

<b>Institution:</b> University of Warwick		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D26 – Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Let's talk about race: Building resilience and agency within BAME communities through Caribbean art heritage in the UK		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Dr Fabienne Viala	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Reader in Hispanic and Caribbean Studies	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2012 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Britain is a country that has historically struggled, and continues to struggle, with recognising and reconciling the history of Empire, its role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the legacy of colonialism. This refusal to engage in an open dialogue about race, or to provide opportunities to learn about this heritage, has contributed to discriminatory social practices and the continued marginalisation of minority communities in the UK. Viala's work directly addresses this deficit, demonstrating how artistic propositions from Caribbean artists can create space for dialogues about racism and colonial legacies within the UK. Through art exhibitions, performance and schools workshops, Viala's work has directly impacted on BAME communities by raising awareness of this artistic heritage, creating new spaces for discussions about race, and building resilience and agency within minority communities through artistic practice.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Viala's research examines how Caribbean Art offers new, different and effective responses to combatting racism and related inequalities resulting from the history of Transatlantic Slavery. Her research has revealed that exhibitions and performances are the most effective platform to trigger a positive and critical dialogue around this issue by raising awareness about the history of European Colonialism (3.1; 3.2; 3.3). Focusing on artworks that react to this theme in the Caribbean (3.1; 3.4; 3.5), Viala's research methodology has included interviewing artists, curating their work in the Caribbean as part of her analysis and bringing their work to the UK to generate impact on British audiences with non-British heritage.</p> <p>Based on her earlier research findings, in <i>The Post-Columbus Syndrome</i> (3.6), Viala argued that while official political memory in the Caribbean perpetuates racist national narratives, creative and artistic offerings have been more inclusive and are leading the way in developing positive approaches to multi-racial and multicultural heritage within each Caribbean nation-island. Continuing this line of research, Viala's British Academy funded research project 'Contemporary Art and Reparations in the French Caribbean' examined how the main pathways of transitional justice, such as truth finding and reparation commissions, restorative justice and/or retributive justice, post-traumatic counselling, gender awareness in post-conflict situations, are actually modes of transaction which are re-enacted by conceptual artists, either with their own body or with bodies that become the protagonists of complex story telling. Because the stories told by photographers are not didactic, and because what is seen actually stands for a wider emotional situation (involving feelings such as guilt, anger, forgiveness, shame, pride), Viala's research demonstrates how contemporary art channels provoke action and restorative dialogue via the artistic medium in a unique way. The visual transaction between what the artist wants to show</p>		

and share and what the public sees and feels opens up a wider transitional platform that goes beyond the standard dichotomy of guilt and forgiveness, or of trauma and shame, feelings which are omnipresent in Black communities all across Europe and which are revived constantly by structural racism in a white-dominated institutional framework.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Viala's publications include a monograph, an article in a peer-reviewed journal and chapters in edited volumes:

1. **Viala, Fabienne** (2016) *Le Musée International de l'Esclavage (IMS) de Liverpool: Entre Engagement et Politique Culturelle de l'Emotion*. In: Dussauge, Matthieu (ed.) *La Route de l'Esclave: Des Itinéraires pour réconcilier Histoire et Mémoire*. Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 257-264. ISBN: 978-2-343-08378-0
2. **Viala, Fabienne** (2019) *L'esclave comme autre ou l'esclave nôtre: Les réparations de l'esclavage au regard des arts visuels caribéens*. In: Bénac-Giroux, Karine and Diop, David and Poirson, Martial, (eds.) *Poétique et politique de l'altérité. Colonialisme, esclavagisme, exotisme*. Paris: Classique Garnier, pp.507-519. ISBN: 978-2-406-08156-2
3. **Viala, Fabienne** (2019) *The Memorial ACTe*. In: Achille, E. and Forsdick, C. and Moudileno, L., (eds.) *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp.186-194. doi: 10.2307/j.ctvwvr2vr.20
4. **Viala, Fabienne** (2019) *Cultural agency and antiracism in Caribbean conceptual art*. In: Wade, Peter and Scorer, James and Aguiló, Ignacio, (eds.) *Cultures of Anti-racism in Latin America and the Caribbean*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies. ISBN: 978-1-908857-55-2
5. **Viala, Fabienne** (2018) *La mémoire des gestes de l'esclavage dans les pratiques performatives caribéennes*. *L'Annuaire théâtral: Gestes ordinaires dans les arts du spectacle vivant*, 63-64. pp. 49-62. doi: 10.7202/1067747ar
6. **Viala, Fabienne** (2014) *The Post Columbus syndrome: identities, cultural nationalism and commemorations in the Caribbean*. *New Caribbean Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 9781349495405

British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grants Awards 2014-15: **Viala, Fabienne**. *Reparations for Slavery in the French Caribbean: From Patrimonial to Performative Memory in Guadeloupe*. Ref: SG143217. April – November 2015. **(GBP6,935)**

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

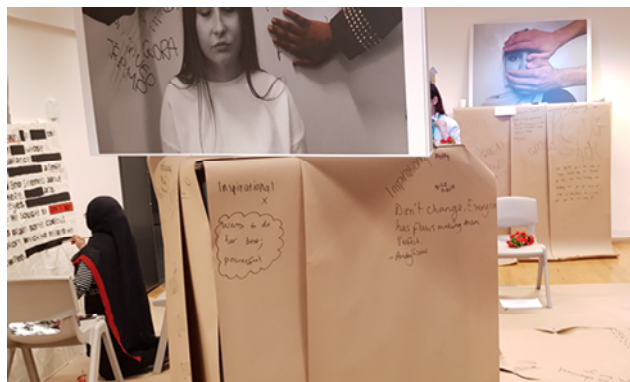
Britain's colonial history and involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is considered a sensitive topic in the UK today; it is covered only briefly in the national curriculum and is rarely represented in popular culture or art. The refusal to give space to this history reinforces the myth of Britain's racial diversity as a recent demographic change, contributing to the ongoing discrimination and hostility faced by BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) communities in the UK. Caribbean communities in particular have felt the impact of this recently in the Windrush scandal, when it was uncovered that the British government had been deporting members of the Caribbean Windrush generation. In response, calls for more discussion and education about Black British history from groups such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) are becoming increasingly prominent. Viala has used her research to address this gap in awareness, focussing particularly on working with diverse communities in Coventry, as well as the wider West Midlands and beyond. Through photographic and art exhibitions, performance development, original dance choreography and educational workshops, she has engaged the public with the history of Caribbean slavery and increased the agency of the BAME audiences and participants by addressing the painful histories, and present realities, of racial discrimination in today's UK society.

***Embodied Islands: Examining the cultural legacies of Caribbean history through art***

As Viala's research findings demonstrate, art has enabled a positive and safe mechanism for exploring issues around race, history and slavery. In collaboration with Hispanic photographer Jean-Francois Manicom, she curated *Embodied Islands*, an exhibition of Caribbean photography. The exhibition contrasted contemporary photography with historical images of the Caribbean and conveyed Viala's research in a visual way that created essential space for discussions on larger themes of colonialism, identity and racism. The touring exhibition, between June and October 2016 (Warwick Arts Centre, Belgrade Theatre Coventry), was visited by over 1,000 people, stimulating and facilitating a dialogue around identity, race and ethnicity. Visitors commented that the exhibition had 'had a big impact on my understanding about the interaction between different cultures', that it had 'opened my eyes to a new area' and that the exhibition was an example of how we can foster increased 'societal cohesion' (5.1).

Locating an exhibition that showcased a marginalised history and culture, in established institutions such as the Belgrade Theatre, enabled many of Coventry's Afro-Caribbean community members to engage with spaces within which they had previously felt unrepresented. A number of community and school groups organised visits to the exhibitions. Community members commented that 'such emotional feelings are brought to the surface, that are usually kept in a box' and how important it was 'for a place like Coventry... [which] has high unemployment and has particular tensions in these communities, to bring this community together' (5.1). The exhibition provided a vital space to educate people about the history and art of the Caribbean, but also a vital space for people from BAME/Afro-Caribbean communities to celebrate this heritage and 'see art that was made by non-white people' (5.1), an opportunity that is routinely denied them by contemporary art exhibitions and spaces within the UK.

Many of the visitors to the exhibition commented upon the importance of bringing this exhibition and research into schools, to 'teach our kids... about black history' and 'about equality and diversity' (5.1), and empower students from BAME backgrounds, instilling pride in their heritage and making the arts accessible to them. Continuing this work, in 2019 Viala collaborated with Sidney Stringer Academy in Coventry on a programme of bespoke workshops based on her research, and the *Embodied Islands* exhibition, that culminated in a student devised art exhibition and performance in response to her work. Sidney Stringer Academy is a state school located in an inner city area of high social deprivation with a large population of non-white students. Working with a group of students from diverse BAME backgrounds, Viala facilitated collaboration between the students and art practitioners to use her research as the basis for a photography showcase, live art exhibition, drama performance and spoken word poetry. All creative outputs demonstrated (and reaffirmed Viala's research findings) that Caribbean art could be used to encourage and empower students to explore their racialised experiences of life in the UK. The collaboration resulted in participants presenting their work to the rest of the school (approximately 400 students and 40 staff), as well as other schools in the local area who attended the showcase event.



Reflecting on the project, the students commented that it had given them the opportunity to learn about aspects of British history that they are not given access to in schools; 'I've never had a lesson in this school about black history or anything like that'; 'history is hidden, it's almost like we're not allowed to connect to it' (5.2). The students expressed anger 'that students aren't given the opportunity to learn about colonisation and slavery at a deeper level' (5.3). Students involved in the project commented that the opportunity to access this knowledge and engage with issues of racial and cultural difference was 'empowering'; it 'allowed me to get a voice and

just show how I've been feeling'; 'I've realised that we're actually more capable than we think we are. And we're usually restrictive in what we're going to do and stuff, but this let us open up and express ourselves and actually be us.' Participating in the project had built resilience and increased agency, by allowing them to explore the 'hidden' aspects of themselves and their heritage through art practice (5.4).

Teachers commented on the transformative change they had observed in students who took part, noting their 'confidence had shot through the roof' and that the project had given the students 'a voice they didn't know they had, that they're not afraid to use and will continue to use' (5.4). This sense of empowerment was also reflected in the audience feedback from the event, with visiting students commenting that seeing the performances and artwork had made them feel that 'I am worthy', 'black is beautiful' and 'difference is okay'. Audience members commented that the event had left them feeling 'confident' and that they found it 'empowering', while others indicated that they were more secure in their own sense of national and cultural identity: 'I am Persian' and 'I am who I am!' (5.5).

The Vice Principal of Sidney Stringer Academy commented that 'the original exhibit was the first art and cultural exhibition that the majority of our students attended. I would therefore say it has high value in developing their cultural capital and providing a positive social as well as academic experience...This project has recognised the potential on some very vulnerable students and made them feel gifted and valued...I feel that they have begun to close a social chasm between themselves and some of their peers from other areas of the city and country' (5.6). The school expressed an interest in continuing to collaborate with Viala to 'permanently build it into art examination units and Literature coursework', as an embedded aspect of the school's programme that draws on Viala's methodology to address the legacy of colonialism and use art as a means of decolonising this history and building resilience amongst its pupils. The Academy is using the partnership with Viala in their application for the Arts Mark and as 'evidence in an inspection for the type of intervention we hope to provide for some of our more vulnerable students' (5.6).

### **Exploring cultural history through performance: ACE Dance School (Birmingham, UK) and Untold Dance School (Amsterdam)**

In 2019, Viala co-created an art exhibition, *Memorial ACTe*, in Guadeloupe, using her research on art as a platform to raise awareness about the legacies of slavery in today's postcolonial societies (3.2). This exhibition, coupled with her research, formed the basis of performance development workshops with students and BAME choreographers at ACE Dance School in Birmingham and Untold Dance School in Amsterdam, who both collaborated with Viala to stage a dance show that explored the history and themes of her work. Viala worked with students and BAME choreographers at ACE Dance School in Birmingham and Untold Dance School in Amsterdam to devise a new dance performance that explored the colonial history of Guadeloupe in response to Viala's research.

The collaboration between Viala and ACE facilitated a new way for the dance school to explore the research themes presented by Viala, and provided a mechanism for the dancers to explore and express the feelings her research elicited. One of the ACE choreographers on the project commented that the project had had a transformative impact on the young dancers he worked with; at the beginning of the project, one student said that 'she didn't identify a personal connection with either side of her mixed race heritage. By the point of evaluation, she stated she had a clear understanding of her identity as a result of the work we did with her' (5.7). He also noted that the project significantly improved students' understanding of the Caribbean and colonialism.

Viala's work and methodology impacted the choreographer's own creative practice: 'this approach made me choreograph differently...the process resulted in me coaching/giving behind the scenes information of how I approach choreography – this was a direct result [of] working with Fabienne's research' (5.7). Viala's approach also enabled the challenges of the histories of



slavery and their legacies in Caribbean Arts to be discussed in an open way, and explored through dance, leading to a deeper, more profound understanding of the lasting resonance in contemporary society. ACE's choreographer stated that 'I have now applied this practice to my approach - the Caribbean studies let me know you have to have an understanding of our ancestors, wherever they're from. It's an important discovery in an artist's journey... I wouldn't have achieved the same result without the Embodied Islands team. Their team is invaluable and gave a unique opportunity for me as a choreographer - for the work that we produced, but also in developing my own practice' (5.7).

Using a similar approach, Viala worked with Untold Dance School in Amsterdam to look at histories of slavery and colonialism and Viala delivered workshops to share her research as the basis for new work within the dance school. Untold's choreographer and Exchange Coordinator commented on the impact of the Viala's research and the project on their students. She explained that it had enabled their students to connect with their Afro-Caribbean heritage but also with each other: 'We have a lot of people who identify strongly with their African roots, so every kind of information...we're hungry for it...What you saw is that they experienced the same racism, so they saw, even though we don't look the same, we're from the continent but not from the same country, we live somewhere different, we have the same things. And at the same time we were talking about how everyone is still the same, is connected...You could just see that they understood each other' (5.8). Viala's research and unique model of engagement allowed students to access cultural knowledge and history that is rarely recognised, but whose absence they felt. This resulted in rich new art works, new art methodologies and a renewed sense of empowerment and confidence.

Viala's research and unique collaborations have enabled both ACE and Untold dance schools to meet their objectives of delivering content which is underpinned by academic expertise. This in turn enabled artistic practitioners new ways to comment on and respond to contemporary social issues, such as race and prejudice, giving voice, space and credibility to new generations of society.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Feedback from the Embodied Islands exhibition and associated events at the Belgrade Theatre
2. Transcription of interviews with Sidney Stringer students and teachers about the workshop
3. Sidney Stringer Academy Student Project Journal Entry
4. Transcription of interviews following exhibition and performance at Sidney Stringer Academy
5. Audience Feedback from exhibition and performance
6. Sidney Stringer Academy Vice Principal statement
7. Statement from ACE Choreographer
8. Transcription of interview with Untold Amsterdam's Exchange Coordinator

Original audio files from transcriptions are available from the University of Warwick