The Summer 2020 Debate on How Britain Commemorates Its Past			Cambridge Heritage Research Centre
Interview Date:	07-09-2020	Interviewer:	Tom Crowley
Interviewee:	Madge Dresser	Organisation:	Bristol University
Position:	Honorary Professor		

Interview Between Tom Crowley (University of Cambridge) and Madge Dresser, Honorary Professor in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol. 07-09-2020

Tom Crowley 0:00

So yeah, we are recording now. So, this is Tom Crowley from Cambridge University Heritage Research Centre, speaking to Madge Dresser, who's Honorary Professor in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Bristol. And she's also been asked to be part of the Mayor of Bristol's History Commission, and we're speaking on the seventh of September 2020. And my first question is just about the background of your involvement with questions around representation of slavery in public space in Bristol, and then on to how the Mayor's Commission came to be.

Madge Dresser 0:42

Well, although I'm American born and I was in London for a year, my first job was in Bristol in 72. And it struck me as quite a parochial place but I was told— I thought it was a town and people said it's been a city since 1373 so I was put in my place. But I was very aware from the very beginning that the history of the city in terms of slaving was— in some quarters, people just didn't want to talk about it. And it was all mixed up with my interest in race and ethnic division anyways, there.

In those days in the 70s, the Left didn't really want to know about race and ethnicity, because they were more interested in class analysis. And liberals and some, you know, sort of more right-wing people certainly didn't want to talk about it. So— except the liberals would want to talk about it in terms of their role and abolition, you know, as Quakers or Baptists or what have you. So I was I was very interested in and I got— I had been doing some work on the Bus Boycott, documenting that by the early 80s, but all really as an activist more than as an employee of what was then Bristol Polytechnic, and then by the late 90s there was the Festival of the Sea. And some other maritime celebrations which really didn't address the whole question of Bristol as a slaving port.

And so there were a number— by then the demographic of Bristol had changed considerably. And I'd already had links with the Jamaican population, British born population because of the work I did on the Boycott. And I got quite intrigued, but there were many people in Bristol, a small coterie of people including the then director of the Museum who was an incomer, and one of the curators, the ethnography curator called Sue Giles, but also people who were left wing activists Peter [unintelligible] Chair of the Council for Racial Equality. A number of people of Jamaican heritage or African heritage,

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including Ross Martin, who later became involved Countering Colston. But a number of people, we formed a coterie to push for change in the representation of slavery in Bristol, both at museum level and in terms of commemoration.

So, this has been going on for a long time. And in the 90s, as I sort of mentioned in I think, one of the TED Bristol talks I gave, as part of the consultation for new exhibition on Bristol in slavery, we went to various places and told people about what we found out about history including in St. Paul's, which was seen as the ghetto, it wasn't, it was a mixed ethnic area, but there were streets of people from mainly the Jamaican community or British born people of Jamaican origin and we— I did sort of say, well, look, there's been this research that was done in the 1920s that, you know, Colston was part of the Royal African Company, etc, etc. And the next day, F off slave trader—

Tom Crowley 4:13

Quickly, who conducted that research in the 20s?

Madge Dresser 4:19

It was a Church of England Reverend, who, you know, just had an eye— there were even people within the Church of England, although the Church of England tended to be more on the conservative you know, don't talk about slavery or that was then this is now kind of school, but he got into the records and it was well known that Colston was involved with slavery way back when because people, even the chroniclers of Bristol, Latimer— from the 1970s— I mean, they knew, they sort of knew people who are descendants. So, you know, it was a kind of open secret in a way. But what Wilkins did is he really went to chapter and verse and lifted the records and showed that Colston was present at the Royal African Company. And he was an official there. So that was in London but you know, he had family links that went way back with Bristol.

And so anyway, we sort of popularised this, because there is a lot out there, you know, in the Academy, but people just don't know about it if they're not afforded those opportunities. So, the next the next day, the F off slave trader was painted in red paint across the Colston statue. And this 1895 statue, as you know, is right in the city centre, and it proclaims Colston as a wise and virtuous son of the city and details his philanthropic works, but not a word about how he got his money. And so that started the public debate.

And what was fascinating to me is that the public debate, it wasn't just Black versus White, it was cut across by class and family interests, etc. But it kind of replicated the divisions that you had when you had the debate about slavery in the 1830s in emancipation. I just thought a lot of those tensions kind of resurrected themselves in different ways. So, it's been bubbling on this whole idea of, you know, do we have— why do we honour Colston? How do we how do we make people aware that he wasn't— he was a philanthropist. It's undoubted he was a philanthropist. But, you know, how did he make

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his money? How much of his money was derived from that? People conflate the slave trade with the wider slave economy, which, you know, Bristol was much more involved with the wider slaving economy, the plantations trade and slave produced goods, trade with West Africa, trade with the West Indies and you know, it's the beginnings of globalisation.

The point is, is that we've been trying for ages to get some kind of at least replaquing, or contextualization in the public space. And it isn't that everybody was against that. It was that it was a combination of bureaucracy, the lack of maybe leadership, people wanting to do stuff, but you know, time ran out, or they had other priorities or what have you. So, it's just been dragging on and on and on. And the, I don't know whether you want me to go into the details about— there was this plaque that was going to be reconceptualized. Just to repair some damage. There had been a lot of guerrilla interventions, if you like, onto that statue, which were quite interesting. But temporary, so you had, you know, slave ships mocked up and put at the base of his statue. You had digital interventions, you had Banksy, we think, painting blood dripping down his face, all sorts of things that were quite lively as it were, but everything was very ephemeral.

And so, I'm losing my thread a little bit. You have to transcribe this. Anyway, well, what happened was a guerrilla plaque, unofficial plaque had been put on the plinth. And it damaged the plinth and the plinth is very nice, you know, there are all these Art Nouveauy kind of plaques there, you know, artistically it's quite nice. And so one planner who's also a local historian and innovator with educating people about their past, including about the slaving past, he got some money and we put up a plaque about Colston to counter the, you know, the hagiographic plaque. But it wasn't to sort of stop it being replaced. That would be part of a later debate, you know whether the statue is there or not. But I think it was misinterpreted. Anyways, it had to go up, in order for it to be approved. The wording that I was commissioned to do, had to go up on a website and be subject to public scrutiny and debate.

And one of the things I said that really got people's backs up, I thought it was sort of like a draft because we only have 100 words so I put something bit longer and hoping that people would come back to me, and people were furious because I said that Colston, although he was a philanthropist, he actually was very sectarian towards many of the White people who did not subscribe to his Tory or high Anglican views. And that was seen as you know, I'm a Labour apparatchik, who is trying to score political points, and at that time, I was not a member of the Labour Party. So that wasn't quite true. But I just, you know, wanted to give a fuller picture that he wasn't the hero a lot of people have been led to believe, although he was a contradictory man. I mean, he was personally very kind to people if they knew their place, you know, he was part of an older tradition of the rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate.

And anyways, we got all sorts of nit-picking resistance, and nobody kind of supported us, in terms of the wording, so all the wording was quite negative. And I tried to broker a couple of informal talks with some of the people who were most critical. And that was kind of a mistake because we got nobbled and we weren't getting the support because of the bureaucracy. The Mayor's Office and other people who might have leapt to our support weren't aware that this was all going on. The website was very hard to get into, and you have to know about it. And it became apparent that the Merchant Venturers or at least some of them, they're not a monolith anymore, wanted to protect the brand of the Merchant Ventures. And so, you know, there's things like he hardly ever came to Bristol. And, you know, he was an MP,

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and he was a member of the Merchant Ventures, but, you know, he hardly came, etc. And I said, that's immaterial. He was involved and he was at the meetings when he was in in London, he was a Royal African Company person. He was definitely, you know, at meetings where they were selling kids under 10, you know, transporting enslaved children under 10, etc.

And we had all sorts of argy-bargy, about how do you know they were under 10? And, you know, there wasn't a census record, all that sort of thing. How do you know most of his money was made by the slave trade, he traded in the Levant and Portugal. And so I don't know how much of it, but I do know that in Spain and Portugal there were unofficial links between soap factories that employed slave labour, etc. and Bristol merchants who were involved. Anyways, I think that there was just a resistance and we weren't getting the support from other people within the Council who didn't really know about this whole thing. So, we were kind of pushed into a corner where we had to agree to a sanitised version in order to get the plaque cast in time to qualify for the budget. And we were not happy with it, but we thought at least it would start a debate. And we might even have something we could scan where people could get a fuller story, you know, a little barcode on there. But anyways, by the time it came to the attention of the Mayor, he was rightly furious at the rather sanitised wording, but we were saying well, you know, we wanted support from you guys, but he hadn't really been told by his office. I think they were trying to protect him because he's overwhelmed with stuff and anyway, so they junked the plaque.

In the meantime, we then had the movement Countering Colston to replace the statue and again that was beset with all sorts of bureaucratic delays about when we were going to have a proper debate. We've had a million debates about all this through the years it's been going on for ages and nothing ever really gets done in a permanent way. And in the end, I guess with the Black Lives Matter and the whole decolonize and then the whole COVID thing and the George Floyd thing and the differential mortality rates of Black people in Bristol and their unemployment rates etc. that all came to a head with the Black Lives Matters protest. And then the rest is history in the sense of the you know, some people toppled the statue, which meant that a Bristol became globally interesting to people. And we're all besieged with interest about it, including the Mayor who is held in high regard, I think, globally even though he's sniped at a lot locally and the opportunity arose that maybe we could actually you know, get things going in terms of either recontextualizing the statue or removing it.

I mean, the whole point which David Olusoga has made is that it wasn't just the statue, the statue was an 1895 statue. But the point was the fact that it was in the centre of town, and it was a place of homage and celebration in a way that was very damaging to social cohesion and for people feeling they would belong to the city, etc. So, all those things came to a head. Now, then you had all sorts of action on all sides where some people wanted every sort of illusion or mention of slavery in Bristol expunged as racist. So, the tombs in the Cathedral to Barbadian merchants or you know, certain buildings, etc. And then you have the alt-right, taking advantage and destroying one of the, well, a couple things. So, a tombstone where we think a young black servant in the 17th century, early 18th century had been buried and certainly the tombstone which was a site of remembrance for a lot of African Caribbean people. It was a later tombstone, but that's another story.

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That was damaged and that was damaged by outsiders, we think, and I think it was a hard-right kind of you made us do it kind of thing. To really capitalise, I think, on the disquiet that a lot of white Bristolian felt about the toppling of the statue and the fact that it was unlawful. And, you know, it was seen as mob rule in some quarters.

And then we have the damaging of the only real memorial we have to a black person in the statue of a screenwriter called Fagan, a dramatist in St. Paul's where bleach was poured on. So, it was all getting really quite nasty. And then, you know, there was worries, you know, some justified worries, I think that people might be so angry about, you know, tombs or illusions or memorials to slave traders, plantation owners that they would destroy those. And so, you had a kind of real Twitter suffocation, or, you know, either racial injustice is the only thing that we should be concentrating on, and the only kind of injustice is racial injustice. And of course, at one level I think that's what we have to focus on because the conjunction of events with decolonization and George Floyd and COVID everything means that we have a real chance to bring up race and racial injustice and racism and make some material changes at this moment.

So that does have to be foregrounded, but you know, it's not— but we also have to realise that a lot of White people in Bristol were exploited as workers, etc. It's not the same as Atlantic slavery, even the ones who were sent as political prisoners or indentured labour were not sent in anywhere near the numbers that Africans were taken. And there's so much ignorance on the part of a lot of White custodians who don't know the whole story because they've been educated in an imperial context. You know, their curriculum was quite imperialist and gung-ho, and they just didn't know all the permutations. And then there were others who wanted to sort of say, well, we have modern slavery now, we should be concentrating on that.

And I think that begs a number of questions. So, there are all these different, sort of, cross currents. And some people just didn't want to— they were rather contemptuous about why do you want to have all these White people— or all these, you know, buildings, or parks or what have you that have to do with slavery? Let's just erase all the names, everything. And I think if you did that, you would, you know, you might have a rather bland historical landscape. That might be the American tourist in me, but I mean, I do value the kind of palimpsest of different people and different buildings etc., but we need to understand them in context. However, that's easy to say because in the public arena people want good guys and bad guys. And to Marvin's credit, to the Mayor's credit when he realised that some people were going in, you know, trying to guard the Cenotaph or retrieve Colston's statue etc. He didn't think they were all neo-Nazis. He wanted to talk to them because he felt that a lot of them were people from working class backgrounds or people who felt disrespected or that the traditions of Bristol that they felt proud of were being disrespected. And he wanted to talk to them and bring them along because I think he realised that we can't just do this on a cancel culture basis. We have to bring the City along with us to a new understanding of Bristol's history and he did call a history commission.

Now these mayoral commissions have been called in the past by mayors past and present. There's a Housing Commission or there's a Committee on the Legacy of Slavery. And there's a Commission on Racial Equality, and all of these commissions, and things have overlapped. And there's been no central record of what good practice has been established, what in the past has been accomplished. And so, any initiatives and reforms tend to get lost because they're not audited.

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They're not, you know, we're not building on good practice. So, there is a danger that this History Commission could, you know, just become a talking shop, but I think there is an opportunity if we do it right. And we can get the funding to you know, get administrative support, that we can get people who have had a lot of time to research and the privilege of researching the empirical history of Bristol but also people from outside the Academy. People who know about family connections who have oral tradition, knowledge, who are artists or what have you, to bring together and have a dialogue between us all. And not just dismiss every curator or academic historian as a Eurocentric elitist, and not just dismiss everybody outside the Academy as ignorant or not academic enough, I think we have to have a kind of interactive discussion about the city's history and re interrogate it on the grounds of things like class, gender, housing, race, etc.

The danger of that is if you don't foreground racial equality right now, you may miss the moment when people's concern and engagement with it— it's not going to last forever because it's, you know, it's something that may be a fashion for some or, you know, sincerely felt but not central to certain people's lives. So, it's very important to seize the moment to try to affect differences in how we memorialise things, differences in how we feed new research and new perspectives into the school curriculum. And I think Bristol could be a real leader in that. New ways of memorialising if that's what we want to do, in terms of, you know, new venues or new ways of representing the city's past, not just in the centre of town, but elsewhere in museums, but also other spaces that might be more accessible to more general public.

I hope that's halfway coherent, but I think you know, there are dangers, and a lot of the dangers are cockup rather than conspiracies. And I think one of the worries is that conspiracy theories are rife when people feel disrespected, or powerless, or under stress, particularly with COVID. Now people want answers, and there's a lot of very nasty conspiracy theories that are travelling under the banner of both right-wing people, but also in some sections of the Left. And that can flip into something that could be quite oppressive, and not what we want, or not what I want. I mean using that term we is so telling isn't it? Because who are the we? And what we have to ensure in this city is that we may have different interests and there may be short and long term goals that differ according to us, but we need to try to bring the City together in order to affect some better change and a better understanding. And I think everything has to be taken on a case by case basis.

So, for example, I'm participating as a historian in talks with Colston Girls School, which is now funded by the State, but it was an Academy. Colston independent school is another case in point and the pupils there and the teachers want to think how they address the legacy of Colston and of slavery in the City, but also how to talk to one another and how to respect each other's experiences. So I think when you talk to people about this as a historian it was really interesting because a lot of very bright pupils— I was talking to one lot with some teachers, they all thought Colston was completely evil he was like a neo-Nazi and, you know, in one sense, of course, he was party to crimes against humanity, what we would now consider crimes against humanity and which some people at the time did. And there is no doubt that he was, you know, profit was a big consideration for him. There was no doubt that as a Bristolian, he was enmeshed in Bristol interests that he was a champion of those interests, but it's also important to understand where he was coming from and if you completely demonise him, you don't have to honour him, but in order to understand where he's coming from, that enriches your

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perspective and perhaps, also makes us more reflective about our own role as citizens today, as we use, you know, slave produced stuff to fuel our iPhones. You know, further climate change or what have you.

So I think in terms of not jettisoning critical thinking as simply a Eurocentric invention, which it isn't, but to actually look at empirical logical knowledge, value that, it may not all come from the West, but also value the importance of the arts and people's emotions etc. when we make political decisions, and I think this is something— we need to have that conversation. This is really difficult, there's no easy, quick fixes on this. And the Mayor wants to take some time to, you know, a few years to actually get this History Commission together and produce things. And time will tell if it's more than a talking shop. Time will tell whether we've got money in funding to make things happen. Time will tell whether there's the appetite in the public arena for people to have a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the city's past, but it will never be the same again, the complacency, it will never be the same again. So, I think there's a real opportunity to reconfigure things and I think, you know, what we rename and what we reconfigure, I think needs to be taken on a case by case basis. It's not going to be easy, but I think we have to have difficult conversations and hopefully the Commission will be a vehicle for that.

Tom Crowley 27:06

That's very interesting. That's a very good answer. Thank you. So, we've covered— I'm just being quite formulaic and shuffling through the questions. We've covered the kind of ambitions of the Commission really I think. Yeah. What you were saying about the initial plaque that was vetoed by the Mayor in the end, and the idea of accompanying it with a QR code so people could find out more. And also, how you were trying to use this plaque as a platform to maybe foster the kind of discussion that, you know, obviously we think is really necessary. But it just became really binary, good- bad and reductive really, really quickly. So, I'm kind of bearing that in mind. And I guess my question is: so we've got the plinth of the statue, we've got this statue that's been toppled. How in terms of what's left, in terms of the use of public space, how do you try and get that nuance back into the public space? You know, is a plaque sufficient? Or because you were sort of describing the wording on the plaque, and then you were describing how people responded to it, and then you came back and said, but there are these dimensions. So, do you think a plaque is enough or does it need to be more comprehensive do there need to be more things commissioned around—

Madge Dresser 28:51

Yeah, I mean, first of all, you know, I have different— renaming Colston Hall is fine by me. I think we're never going to have Colston in the city centre and rightly so, you know, it commemorates etc. But I think they're all these— and I think you're right I mean, plaques, people don't read plaques on the whole. And people often pass by those statues and don't realise, you know, but there's a lot of misinformation about stuff and I think what would be— I think we need a variety of things to

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engage it. I personally would like a memorial to the work of exploited, to the contribution that enslaved and exploited labour and their descendants made to the prosperity of Bristol. I personally would like a counter— I would have liked a counter monument in the centre of town, but maybe it needs to be somewhere else and will we ever have it? You know, can we crowdfund it? But I also would like to see in the various churches and the sites around Bristol and the buildings around Bristol. I don't want people to be worried about vandalization, etc. I don't want everything to be the Nelson Mandela Hall or Nelson Mandela Street, I think that flattens out the distinctiveness of Bristol's history.

Bristolians are very proud that they're not just like London, they have their own [unintelligible], and I think we need to honour that. But I think everything has to be taken on a case by case basis. And I think the arts have to play a role. Music has to play a role. There's all sorts of imaginative things. But the thing about something more permanent is you can have all these great events and they get forgotten about in five or 10 years, we've had great things happening and great debates going on and then it all gets, you know, forgotten about and in 20 or 30 or 40 years' time, you know, where's it going to be? Okay? and I think we, if only Bristolians of all backgrounds would realise what a fantastic opportunity this is to put Bristol in the centre of a global interest. You know, people are interested now in this history, and they want to engage for all sorts of reasons. And there's no need to be defensive about it. Just be honest about it. Okay?

Tom Crowley 31:22

That's very interesting. Thank you. Um, I've got one more question which just occurred to me as you were, yeah, talking about your career of activism and research in Bristol, starting off with the Bus Boycott. And it strikes me that people find it quite hard to kind of conceptualise the identity politics of today. It's not class, it's a bit beyond race as well. The demographic of the people pulling the statue down was very diverse. People were saying there was more white people there— there's a discussion around that as well. And you were talking about how people in the 70s weren't very interested in talking about race unless it intersected with questions of class or particularly valorising the abolitionists. So, um, yeah, I was wondering, maybe this is a really difficult question to answer or it will take too long, but how you think the debate around race has shifted within Bristol during your time of being engaged with it and monitoring it?

Madge Dresser 32:42

That is such a big question.

Tom Crowley 32:45

Yeah, it is isn't it?

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Madge Dresser 32:53

Oh God, I don't even know where to begin. I think my antenna to all these issues, you know, it's personal. And it's partly because I was I brought up by a Jewish orthodox father, irreligious mother really. But in the middle of the biggest concentration of Jews from Eastern Europe, not all, mostly Holocaust survivors outside of Tel Aviv, in New York, okay? I just didn't know it, it was just part of, you know, it was just a normal kind of thing. But we were very aware that we were in between the status of Black and Latino people and the WASPs. And we have this liminal status at least till the 60s. And so, my identity was different. Then I went and did the first Black studies courses at UCLA, you know, and I think I mentioned I had Angela Davis as a tutor, but I also did some other Black studies stuff.

It was a de facto segregated town. There's no doubt about this. And so, my kind of instincts were, you know, my antennae were out about all this. When I was in London it didn't matter, it was cosmopolitan, but coming to Bristol really brought home, how Christian and how white and how-self referential— you know, you had some Irish and people like that and obviously the people from Jamaica and Barbados and things, but just the kind of, the default position was not mine, you know. And so, even though I've got white privilege and all that, I really didn't feel like I was part of that. And I think that's something that's not acknowledged.

And then the other thing that I think is really quite interesting is the whole relationship to capitalism that we now have on the Left. Of course, it was always we were either going to have a, you know, state-controlled nationalisation or some anarchistic co-operative stuff. And it's all going to be cool, right? And the enemy was capitalism. Now, capitalism, corporate capitalism is obviously really oppressive, and contributing to all sorts of social injustice right now. But there's been some really interesting work now about recalibrating the way we look at economics, in the light of COVID, and global warming and racism and everything, and that we can see now that capitalism, in terms of small and medium-sized firms, those people are getting victimised by the monopoly capitalist. So, the workers are being victimised by Amazon, but so is the guy or the woman who has to sell their goods or, you know, pay a tariff, etc. And historically, capitalism was you know, seen as against the worker and not wanting to pay minimum wage or you know, ripping people off about rents, which is true.

But I think now maybe we need to recalibrate the way we look at capitalism, because it's also that individualism, that can doism, that not going through bureaucracy, but having a sort of hard head about getting things done. I think we need that. It's just how to rein it in. So, it isn't just exploitative in its own right. And historically, capitalists were the people getting us out of feudalism. They were the ones who were, you know, the navigators or the scientists or the people who wanted to have individual freedom. And you know, the irony with Bristol was, the Bristolians were against royal monopolies in the name of individual freedom. They wanted the right to trade and enslave people. I mean, it's a contradiction at the heart of capitalism. So, I think we need to, I think the Left really needs to rethink [recording interrupted] the huge challenges that confront us now. Sorry, I'm going around the houses, but I, I think it's such a big question. And it's something that relates

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to the very nature of knowledge and what we value in how we get things done, how we operate in the world, and how we value each other, and what kind of society we want in the end.

Tom Crowley 37:46

And that insight, I guess, offers some way to kind of navigating what's the composition of the crowd that felt motivated enough to pull the statue down, albeit be motivated by you know, years and years and years of frustration with nothing being done versus the kind of smaller group of people who wanted it back out of the water?

Madge Dresser 38:16

But I don't think they're smaller. You see, I think a lot of Whites have moved out of Bristol, after the inner city, you know, the Blitz etc. They moved out to the outer— they're in South Gloucestershire, Somerset or what have you. And a lot of them are very well off thank you very much. But they retain their Bristol ties. It might be through the rugby club or what have you. They have an input, they feel Bristolian, they're proud of their family history. And then you have all these very deprived people who have been brought out from the slums of Central Bristol after the Blitz and dumped into these housing estates on the outskirts, who are amongst the most deprived people in Europe. And, you know, some of them had Irish backgrounds, but you know, some of them were English, what have you. You know a lot of those people that are working class will say, Well, what about us? We've had a bloody awful time too. And then the middle classes are saying oh, my God, it's lawless and, you know, it's the mob rule and we're frightened.

Now some of those people might be brought along to a more informed view about race and identity politics and the legacy of slavery. Not all but some of them will be driven into the hands of the hard right if people don't acknowledge them and that worries me because think the neo-Nazis, they're waiting you know, they are waiting. And then you have all that, you know, this embrace of these conspiracy theories on both the Left and the Right. Who was it? Qanon and you know David Icke and all sorts of people who should know better and have a vested interest I suppose. I'm not a Zionist myself, I've been to Israel once and I went to the West Bank as well as, you know, all the Jewish bits. But I'm really very worried about the vilification of all Jews as Rothschilds who control the world, or as people who are, you know, the Epsteins and the Maxwells of the world, etc. And that we're all rich, or that we're all white, that we're all Ashkenazi Jews, etc. There's so much misunderstanding and misinformation, partly it doesn't help with people like Netanyahu or Erdoğan or any of the other, you know, fascistic power grabbers we seem to be attracting into public office right now.

But I really worry very much that we're going to have a flip, because just because you are in a less powerful position, you know, like if you're Black your life chances are not what they are this country or America, if you are Jewish, they're just not, but every Jew knows that it even wealthy people, be they Tutsis or Ugandan Asians or Cambodian intellectuals, what have you. It's very easy to flip into genocide. And so, I'm worried about this and I worry about the inability of people to talk

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with each other and actually try to get each other, and what Zionism means, it means a lot of different things to people. And how to secure justice for the Palestinian people, and not sell people into a one person, one party state where Jews will get absolutely slaughtered, and not talk about Hamas and Hezbollah, etc, as well as Palestinian failures, as well as the failures of the Israeli state. And to see it simply as the European colonial imposition, which of course it was, but it isn't like the Jews were all powerful when this happened. It served the interests of the imperialist state to have them there. And so, there's all these different you know, issues that motivate me personally. But racial justice is one of them and combating anti-Black racism.

I'm a member of Journey to Justice, which is a national charity that tells untold stories and a trustee of the Somali Resource Centre. And we need to realise that not all Black people come from the same space. And I think the other thing is that Black people is a huge generic term that covers so many different types of people in terms of class, ethnicity, historical lived experience, and to talk about Africans or talk about you know, as an undifferentiated whole, is another form of eurocentrism and racism, etc. I've lost the thread because it's such a huge and, you know, encompassing thing. We really need to talk and not have cancel culture.

Tom Crowley 44:00

Yeah, sorry, I'll let you go. I was just um— you talked about kind of seizing the moment, right? So, a moment where a lot of people who, I guess in some part of their consciousness, were concerned about racism, but now it's much higher up their consciousness. Do you think there's a kind of order to what needs to be done? Like we need discourse, dialogue, conversation, but to enable that, for that to be productive, there needs to be a sort of racial agenda, dealing with racial inequality.

Madge Dresser 44:43

Yes, I agree. I agree. Yeah, I mean, because the moment is come. It's a confluence of opportunity with you know, the Black Lives Matter and the decolonisation and the whole worldwide sort of awareness. We've got to strike while the iron is hot, because it could so easily not go the way we want it to, and opportunities can be lost. And you know, there are people who are starving to death in Bristol, you know, some of them are White, but most of them aren't, a disproportionate number are not. And we've got to do something. And that's, you know, really, really important. And if we don't, we're going to drive people to radicalization of an unpleasant kind, of a destructive kind.

Tom Crowley 45:43

Thank you very much.

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Interview Date:	07-09-2020	Interviewer:	Tom Crowley
Interviewee:	Madge Dresser	Organisation:	Bristol University
Position:	Honorary Professor		

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