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"This is Not a Moment": Theorising the Temporal Aspects of Hope in Antiracist Protest

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Abstract

This paper explores the theorisation of the temporal nature of hope within antiracist protest. It arises out of a larger research project, a qualitative case study of a Black Lives Matter protest which took place in Bristol, UK, on 7th June 2020. During this, a statue of a slave trader (Edward Colston) was toppled and thrown into the River Avon. Building on social psychological studies of collective action and critical theories of hope, the paper takes a processual ontological approach, theorising hope as an emotion with cognitive influences and dynamic, relational and temporal qualities. Hope is seen as a situated and affective mode of world-making linked to solidarity and community and expressed in many social and cultural forms. It is conceptualised as having liminal qualities, part of a temporal landscape linked to collective and personal memory and historical narratives related to melancholy. Theorising is developed through explorations of: the complex interrelations of memory, history and time; the concepts of racialized time (Al-Saji, 2013, 2021), reparatory history (Hall, 2018) and memory activism (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023); the protest context; a temporally and contextually sensitive methodology; temporally saturated data; and, a reflexive practice rooted in decolonial understandings and epistemic modesty (Teo, 2019).

Keywords: hope, antiracism, collective action, Black Lives Matter

Introduction

> Standing ovation on the platform of your neck.
> Punk Ballet. Act 1.
> There is more to come.
>
> Hollow Vanessa Kisuule (Bristol City Poet) (2020)[1]

This paper examines the theorisation of the temporal nature of hope within antiracist protest. It arises out of a larger research project, a sociocultural, transdisciplinary and event-centred inquiry into understandings, expressions and experiences of hope in antiracist collective action. It is a qualitative case study of a Black Lives Matter ('BLM') protest which took place in Bristol, UK, on 7th June 2020 ('the protest'). During the protest, a statue of a slave trader (Edward Colston) ('the statue') was toppled and thrown into the River Avon ('the toppling'). My focus on hope aligns with social psychological and wider scholarship that posits hope as central to protest, critical consciousness and a significant motivating emotion for activism. I adopt a processual lens, connecting concepts of time and historical narratives to understandings of hope in antiracism. My work builds on social psychological collective action literature (e.g. Badaan et al., 2020, 2022; Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024; Bird et al., 2024; Clarke & Drury, 2024; Chevrier et al., 2025), and the work of critical theorists of hope (Eagleton, 2015; Freire, 1992/2021; Fromm, 1968; hooks, 2013; Solnit, 2016; Winters, 2016). I explore how the collective action and wider scholarship treat the temporal nature of hope, building my argument for a conceptualisation that foregrounds temporality and historicity. I show how the concept of *racialized time* (Al-Saji, 2013, 2021) informs my theoretical position, which I then outline. Using a decolonial lens (Fanon, 1952/2008; Hall, 2018; Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2016; Malherbe et al., 2021; Quijano, 2000; Winters, 2016), I explore the Bristol context and examine the concepts of *reparatory history* (Hall, 2018) and *memory activism* (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023), illustrating how contextualisation and reflexivity, including *epistemic modesty* (Teo, 2019), advance my theorising of hope's complex temporality.

Hope and the Scholarship

> It is then in making hope practical, rather than despair convincing, that we must resume and change and extend our campaigns
>
> Williams (1989, p.338)

In this section, I describe how social psychologists and critical theorists recognise the practical and psychological importance of hope in collective action. I set out how hope is theorised and studied. I then turn to hope's temporal quality, central to this paper. I discuss memory, history and time,

[1] See https://www.vanessakisuule.com/

including concepts of linear time and racialized time (Al-Saji, 2013, 2021), explaining how these deepen my theorising. Building on this foundation, I conclude by introducing my conceptualisation of hope in antiracist protest.

The Importance of Hope

Social psychologists and critical theorists of hope see it as playing a vital role in social change. Within social psychology, hope is widely considered a significant motivating emotion and central to activism, with some asserting it is "crucial to the act of protest" (Wlodarczyk et al., 2017, p. 205). Empirical research consistently demonstrates hope's role as a motivator for collective action (Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024; Geiger et al., 2023). For instance, a quantitative study by Wlodarczyk et al. (2017), conducted after actual protests, revealed a direct link between hope and the intensity of protest. Hope also enables individuals to perceive the world as capable of change, where the future contains possibilities (Bury et al., 2020). Furthermore, it can contribute to achieving concessions in prolonged conflicts (Cohen-Chen et al., 2015). Even studies with non-activist participants, investigating attitudes towards social change, confirm hope's motivating quality and its power to increase social transformation (Greenaway et al., 2016). It is seen as having collective, social and cultural expressions (Badaan et al., 2020, 2022; Bar-Tal, 2001; Bar-Tal et al., 2007; Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024; Dinerstein, 2015; Fromm, 1968/2010; Solnit, 2016; Winters, 2016) and as a "fundamental prerequisite for transformative political practice" (O'Donnokoé et al., 2024, p.330).

Critical theorists whose work I draw upon agree that hope is a mechanism for social change (Eagleton, 2015; Fromm, 1968/2010; Solnit, 2016; Winters, 2016), a precondition for revolutionary action (Freire, 1992/2021): as Fromm (1968/2010, p.9) states "Revolution was never based on hopelessness". It is seen as central to the development of community and resistance (hooks, 2013). A consistent feature within this scholarship is that hope is seen as having dynamic qualities. Theorists and educationalists see it as a pedagogical imperative (Freire, 1992/2021; hooks, 2013; Lopez, 2023) and a social force and practice (Dinerstein, 2015; Fromm, 1968/2010; Solnit, 2016; Winters, 2016). Solnit (2016, p.xvi) describes hope's centrality to action, adding it is "only a beginning … not a substitute for action, only a basis for it". She notes it is "not a prize or a gift, but something you earn through study, through resisting the ease of despair…through digging tunnels, cutting windows, opening doors, or finding the people who do those things" (Solnit, 2016, p.142).

The Challenges of Theorising and Studying Hope

Across the social psychology and critical theory literature, hope is theorised in a multiplicity of ways (see Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024). It is largely theorised as an affect, emotion, emotional experience or mood having cognitive aspects or influences (Badaan et al., 2020,2022; Bar-Tal, 2001; Bird et al., 2024; Bury et al., 2020; Chevrier et al., 2025; Cohen-Chen et al., 2015; Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024; Fromm, 1968/2010; Greenaway et al., 2016; Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019; Hornsey & Fielding, 2016; Freire, 1992/2021; Lopez, 2023; Solnit, 2016; Van Zomeren et al., 2019). For some, it is primarily cognitive, variously, a foundation, trait or process (Jin & Kim, 2018; Snyder, 2002). It is recognised as a motivational (Bury et al., 2020) and a psychological resource (Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018), an antecedent, mediator or moderator of action (Badaan et al., 2020, 2022; Greenaway et al., 2016; Wlodarczyk et al., 2017). The positive benefits

of hope are recognised within positive psychology (Snyder, 2002) and within a health context (Kim et al., 2006). It can vary according to its target (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019).

Hope is also variously theorised as a virtue or disposition (Eagleton, 2015), an ontological need or demand (Freire, 1992/2021), and a hidden dimension of reality (Dinerstein, 2015). Suffla et al. (2020), following Lear (2006) and Eagleton (2015), theorise a particular form of hope, *radical hope,* as an everyday political and epistemic resource in contexts of systemic violence and coloniality. Hope is formulated as a "liminal, transformative state rather than a concrete, prescriptive notion" (O'Donnokoé et al., 2024, p.330). This is echoed by Solnit (2016, p.95) who talks of "days in which hope is no longer fixed on the future" where hope is "an electrifying force in the present". It is conceptualised as a philosophical principle or category (Dinerstein, 2015; Fromm, 1968/2010; Solnit, 2016) with an active and dynamic nature: for Fromm (1968/2020, p.12) it is "a state of being" containing an "intense but not yet spent activeness"; for Solnit (2016, p.xvii) it is a "forward directed energy". For Suffla and colleagues (2020), it is enacted through embodied practices, refusal and care.

Work has been conducted in many disciplines, fields and subfields with few attempts to integrate findings and conclusions, meaning hope is conceptually unclear (Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024). Within social psychology, there is a lack of context-dependent research capturing the nuances of hope, and the scholarship largely fails to address perceptions, experiences and expressions of hope in collective action (Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024). Studies tend to focus on individual rather than collective experiences of hope. While there is important work on what it feels like to be in a crowd, including a protest or uprising (Hopkins et al., 2016; Reicher,1984), experiences of hope during collective action are neglected (though some work looks at related positive emotions such as joy). There are some social psychological studies about the outcomes of protest (see Vestergren et al., 2019), but hope as a psychosocial outcome of protest is under-specified (though Páez and colleagues' [2015] work on emotional synchrony touches on hope post-participation). Studies largely focus on hope as a motivator for collective action, ignoring it as an outcome and a practice associated with societal transformation. This matters because hope is seen as so central to social change and critical consciousness.

Despite concerns about hope being under-researched in the collective action literature (Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018), with more attention paid to anger (Badaan et al., 2020), there is a recent burgeoning interest in hope (Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024) and practices founded on it, such as *collective positive prospection* (Chevrier et al., 2025) and *emergent prefigurative politics* (Clarke & Drury, 2024). Cohen-Chen & Pliskin's (2024) theoretical paper investigates hope as a group-based or collective emotion, examining the treatment of the experience and functions of hope within the social psychological literature. They identify a gap in the empirical studies addressing the ambivalence or unpleasantness associated with group-based hope.

Furthermore, empirically, within the collective action literature (e.g. Badaan et al., 2022; Bury et al., 2020; Hornsey & Fielding, 2016; Van Zomeren et al., 2019), hope has largely been measured or expressed using numerical scales. These include Greenaway and colleagues' (2016) single-item measure for personal hope and Jin and Kim's (2019) five-item scales for the measurement of social hope. Arguably, the methods used are "best suited to conceptualizing a static world" (Power et al., 2023, p.2) and may miss the complexity of hope as a political emotion with a distinct dynamic and

relational nature (see Clarke & Drury [2024] for a discussion of these methodological challenges in the context of studying emergent prefigurative politics). These quantitative methodological approaches jar with the philosophical foundation of my thesis, a processual approach foregrounding relationality, rather than materialism, seeing experiences (including emotional ones) as a "*going through*: a process" (Stenner, 2024, p.332). The challenge of the theorising underpinning these methodological approaches is seen even more starkly when addressing the temporal nature of hope in antiracist protest, the focus of this paper.

Theories of Hope's Temporality

Hope and History within the Social Psychological Literature

A widespread feature in the collective action literature is the theorisation of hope as temporal and primarily focused on the future (Badaan et al., 2020, 2022; Bird et al., 2024; Cohen-Chen & Van Zomeren, 2018; Greenaway et al., 2016). Definitions often describe it as a "future-oriented emotion" (Greenaway et al., 2016, p. 2) or a "positive, future-oriented emotion" (Badaan et al., 2022, p. 80); "that focuses energy to the future" (Bury et al., 2020, p. 292), involving a "belief in at least the possibility of social change" (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019, p. 209). However, this prevailing view largely overlooks a crucial aspect revealed in real-world antiracist protest: that hope is intimately bound up with history. References to the past and history are rare in collective action scholarship on hope (but see Cohen-Chen & Pliskin, 2024; Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019), reinforcing the notion that it is mainly theorised as purely future-focused. The significance of the past is recognised by Badaan et al. (2020, p.5) who, while defining hope as future-facing, see related utopian thinking as a practice for loosening "the grip of the past" to inspire hope. There is also work in the context of attitudes to peace and intergroup conflict (Bar-Tal, 2001; Halperin et al., 2008), which offers a more nuanced temporal theorisation of hope. Halperin et al. (2008) find a combined interaction effect on hope of collective memory, political orientation and various elements of life experience. They describe a hope which "allows members of groups that are involved in violent conflicts to imagine a future that is different from the past" (Halperin et al., 2008, p.22). Suffla and colleagues (2020, p.357) describe the radical hope which they theorise as requiring "a collective hoping against history". This is an explicit recognition that history and hope are interrelated. This literature informs my thinking about the centrality of historical narratives and the preservation of memory for my theorising.

Work relating to the importance of understandings of history for social change is also relevant for my theorising. This scholarship recognises that historical awareness seems to matter for social change (Schraube, 2015), and for education within the context of antiracism and liberation (hooks, 2013; Freire, 1992/2021; Selvanathan et. al., 2023; Suzuki et al., 2023); with hooks, Freire and Suzuki and colleagues seeing an important link between critical consciousness (Freire 1992/2021) and hope. Suzuki and colleagues' (2023) empirical study in the context of education of Black students in the United States looks at links between critical reflection (which broadly involves an understanding of the history of oppression and struggle), hope, and critical action (including current or future involvement in protests or demonstrations). Selvanathan and colleagues' (2023) study involving Black people in the United States examines links between historical narratives and a sense of collective continuity, linking the latter to support for the BLM movement. In the next section, I elaborate on how these complex links inform my theorisation of hope through an examination of the interplay of memory, time and history.

Memory, Time, and History

Linear Time and the Challenge of "Progress". One model of time, prevalent in discussions of progress, is linear, often linked to "overconfident narratives of freedom, civilisation and reconciliation" (Winters, 2016, p. 33). Winters (2016, p.15) critically examines how such progressive narratives can undermine our capacity to remember and mourn past catastrophes, functioning as a "triumphant category" that justifies the existing order. Fromm (1968/2010, p.7) similarly warns that what he calls the bourgeois worship of progress can lead to the "alienation of hope," particularly when applied to racial difference and struggles for justice. These linear narratives, which often imply harmony, can lead to a denial of conflict and a downplaying of "racial loss and trauma" (Winters, 2016, p. 41), failing to register the "complexities, depths, gaps, fissures and anguish of the Black experience" (Winters, 2016, p. 46). Ultimately, they can be "converted into an affirmation of the status quo" (Winters, 2016, p. 24), thereby undermining hope for genuine social change.

Non-Linear Time: History as Process. An alternative conceptualisation of time is a non-linear one, as captured by Solnit (2016, p. 3): "cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away a stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension." Winters (2016) explores non-linear time through Black art and culture employing jazz tropes such as breaks and cuts, arguing that "hope and possibility are determined by the way we remember and imagine the past" (Winters, 2016, p. 87). In this view, the present is not coherent but "disjointed and marked by competing rhythms, temporalities and modes of being" (Winters, 2016, p. 248), where forgotten dimensions of the past can unexpectedly resurface, as seen in Baldwin's reminder of the Black body as a signifier of historical suffering (Winters, 2016, p. 212).

Racialized Time. The concept of racialized time, developed by Al-Saji (2013, 2021), builds on this and is central to my theorising. Al-Saji advances the thinking of Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/2008) and Quijano's (2000) exploration of colonial power and Eurocentrism, asserting that racism and colonialism are temporal formations which themselves "manage, skew, divide and reconfigure time" (2021, p.177). This is developed further by Ngo (2019, p.241), who asserts that "Racialised and colonised bodies are weighed down by these pasts". She examines the racialized temporalities of "racialised and colonised embodiment", including what she describes as "a habitual looking back" (Ngo, 2019, p.242). Critically, societal exhortations to "get over it", to stop dwelling on past injustices, deny the enduring violence of colonialism and disregard how "colonised bodies are made to dwell" in these temporalities (Ngo, 2019, p. 248). Winters (2016) notes that there is not always control and agency over this remembering and forgetting.

Remembering Historical Trauma. To truly understand hope in antiracist protest, it is crucial to consider which, and whose, version of history is told, with whatever "damages, losses and erasures " (Winters, 2016, p. 7) it might contain. The erasure of history, such as the historical memorialisation of slave traders (as seen with Colston's statue), highlights how memory can become "a tool of the ruling classes" (Benjamin, 2009, p.3). For Winters (2016), the possibility of change and hope is directly linked to "a heightened capacity to remember, register and contemplate" these losses erased from public memory (p. 7). Both Winters (2016) and Solnit (2016) theorise hope as being found not in evading trauma but in revealing and working through

it. Challenges to dominant historical accounts demonstrate how remembering the past can become the foundation for present-day change and the generation of hope, such as during the activism sparked by the 500-year marking of Columbus's voyage to the Americas. Solnit (2016) explains how all African countries walked out of the 1980 UN General Assembly after Spain proposed that 1992 be declared the "year of encounter of civilisations". She quotes Dunbar-Ortiz (a Treaty Council activist): "It's exactly what gives you hope when you see this happen–when you see how hungry people are for the truth. When it is offered to them, they seize it" (Solnit, 2016, p.103). An unrealistic or untruthful historical account offers no hope for meaningful action; instead, the "possibility of a better future" (Winters, 2016, p. 51) depends on remembering ancestors' losses, disappointments, aspirations, and struggles, acknowledging the hold of the past over the present as Benjamin (2009) shows us.

Remembering Struggle and Resistance. Central to generating hope are the "seldom told seldom remembered" accounts of struggle and resistance, including stories of "victory and transformations" (Solnit, 2016, p. xxiii) and "wins and achievements" (Solnit, 2016, p. 142). Solnit links social change to hope and "the collective memory we call history" (2016, p.xvii): "the branches are hope; the roots are memory". This connection is echoed by Brueggeman (cited in Solnit, 2016, p.xvii) who sees memory producing hope "in the same way that amnesia produces despair". These narratives provide "inspiring and encouraging stories that remind us of historical achievements and moments when people intervened into and changed things" (Rorty, cited in Winters, 2016, p. 243). Black freedom struggles, in particular, are noted for their power to "inspire important forms of action, empowerment and hope" (Winters, 2016, p.192).

The Interplay of Historical Narratives and Melancholic Hope. However, these positive narratives of struggle and resistance are intertwined with trauma, and this trauma has implications for hope. The complex interplay between historical narratives and hope is vividly captured in the founding mission of Black Lives Matter, where the hope explicitly offered by the movement is "rooted in grief and rage" (Cullors, cited in Solnit, 2016, p.xii). This tension resonates with Martin Luther King's sentiment: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope" (Solnit, 2016, p.xvi). This is related to Winters' (2016) theorising of a specific form of hope, *melancholic hope* or *hope draped in black*, which "imagines a tension filled interaction between the past and present" (Winters, 2016, p.248). This concept links liberation with remembrance and mourning, viewing melancholy not as solely pessimistic but as a "continuous engagement with loss and its remains" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p.4). This engagement, in turn, "generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p.4). While there is a risk of hopelessness if creative responses are not employed (Rorty, cited in Winters, 2016), collective resilience narratives can foster a greater sense of collective continuity and support for movements like BLM (Selvanathan et al., 2023), illustrating the complex temporal dynamics of hope in antiracist protest. Building on my synthesis of the social psychological and critical theory literature, I propose an alternative theorisation of hope.

How I Theorise Hope

I conceptualise hope as an emotion with cognitive influences, which can be experienced individually and collectively and can vary according to its target. I theorise it as a situated and affective mode of worldmaking (Power et al., 2023) linked to solidarity and community and expressed in many social and cultural forms, such as poetry, art, public memory, and education.

Adopting a processual ontological framework, I conceptualise hope as part of a temporal landscape linked to collective and personal memory and historical narratives. I recognise its connection and interplay with other emotions such as love, joy, anger, melancholy and grief. Rather than treating hope within antiracist protest as simply a future-facing optimism or inner trait, I conceptualise it as a process with liminal qualities disturbing colonial temporalities and opening space for alternative futures. For me, hope must be understood relationally, historically, and as a generative and dynamic practice of resistance. This theoretical framing underpins my reading of the protest, which I turn to next.

The Bristol Context: Hope and History

I think of you lying in the harbour
With the horrors you hosted.
There is no poem more succinct than that.

But still
you
are permanent.
You who perfected the ratio.
Blood to sugar to money to bricks.

Hollow (Kisuule, 2020)

In this section, I describe the context of the protest, outlining the historical background and some of the cascading consequences. I then explain how the practices of *reparatory history* (Hall, 2018) and *memory activism* (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023) have operated in the Bristol context and what the implications of these, and the context itself, are for my theorisation of the temporal aspects of hope.

The Antecedents and Cascading Consequences of the Protest

Bristol, a city of less than ¾ of a million people, was central to the transatlantic trafficking of African people and Britain's role within it (Moody, 2025; Steeds & Ball, 2020). Edward Colston was, in his role as an official with the Royal African Company, responsible for trafficking approximately 84,000 African people (of whom almost 20,000 died) (Ball, 2017). Notwithstanding this, he was widely celebrated in Bristol's memoryscape (Horwath & White, 2024; Moody, 2025): in schools, churches, many other buildings, and a highly contested statue in central Bristol. On the plinth of the statue, a plaque read "Erected by citizens of Bristol as a memorial of one of the *most virtuous and wise sons* of their city AD 1895" (emphasis added). The protest on 7th June began as part of the global wave of Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the murder, in Minneapolis, U.S., of George Floyd, an African American man, by Derek Chauvin, a white American police officer. Chauvin had asphyxiated Mr Floyd in public by kneeling on his neck for at least eight minutes and 46 seconds. The Bristol event (during the Covid-19 pandemic) was a protest against this murder and, more broadly, against racial injustice and inequality in Bristol and beyond. It was

described by a police officer at the subsequent trial of protesters as "very much a community event" (T10). During the protest, the statue was spontaneously toppled and thrown into the River Avon by a multi-racial group of protestors.

The statue was seen by some as a celebration of racism and a symbol of the erasure of colonial history in Bristol and beyond. Artists, historians, educationalists and activists had campaigned for many years against this *disavowal*[2], within Bristol (Bristol Radical History Group, 2017; Countering Colston). This included campaigns against the memorialisation of the 500th anniversary of Cabot setting sail from Bristol and the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade (Horvath & White, 2024; Steeds & Ball, 2020). The toppling did not eradicate racism, nor change history, but as an expression of antiracist solidarity and a visible manifestation of the challenge to disavowal, it had important local, national and international ramifications. Notwithstanding some public and political disapproval locally and nationally, hope thus emerged in the aftermath as a potentially important psychosocial feature of the protest and the ripples it created.

On 9th June, the hope generated by white antiracists' involvement in the toppling was mentioned by civil rights campaigner Reverend Al Sharpton at Mr Floyd's funeral in the United States (King, 2020). On 16th June, the toppling of the statue was described by the Bishop of Bristol[3] as *"*a symbolic moment for the city and a signal for change*"*. On 15th July a temporary statue of a female protester performing a Black Power salute on the empty plinth was placed there, its artist stating: "Hope flows through this statue" (Emelife, 2020). At the trial of four white protesters ('the Colston Four'), charged with criminal damage to the statue ('the trial'), a defence lawyer (T19), in his closing argument to the jury, invited the jury to let "hope and history" "rhyme" again by acquitting the defendants. He quoted a Seamus Heaney poem (Heaney, 1990):

> History says, don't hope
> On this side of the grave.
> But then, once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up,
> And hope and history rhyme.

The invitation to the jury, like art and public memory work in Bristol after the protest, makes explicit the temporal features of the landscape within which hope in antiracist protest is experienced, understood and expressed. I explain next how the practices of reparatory history (Hall, 2018; Horvath & White, 2024) and memory activism (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023; Moody, 2025) are relevant to my theorising.

[2] See Hall, (2018) for a discussion of the concept disavowal in the context of historical accounts of slavery in the UK.

[3] See https://www.bristol.anglican.org/news/statement-from-the-bishop-of-bristol-bristol-cathedral-st-mary-redcliffe-church-and-the-diocese-of-bristol

Reparatory History, Memory Activism, and Hope

The toppling occurred against the background of years of campaigning in Bristol rooted in the practices of reparatory history (Hall, 2018; Horvath & White, 2024) and memory activism (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023; Moody, 2025), which challenge racism and disavowal. Reparatory history is a form of history writing that seeks to address and repair past wrongs, particularly those associated with slavery and colonialism. It is part of a growing discourse around reparations, recognising that injustices are intergenerational and live on. It seeks to focus on the histories and experiences of Black people that have been missing, including stories of Black agency and resistance. It thus recognises the importance of narratives of "historical collective victimhood" as well as those of "historical collective resilience" (Selvanathan et al. 2023 p.136): or naming "joys" as well as "suffering" (hooks 2013, p.183) to create a "a memory commensurate to the complexity of the past" (Solnit, 2016, p.xvii). It shares theoretical roots with what might be termed *radical historiography* (see Eagleton's [2015, p.28] discussion of his role as a "radical historiographer") which seeks to redeem the histories of the dispossessed and challenge notions of a linear view of history as progress, resonating with the work of Benjamin (2009), Fromm (1968/2010), Hall (2018), Solnit (2016), and Winters (2016).

Memory activism, located in the space between memory and forgetting, is founded on the premise that memory can be deployed for political purposes to publicly deal with past atrocities, "participating in the symbolic change of meaning in the world" (Jelin, 2003, cited in Gutman et al., 2023, p.153). Examples of memory activism before the protest were mentioned during the trial. One defendant, (T03), explained: "…there's been a table of bloody liver in front of the statue to represent him feasting from the flesh of souls".[4]

Toppling statues with racist and colonial associations (*fallism* or *urban fallism*, Frank & Ristic, 2020; see also Cole, 2023; Maldonado-Torres, 2016) is a particular form of memory activism.

Both memory activism and reparatory history are deeply connected to a melancholic but transformative hope (Winters' [2016] *hope draped in black*) linked to acknowledging and exposing painful colonial histories and associated struggles: "the hope is that the work of mourning can be linked to hopes for reconciliation, the repair of relations damaged by historical injustice" (Hall, 2018, p.12). They explicitly connect the past and the present, creating an "opening for envisioning antiracist futures" (Philogene Heron, 2022, p.1259). They activate melancholy and sorrow, addressing trauma and loss. The practices reinforce Solnit's view (2016, p.xvii) that "grounds for hope lie in the records and recollections of the past". They align with Winters' (2016) claim that the possibility of change is linked to this capacity to remember and register the loss and erasure of the past, as well as the present.

Memory activism can recover events of the past for restorative justice and social inclusion (Gutman and Wüstenberg, 2023). As Griffiths (2024, p.169) states, "unless we confront the darkest annals of our shared history, we will be unable to shine a beacon of hope for future generations to navigate." Winters (2016, p.88) explains the need to confront, expose, remember and work through

[4] This illustrates the importance of studying the role of imagination in social movements, a view shared by Hawlina and colleagues (2020).

past racial traumas: "Hope is not defined by evading the traumas of history but by swinging, or working, through the breaks and cuts of our social world".

This drive for "new understandings", which Hall explicitly roots in "the hope that change can happen" (2018, p.15), is seen throughout the context, including in the embodied practices at the protest, themselves forms of memory interventions (see Moody, 2025; Philogene Heron, 2022). The challenges to dominant narratives in Bristol and the insistence on alternative ways of remembering have implications for empowering individuals to believe the world is changing and that "the future is malleable" (Bury, 2020, p.292). The practices of reparatory history and memory activism also emerge in the educational, public memory, and legal responses to the protest. These temporal aspects of the context are central to my theorising of hope. I turn next to a discussion of how my methodology enables me to engage with the complexity of the context to better theorise the temporal aspects of hope.

Methodology and Theorising Hope

In this section, I begin by introducing my methodology, explaining the importance of thorough contextualisation for my theorisation of the temporal dimensions of hope in antiracist protest. I outline how my design and data capture complex temporality. I explain how epistemic modesty (Teo, 2019) deepens my theorising, and I describe moments of reflexivity to illustrate this. I discuss how methodology, reflexivity, and theory interact to assist in the development of a temporally nuanced theory of hope in antiracist protest.

Contextualisation and Temporal Sensitivity

My research is grounded in a *world-making* methodology (Power et al., 2023), selected for its capacity to illuminate the temporal, affective, and situated nature of hope within antiracist protest. My methodology involves thorough contextualisation, recognising that racism is neither static nor universal but a force which manifests through specific historical and structural processes, including the legacies of colonialism (Fanon 1952/2008, 1961/1967; Hall, 2018; Malherbe et al., 2021; Quijano, 2000; Winters, 2016).[5] Theorising demands engagement with the specificity of context: "it is only through particulars that we see the sustained dynamics of the general" (Fine 2006, p.93; see also Cherry, 1995). My methodology, in treating context as an analytic lens, allows for the study of how hope emerges through political action, historical memory, cultural expression, and collective meaning-making. It aligns with my approach of treating hope as a dynamic psychological state with a complex temporality. My focus on temporality aligns with work that conceptualises hope as a relational and recursive emotion, one that loops across time and space rather than progressing linearly.

[5] Trawalter and colleagues (2022) view psychological studies of racism which ignore context as offering "incomplete and sometimes harmful solutions to redressing racism" (p.1), adding that engagement with context is required to "bring about meaningful social change" (p.6). See also Malherbe et al., (2021) regarding psychology's intense focus on individual-level processes which can encourage a neglect of the historical and structural roots of racism.

Data and Design: Multimodal and Place-Based

The study draws on four intersecting bodies of qualitative data, each situated within Bristol's geography and its history of antiracist and decolonial activism, including the toppling. Firstly, I conducted 22 retrospective walking interviews[6] (Bibi & Ehgartner, 2021), with 22 Black, mixed-heritage, and white protesters (33 hours of audio-recorded interviews). The interviews involved participants leading me along the protest routes they had taken, visiting contested colonial sites, including the empty plinth and the site where the statue was thrown in the River Avon. Secondly, I have obtained a full trial transcript of the trial of the Colston Four, comprising 14 hours and 40 minutes of courtroom testimony and legal argument. The testimony and argument are saturated with melancholic temporality. The transcript includes evidence from three Black Bristolians with personal links to slavery. One talked of an enslaved relative being raped by their white enslaver. Another described how their white slaver ancestor was compensated for the loss of their 'property'. She explained that the UK government debt, which paid this compensation, was being funded by UK taxpayers (including those whose ancestors were trafficked from Africa) up until 2015. The third explained how "colleagues in places like Trinidad were overjoyed, they were jumping for joy" on hearing of the toppling. The expert evidence of a historian, Professor David Olusoga, included graphic detail of the violence of slavery, the links between colonialism and present-day racism and how Colston had been memorialised in the city.

My third data corpus comprises artistic works encompassing a diverse range of poetry, photography, murals, sculpture, dance, and soundscape, which I analyse through images, texts, and interviews with artists. Much of the art associated with the protest involves re-imagining and reclaiming sites of colonial celebration, challenging the processes of disavowal explored above (Colston's last journey; Decolonising Memory; Moody, 2025; People's Platform). The artistic data reveal how placards taken to the protest featured in artistic works, e.g. the photography exhibition *This is Not a Moment* (Robinson, 2022) and the mural *A Movement Not a Moment* (Thompson, 2021). Both works explore the temporal qualities of hope and capture the messages of the placards as traces of the protest, living on in artistic and public memory. Finally, I have a large body of ethnographic material including photographs, informal interviews, media reports, and field notes of visits to art and museum exhibitions and cultural and community organisations.

These data sources were selected for their capacity to trace the expressions and disruptions of hope across different spheres, temporalities, and audiences. The sources are each saturated with a temporal quality, allowing an analysis of hope as something that appears in protest moments, with deep historical roots, reverberating through artistic responses, institutional reactions, and personal memories. The walking interviews enabled me to explore the memoryscape of Bristol and observe changes since the protest (see Steeds & Ball, 2020). This included the guerrilla plaque installed on the railings on Pero's Bridge where the statue had been thrown into the river (Gayle, 2021) incorporating an extract from *Hollow*: 'You came down easy in the end/ As you landed/A piece of you fell off, broke away, /And inside, nothing but air'. In my ethnographic work, I was able to engage with the broader post-toppling effort in Bristol to rethink heritage and memory through collaboration with M Shed museum on their exhibition about protest and racial injustice. This

[6] The walking interview research was supported by British Academy Grant (Ref: SRG2021\210141; PI Professor John Dixon)

features the prone statue surrounded with historical context (McConnell Simpson, 2024; Cole, 2023), contributing to what Cole (2023, p.156) calls "very different framings of the statue" and "radically different ways of thinking about history".

Reflexive Encounters and Temporal Disruptions

My methodological orientation is grounded in reflexivity. This requires a recognition of the complexity of subjectivity and the "historical, cultural and personal limitations of knowledge" (Teo 2019, p.32) and an adoption of the academic virtue of epistemic modesty and the *beginner's mind* (Teo 2023), dispensing with the "arrogance of expertise" (2023, p.147) and remaining alert in particular to the dangers of *white ignorance* (Mills, 2007, cited in Teo, 2022). Epistemic modesty pervades my reflexivity, underpinning the ethics of my theorising. As a white academic and former lawyer, I am attentive to the lenses through which I interpret antiracist protest, particularly the risks of epistemic closure, liberal sentimentalism, or naïve optimism about the future (see DiAngelo, 2011; Fine et al., 2012; Saad, 2020; Teo, 2022, 2023). Reflexivity is therefore not a postscript to methodology but is integral to it. It is part of the foundation of how I see, feel, and theorise hope. A core feature of this methodology is the treatment of reflexive encounters as generative methodological events. These allow me to attend to political and emotional dynamics and are key to my understanding of the shifting temporalities through which hope is experienced, disrupted, and expressed. My adoption of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun et al., 2017) to analyse my data incorporates an iterative process of surfing between data and theory. This is founded on my awareness that I need to remain open to the intense personal feelings, being "alarmed and jostled" (Kidder & Fine, 1997, p.37) by my data, confronting my personal "anxieties and defense mechanisms" (Teo, 2019, p.36) which racism, antiracism and, hope's complex temporality provoke. Reflexivity here is not merely procedural but conceptual: it shapes how I interpret data and engage with the complex emotional and temporal textures of protest. The following reflexive moments shaped my theorising of hope as historically entangled, affectively layered, and temporally complex.

The Courtroom: a Site of Antiracist and Decolonial Pedagogy

My background as a white academic and former lawyer influenced my early interpretations of the Colston Four trial. Two photographs in my ethnographic data, one of a multiracial crowd showing solidarity outside the court before the trial, and another of the four white defendants celebrating their acquittal, initially felt like hopeful moments of harmony. Yet, when viewed alongside trial transcripts, particularly the expert testimony of historian David Olusoga, I was confronted with the enduring legacies of colonial violence and racial trauma. Olusoga's reference to the Brookes slave ship image both as abolitionist propaganda in 1788 and later featuring on Bob Marley and The Wailers' *Survival* album (Morrow & Garrick, 2001), foregrounded the historical layering of antiracist expression. The stark contrast between the celebratory atmosphere outside the court and the painful truths exposed within it disrupted my initial reading of hope as a present-tense, victorious feeling. Instead, I came to see more deeply how hope is entangled with historical grief, racialized time (Al-Saji, 2013, 2021), and intergenerational trauma. Reflexivity here was not just methodological but theoretical. My emotional response to the data exposed the risk of aligning with a liberal, sentimental view of hope that can obscure ongoing injustice (Winters, 2016). Attending to this dissonance allows richer temporal readings, seeing hope as a fragile, layered process shaped by memory, loss and solidarity, rather than a single moment of success. This

reflexive practice deepens my appreciation of how hope in antiracist protest is future-oriented, affectively complex and historically embedded.

Embodied Rituals and the Temporal Complexity of Hope

Reflexive engagement with protest rituals has been central to developing a temporally nuanced theory of hope. Ethnographic data, legal data, photographs and walking interviews show how protesters used ritual to layer the present with historical memory and collective and personal grief. Caribbean and African artefacts were placed on the fallen statue, a poignant reminder of geographical dislocation and generational trauma associated with colonialism. A Black protester reenacted George Floyd's murder by kneeling on the neck of the statue for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. These acts tether the protest to racialized histories of violence and resistance, again invoking Al-Saji's (2013, 2021) racialized time. A white photographer (W03) described wanting to capture "the pain and the hope all at once", pointing to the coexistence of mourning and futurity. This resonates with Winters' (2016) framing of melancholic hope, a formulation that acknowledges how hope can emerge from, and remain entwined with, grief and melancholy. These insights challenge linear, progress-oriented readings of hope and instead suggest it moves in loops and folds, surfacing through rituals that honour loss while gesturing towards transformation. Reflexively, this disrupts my own tendency to read hope through visible expressions of unity. Instead, the rituals reveal a slower, deeper temporality. They reveal hope not as spontaneous optimism, but as a dynamic force enacted through memory, symbolic acts, and generational trauma. This attentiveness to temporality, shaped by reflexive analysis of protest artefacts and testimonies, advances a more textured theorisation of hope in antiracist protest.

A walking interview with a Black participant (W18) further illuminated the temporality of hope as a dynamic and relational process. He described how, after feeling numb and apathetic following George Floyd's murder, a video of a young Black girl showing empathy toward the white children who had abused her "cracked him open." This moment of compassionate witnessing sparked a shift, leading him to attend the protest (his first ever), perform poetry there, and later act as a speaker at other events. His story offers a vivid example of how hope can be reanimated through affective transmission and memory, interwoven with love and compassion[7]. His account unsettles the notion of hope as an individual emotion anchored in the present. Instead, it unfolds across temporal layers, moving from the historical trauma that deadens hope, through the empathetic spark that reawakens it to become a future-facing vector of hope for others. Describing his experiences at the protest, he said, "my hope was through the roof", but he asked in his poem whether the protest was "a moment," drawing attention to the tension between event and continuation, a key theme in theorising temporality (and evident in art created after the protest). This encounter challenges my framing of hope as something mostly visible through the protest itself. Instead, I came to understand hope as temporally complex: emerging through intimate affective ruptures, and expressed through storytelling, and acts of witnessing that bind personal experiences, historical memory, and political realities. This supports and extends theorisations of

[7] Love is seen as "one of the key elements of the decolonial attitude" (Maldonado-Torres 2016, p.23), a significant political emotion (Nussbaum, 2013) and central to social justice (hooks, 2020).

hope in collective action by recognising it as both outcome and catalyst, a recursive process which is temporally and emotionally entangled.

Decolonial Seeing and the Temporal Reorientation of Hope

A walking tour in Liverpool, another UK city, like Bristol, deeply entangled with Britain's history of involvement in slavery, offered another important reflexive moment. A Black tour guide repeatedly asked: "What do you see?". Through this question, and the imagery he pointed out from street names like Gorée (UNESCO n.d.) and carvings of African children on a colonial-era bank, I was confronted with my white ignorance and how much I had failed to see, including on previous tours with white guides. This experience was not just about acquiring new information, but about being temporally reoriented. The tour exposed how colonial histories persist in the present, not only materially but perceptually. It demanded a recalibration of how and when hope can be theorised: not as a forward-looking abstraction, but as an act that depends on seeing what has been deliberately obscured or normalised; what hides in plain sight (Hall, 2018). It echoed Malherbe and colleagues' (2021) critique of psychology's selective listening and underscored how whose voices we attend to fundamentally shapes what kind of hope we can imagine and theorise. Reflexively, the tour highlights the dangers of interpreting hope through a lens detached from colonial history, a lens to which I, as a white academic, am prone. It affirms the importance of epistemic modesty (Teo, 2019) and cultural engagement in deepening my temporal theorising of hope. Hope, in this frame, emerges not from denial or resolution but from the willingness to sit with discomfort and re-see the world through other eyes, a practice as temporal as it is political.

Linking Methodology and Theory: Hope as Temporal and Reflexive

These reflexive moments are not merely illustrative; they shape the development of my theoretical framework. They affirm the value of thorough contextualisation, which resists ahistoricism and attends to the lived and remembered legacies of racism. They also illuminate world-making as a hopeful, agentic practice evident in the embodied rituals at the protest and the solidarity generated by participants. Finally, they highlight the importance of the cascading consequences of the protest, or how moments on the day initiated emotional, cultural, and institutional ripples that reshape possibilities over time. Together, these methodological and reflexive practices contribute to a temporally attuned theorisation of hope.

Conclusion

My theorising of the temporal quality of hope in antiracist protest is rooted in the synthesis of social psychological collective action literature and critical theories of hope. By studying experiences of hope during and after the protest, as well as understandings and expressions of hope by protesters, artists and others, I build on this scholarship to address some of the theoretical and empirical gaps in the collective action literature, developing a theory of hope which is more temporally nuanced and aligned to real-world antiracism. Central to my theorising is my critical reflection (founded on engagement with epistemic modesty, culture, antiracism and awareness of whiteness). Methodologically, my theorising necessitates an awareness of my own imported lens (the Liverpool guide's "What do you see?") and a grappling with the complexity of the event itself. Through a synthesis of theoretical and empirical observations, I theorise hope as having a complex

and dynamic temporal quality, connected to past trauma and struggles. This engaged theorising opens up a possibility of deeper understanding informing antiracist and decolonial struggles.

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Magi Young is a Social Psychology PhD researcher at the Open University, UK. She brings to her research her transdisciplinary experience: she has a Human Geography degree (University of Bristol B. Soc.Sci), a Psychology degree (Open University B.Sc.) and is a qualified lawyer of 25 years (Manchester Metropolitan University C.P.E. and London Metropolitan University L.S.F). She has a research interest in political activism and crowd experience, particularly the emotional experience of protest and activism e.g. female activists' experiences in the Extinction Rebellion movement in the UK. She has research assistant experience with British Academy/Leverhulme projects: researching understandings of 'normativity' in political protest in Bristol, UK and exploring the work of political activists in the Irish conflict who have gone on to careers as professional authors. Her PhD examines understandings, experiences and expressions of hope in antiracist protest through a mixed methods qualitative study of a Black Lives Matter protest in Bristol, UK in June 2020 during which the statue of a slave trader was toppled and thrown in the

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