor’s health, she remarked: ‘We are generally well although the grand old Duke of York seems to be marching rather downhill’. These heartfelt and humorous responses indicated how her own relationship with the Morne and the rhyme had been transformed by my intervention in her and Gregor’s lives.

Personally, the cultivation of connections with participants enabled me to establish a novel—more intimate, more sensitive—relationship with the Morne as a space that I, too, could experience, remember, and transform. Through this process, I became intimately connected to the very intimacy I sought to examine and found myself ‘engaged in forms of memory-work’ that participated in the redefinition of the site (Rose-Redwood et al. 2022: 458). Whilst I endeavoured to ensure that my intervention within these spaces remained careful and considerate, I remain cognisant that ‘the re-inscription of hierarchies can be hidden in relationships of care’ (Blazek & Askins 2020: 466). This concern becomes particularly significant when I consider the poverty and precarity that characterised many research participants’ circumstances, especially in Fort-de-France, where several of the memoryscapes I studied also served as homeless shelters and drug consumption sites, as I have discussed elsewhere (Duhennois 2025 forthcoming).

On the one hand, being perceived as a woman, foreigner and queer individual within a predominantly male environment rendered me vulnerable, often subjecting me to unsolicited sexual advances and



inappropriate comments. This was a difficult dynamic to navigate as it was the same men I was interested in interviewing (Figure 15). Protecting myself required the use of long-internalised avoidance strategies, such as refusing to share my phone details, even though I had shared them with other participants. These decisions were not made reflexively, but often intuitively and instinctively—part of ‘women’s safety work’ (Rose 2025: 2)—yet they had implications for me, the participants and the research as a whole (Blazek & Askins 2020: 468). Specifically, they created an inequitable situation in which not all participants would be able to contact me to find out about the development of the project, creating an ethical dilemma.

On the other hand, in that space, I also was in a position of power and privilege that impacted the participants. For instance, my encounter with Jeremy was, from the onset, asymmetrical: while I, as a researcher in a British university, was here to study the space, he lived in that space. Thus, my analysis and interpretation of his lived experience are situated within a geography of ‘responsibility’ that is inextricably linked to capitalist logics (Lawson 2007: 2). This became evident when we were about to part ways, at which point he asked if I could give him two euros, which I did. However, I was soon admonished by his friend, who informed me that the money would be used to purchase drugs, thus implicating me in enabling Jeremy’s dependency. Although I acknowledge Blazek and Askins’s (2020: 469) assertion that it is ‘arrogance to believe that researchers alone can or should “deal with” ethical issues’, I felt very conflicted in that moment and questioned my professionalism. This experience highlighted how economic disparities, in that particular moment within the memoryscape, were more profoundly haunting us than colonial legacies, despite the undeniable interconnections between the two. The pedestal beside which we stood indeed transformed into this ‘generic and largely meaningless piece of urban infrastructure’ to which much attention was given, ‘while the needs of the poor are blatantly ignored’ (Marschall 2017: 216).



Figure 15: Author walking with the ti banc and talking to a participant. Photo Credit: Mara Chavez and Doris Duhennois



These experiences shape who we are as researchers and what we do with our research (Blazek & Askins 2020). For me, they helped to recognise how I had taken ‘the relationship between colonial pasts and postcolonial presents as self-evident’ (Stoler 2013: 7) and allowed me to nuance and complexify my understanding of memorials and their meanings—towards the reflections presented in this paper. They also encouraged me to recognise the limitations of the creative strategies employed, especially in terms of the accessibility of 3D images in places where people do not have equal access to phones/internet (Duester et al. 2023), and the risks of making regenerative memorialisation yet another form of privilege—an issue that deserves further attention. That the ‘messy and tangled realities of fieldwork’ (Rose 2025: 2) find their way into the memoryscape and thus need space in the analysis of its layers, clearly complicates any conclusions I would like to draw about the nature of these sites. Nevertheless, it is a timely reminder that committing ourselves to the ‘everlasting effort of figuring out how we might, together, fashion liberation’ (McKittrick 2021: 20) requires questioning the modes of our research and the moods it creates for ourselves and others. And how these moods linger, haunt, affect and transform the geographies we study.

## CONCLUSION

This article has examined three interrelated questions: What are colonial memoryscapes? How can they be studied? And how can they be decolonised and healed? Through addressing these questions, this analysis has identified key elements that compose memoryscapes, demonstrating that their significance derives not only from the multiplicity of transformative events shaping them, but crucially from the affective relationships that individuals maintain with these spaces. Creative methodologies proved particularly valuable for examining these subtle emotional dimensions, enabling critical exploration of how everyday interactions contribute to reshaping colonial sites’ meanings. These approaches facilitated the collection of responses that initially appeared unrelated to monuments—including Jeremy’s rap performance and Gregor and Deirdre’s routine walks on the Morne—yet ultimately demonstrated how memoryscapes are transformed and healed through informal and intimate relations.

Such findings suggest that memory-work is practised not only by institutions and grassroots movements through calculated interventions, but equally by everyday users of memorial spaces who introduce new emotions, narratives, and meanings into monuments, thereby marginalising colonial interpretations. Additionally, the self-reflections included in this paper demonstrated that researchers must understand themselves as integral to the memoryscapes they study, recognising that methodological choices can also transform these spaces, thus requiring continuous critical reflexivity regarding power dynamics and positionality. Together, these findings indicate that defining decolonisation in regard to public monuments requires attention to both organised interventions and quotidian ways through which individuals negotiate relationships with colonial heritage sites, as well as attending to how our presence in these spaces as researchers shapes the processes we seek to understand and support.

### ***Ethics and consent***

*Ethic approval for the research was granted by the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (ref: SALCC/2023/A1.7-007/P) and by the University of Winchester’s RKE Ethics Committee (ref: CREC-CH.00150/02/2023).*

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### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Saint Lucia National Trust is a quasi-governmental body founded in 1975 to protect the island's cultural and natural heritage.

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