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KNOWLEDGE AS A PATHWAY TO JUSTICE

In this chapter we're going to explore the contemporary dynamics in which knowledge is created in Britain, looking into its epistemological roots and knowledge supremacy, as well as what it means to resource, sustain, and resurface non-mainstream knowledges.

We did some things that worked within the context of the system, but it was to enlighten and educate people about the system, so that they could see for themselves what the limitations were.

- Emory Douglas, former Minister of Culture of the Black Panther Party¹



Photo: Emory Douglas portrait by Shaun Roberts

Knowledge Infrastructures are concerned with the organisational and pedagogical means in allowing for the production and sharing of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge is liberatory. It provides pathways to understanding, relating, and connecting. Knowledge is also a pathway to liberation, freedom and justice.

Knowledge is also power; those who control how knowledge is produced and used hoard that power, creating the very organisational and pedagogical means to control the production of what is knowledge, shared for what purposes, and in what circles? As Francis Bacon said, *“Knowledge is power. The real test of knowledge is not whether it is true but whether it empowers us. Scientists usually assume that no theory is 100% correct. Truth, consequently, is a poor test for knowledge. The real test is utility. A theory that enables us to do new things constitutes knowledge.”*

In this way, incumbent powers seek to erase and intentionally hide histories and knowledges that challenge their supremacy. This is epistemicide; “the killing, silencing, annihilation, or devaluing of a knowledge system”². Hall and Tandon present the roots of this in Great Britain where the history of feudalism, land dispossession and the hierarchy division between landlord and serf coincide in a time with the establishment of Oxford and Cambridge universities³.

With the dispossession of land comes the erasure of land-based knowledges and ways of being, forcing people into one dominant system. This forced system, created under the illusion of a divine nobility and lord class, was a system ultimately designed for the subjugation of people, land, and all living beings; one that has led to forced migration, planetary system dysregulation (climate change), and the majority of geopolitical injustices faced across the world today.

Jason W. Moore writes in *The Crisis of Feudalism*:

“Feudalism exhausted soil and labour power from which it derived its revenues, rendering the population vulnerable to disease...from this standpoint the origins of capitalism may shed light on today’s ecological crisis”⁴



The feudal-to-colonial-to-capitalist system saw Nature in subjugation to human need. The supremacy system put man’s image of god - himself - at the top with everything else subservient to it. John Locke would continually refer to all the “inferior creatures” on this planet.

Voices (and therefore knowledges) of those practising within alternative knowledge systems, and therefore resisting this supremacist domination of the colonial-capitalists were erased over time with labels such as “barbaric”, “inferior”, “non-growth”; these are of course labels given to voices of Indigeneity, cultures who live and work in symbiosis with land and Nature. We can see this in Great Britain through the invention of the “witch” and the demonisation of any person, mostly women, who demonstrated power through Nature rather than the divine⁵.

The secondary effects of supremacist systems are the illegitimate cognitive frameworks that become normalised and underpin the development of law, regulation, and policy.

In *Pollution is Colonialism* Dr. Liboiron sets out the history of environmental system dysregulation at the hands of man; the anthropogenic contamination of water, land, and air. Liboiron focuses on when two environmental engineers, Streeter & Phelps, were commissioned in the 1920s to determine to what extent a body of water could be polluted with non-natural materials before evidence of a dysregulation occurred, this became known as “assimilative capacity”⁶.

This theory was codified into regulation and supported by laws to allow this. It is a baseline for much of our environmental regulation across the globe. It followed a long history of the white supremacy mentality of exploitation where land, humans, and non-human kin were means of production in the name of concentrating power and wealth accumulation.

The water did not give its consent to being polluted, just as we do not give our consent, only our submission to that which has power



Photo © Alex Stead Photography

Max Liboiron is a Canadian researcher and designer known for their contributions to the study of plastic pollution and citizen science. Liboiron directs the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR), an interdisciplinary plastic pollution laboratory based at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. Liboiron was the Managing Editor of the online journal *Discard Studies* for nearly a decade, which publishes research on industrial waste and its social, political, cultural, and economic implications. Liboiron and their lab have created several research methods aimed to bring humility, accountability, and good land relations into research

The settler-colonialists created a knowledge infrastructure to support their framings of land-human relations. Institutions such as universities, philanthropy and museums helped establish an organised cultural narrative in order to create pedagogies of the elite; methods to maintain their power.

This early Academic Industrial Complex was used to legitimise the human-land relations of the colonial mindset. Indigenous knowledges and sciences were destroyed and delegitimised as they did not abide by the settler-colonialists framings and metrics of what is *science*, and what therefore counts as *knowledge*.

This epistemology is institutionalised, underpinning and shaping the legal and regulatory frameworks and languages we are forced to live by today.

Resourcing radical, and liberatory, knowledge infrastructure allows for the resurfacing of hidden knowledges beyond tokenist presentations but as a wider system of languages, practices and relationships existing.

In the framing of knowledge as a pathway to justice there is a necessity to create an infrastructure that allows for epistemic authority to emerge. Epistemic authority is defined as:

the authority or legitimacy granted to certain sources of knowledge, information, or ways of knowing within a particular society or context. It involves the recognition and acceptance of certain individuals, institutions, or systems as authoritative in determining what counts as knowledge, truth, or valid information.

Epistemic authority shapes how knowledge is produced, validated, disseminated, and accepted within a given society. It influences whose perspectives and experiences are considered credible and authoritative, and whose are marginalised or ignored. Dominant forms of epistemic authority can perpetuate systemic biases and uphold oppressive structures. Epistemic justice seeks to question these dominant sources of knowledge, centre marginalised perspectives and experiences, and create more inclusive and equitable systems of knowledge production and dissemination.

Resourcing radical and liberatory knowledge infrastructures means recognising the centuries of power dynamics that have led to some groups having current epistemic authority of matters over others. It means allowing for the space and time for new knowledge bases to develop and the resurfacing of lost ones and invisibilised systems.

When we question *where are the places where knowledge is produced* we tend to think of educational institutions, all levels. However, the education system of Britain, and its historic counterparts, is based on a legacy system of supporting the colonial infrastructure that monarchies and governments led. In their own way, teaching and research was a means of furthering colonial efforts; a way for them to create epistemic authority to justify their actions.

Within this legacy infrastructure is a challenge in how to surface new, lost, and hidden knowledges.

Knowledge production that typically occurs within educational systems is mostly defined to academic years and financial constraints, which are organised in such a way that knowledge is achieved in a linear fashion with a fixed end result that forms part of a wider system: students graduating, papers published, licensable intellectual property.

The commodification of knowledge has increased over time in relation to the modern *Academic Industrial Complex* (AIC) whose use of money, in combination with neoliberal government defunding, has slowly subverted the behaviours of academia towards commercialisation (licensing IP) and feeding off the bloated system of fee paying students, student accommodation rents, and career-goaled academics. In this controlled and subverted space *time* is not given but predetermined, there is no space for the radical. Equally, the pathways to knowledge production within the educational system require the radical to assimilate; resulting in a body of knowledge that is more descriptive and analytic than lived, reflective and dialogical.

Whilst the AIC offers a pathway to a scholar's knowledge production being achieved it is based in fragmentation and a retention of power, as evidenced by the onerous and scandalous privatising of publicly funded knowledge through the for-profit privately held academic publishing houses; the gate-keepers of what is knowledge.

Knowledge does not exist in its own right. It is not allowed to grow alongside the movements who need it and *it* needs for feedback, iteration, and co-production. The AIC creates a one-way and co-dependent relationship where the knowledge produced by authors is extracted for purely academic (commodity) purposes rather than liberatory.

“In academic work, “careerism” assigns primary importance to the fact - and survival - of oppositional studies within the intellectual and social structures of the university, the master’s house...Their [academics] disarticulation from the larger struggle for social change enables the system to reproduce itself through a multiculturalism professional managerial class.”

- Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Public Enemies and Private Intellections, Abolition Geography* (2022)⁷

Knowledge produced outside of this arena faces the challenge of not being valid or qualified. This is *knowledge supremacy*, a term identified by Centric Lab to define a knowledge pool that self-identifies as supreme to systematically dictate the knowledges that are valuable, trusted, and acknowledged, resulting in hegemonic policies and practices. It is forever “alternative” and placed in contrast to the “standard”.

Non-mainstream knowledge production is either self-funded, which is a



constraint in a financialised modern world, or supported indirectly through resources accessed from organised philanthropy.

There is a major irony that the people who are seeking routes out of their present situations/injustices, mostly caused by the heteropatriarchal white supremacist colonial system, need to apply to powerful organisations whose present and protected wealth more often than not come from historical wealth accumulated from these systems; “We've been placed in a position to apply for resources to undertake the work of justice, by the very institutions that maintain our oppression” - Esther Mamadou.

A decolonising of philanthropy can be to observe how to not replicate the colonial legacy of investment economics (input/output) in literal metrics but to recognise that liberatory and radical knowledge production exists in different space-time conditions.

Additionally, this process would seek to displace the individualisation of research and knowledge production done within academia; where academics are valued on *their* citation numbers, and embolden the collective/ecosystem style of working represented within social movements.

Creating the space-time for this to exist means rethinking what is impact in a more ecological framing, recognising that what is created today by social movements may be useful now, but as importantly it lays an architecture for future generations to pick up the baton and keep moving.

In their 2021 paper, Mario Novelli and colleagues describe these social movements as ‘laboratories of learning, producing radical new insights and ways of understanding how the world works, the tools to change it, and the visions for alternative ways of being and living.’⁸

The challenge presented is to understand how to support these social movements who themselves create the infrastructure that others build from. This involves understanding the actors within the knowledge infrastructure and how they interact with each other.



Esther Mamadou's work is focused on human rights, migrations and anti-Black racism. Esther is currently the consultant for Europe for The International Coalition of People of African Descent (ICPAD), a platform for participation of Afro-descendant organizations in the implementation of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

Photo: Javier Sánchez Salcedo

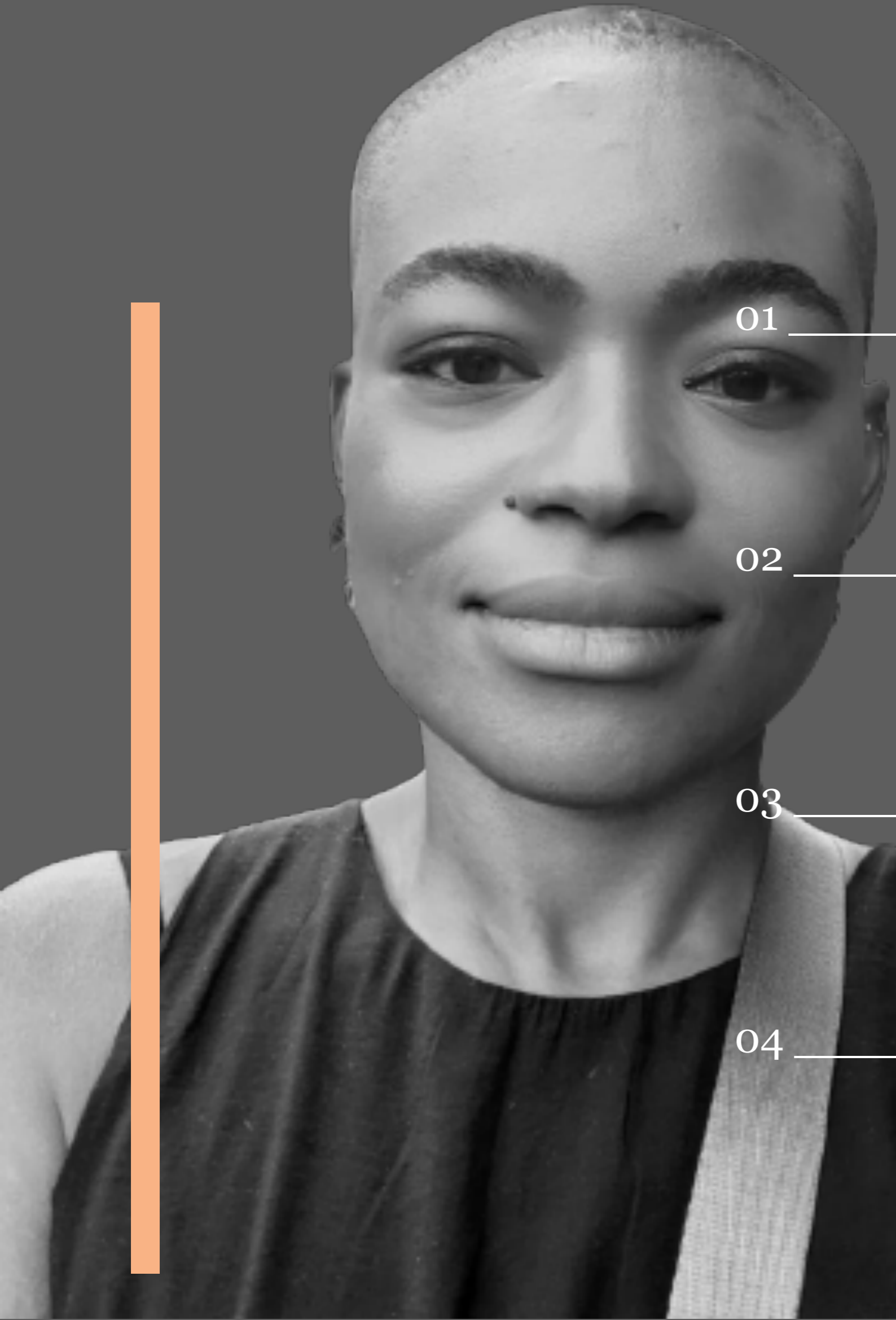
INTERVIEW WITH LILIAN LATINWO-OLAJIDE



Lilian is a portfolio manager at Impact on Urban Health, a division of Guy's & St. Thomas's Foundation working in their research and development function and health effects of air pollution programme, as well being the strategic programme director for Black Thrive, a place based black mental health organisation, that focuses on a system change within the NHS.



We held space with Lilian as she is someone with a brilliant mind on the funding ecosystem and the role funders have in being active stewards for social change.



WE ASKED LILIAN FOUR QUESTIONS AND SELECTED SOME KEY QUOTES, THE FULL INTERVIEW CAN BE READ IN THE APPENDIX.

01 _____

How can funders react to the needs of a radical knowledge infrastructure given the colonial-style impact metrics set in stone?

02 _____

How Lilian sees her role within R&D and Air Pollution work to support communities developing epistemic authority as a pathway for justice?

03 _____

How does the heavily white-led funding landscape move away from the unhealthy focus of marginalised People's trauma?

04 _____

How does Lilian reflect on the problem of idolisation of marginalised individuals over and above resolving the issues those individuals are campaigning for?

INTERVIEW

THERE IS NOT ENOUGH TIME GIVEN FOR THE EXPLORATION OF LIBERATION WHEN IT COMES TO KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCING.

SO KNOWLEDGE IS NOT KNOWLEDGE, THAT IS FOCUSED ON WHAT TRADITIONALLY IS, IN COMMUNITIES, WHICH IS FEELING. KNOWLEDGE IS AFFECT.

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT LIBERATORY KNOWLEDGE, IN ORDER TO EVEN DISCUSS IT, SOMEONE HAS TO SPEAK OF IT. WHO IS THE PERSON THAT HAS THE PRIVILEGE TO SPEAK ON THIS THING? WHO BECOMES THE MASTER OF UNDERSTANDING WHAT LITERALLY KNOWLEDGE EVEN IS?

IF THE PROCESS TO EVEN APPLY FOR FUNDING IS NOT LIBERATING, KNOWLEDGE CAN'T BE LIBERATING IN ITSELF.

HOW DO WE TAKE WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS IN THIS, SO-CALLED, AUTHORITATIVE SPACE AND GIVE IT TO THE PEOPLE THAT ARE IMPACTED IN THAT SPACE AND LET THEM FILL IN THE GAPS?

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT HOW DO WE FUND SOMETHING AND ALSO TAKE THE RISK WITH YOU?

INTERVIEW

AGAIN, WE AS PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND, THE FUNDING BACKGROUND, THE PROGRAMMATIC EXPERTISE, BLAH BLAH BLAH, WHAT I DON'T SEE ENOUGH IS THAT WE DON'T TAKE THE RISK. WE DON'T STEP OUT IN FRONT OF THE PIPELINE. WE JUST DON'T DO IT. WE THINK WE'VE DONE A GOOD THING FOR THE DAY BY JUST GIVING OUT MONEY.

SO HOW DO WE GIVE AWAY MONEY TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM ISSUES? I THINK THAT'S THE BIGGEST THING THAT SETS ASIDE THIS KIND OF AUTHORITY WHEN IT COMES TO THIS KIND OF KNOWLEDGE.

IN ORDER FOR THIS TO OPERATE WELL WE NEED TO DEFACE IT, WE NEED TO STOP SEEING ORGANISATIONS WITH A FACE, AND IT NEEDS TO BE A COLLECTION OF FACES.

IN ORDER FOR US TO KIND OF REGAIN THE AUTHORITY OR JUST HAVE A GROUND LEVEL UNDERSTANDING ACROSS THE BOARD WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT SCIENCE ABOUT DATA, WE ACTUALLY PUT THE STORIES IN BETWEEN. OTHERWISE YOU REMOVE PEOPLE AND BY REMOVING PEOPLE JUST BECOMES AGAIN A PLACE WHERE YOU DESTROY SOMEONE'S WATER SOURCE, ANOTHER PLACE WHERE SOMEBODY ELSE DIES. WE'RE VERY GOOD AT REMOVING BODIES TO JUSTIFY A CAUSE.

LATIN AMERICAN-OLAJIDE

INTERVIEW

THERE WAS ALWAYS GOING TO BE TRAUMA-PORN. SO LONG AS THE SYSTEM CANNOT CHANGE BECAUSE THE SYSTEM WAS NOT CO-CREATED, THE SYSTEM WAS NOT COLLABORATIVE, THE HISTORY OF THE MONEY, EVEN THE HISTORY OF THE MONEY ALREADY SPEAKS TO THE KIND OF IMBALANCE OF POWER THAT EXISTS. IT'S RACIALISED, WEAPONISED AND EVEN THE PROCESS OF HOW PEOPLE EVEN TRY AND ENGAGE IN PHILANTHROPY AND FUNDING TO GET MONEY IS JUST A LIGHT TOUCH REPEAT OF HARM. IT'S BUREAUCRACY THAT ALLOWS YOU TO REMEMBER YOUR PLACE, THAT YOU NEED TO REMEMBER YOUR PLACE WHEN YOU'RE DOING THIS.

IN ORDER FOR THAT TO CHANGE OUR METHODS TO ENGAGE WITH FUNDING AND TO ENGAGE INSTITUTIONS NEEDS TO CHANGE, IT CANNOT BE ALL ABOUT AN INDIVIDUAL. IF YOU CANNOT BRING MOST OF THE PEOPLE WITH YOU, THEN THERE IS NO POINT IN ENGAGING WITH THE SYSTEM.

LATINWOOD-

OLAJIDE