

A Land of Extraordinary Quarantines

A Conversation between Shiraz Bayjoo & Anna Arabindan-Kesson

Global Plantation Series

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The Global Plantation Series presents artist-directed digital discussions featuring **Shiraz Bayjoo**, **Jasmine Togo-Brisby** and **Sancintya Mohini Simpson** developed by **Anna Arabindan-Kesson** and Shiraz in collaboration with **International Curators Forum** that contemplate the global forms and meanings of the plantation historically, and in our contemporary moment.

When Mark Twain visited Mauritius in 1896, he described it as a Land of Extraordinary Quarantines, referring to the fear of disease transmission associated with ships transporting indentured laborers to the island. The dual image of the island as a space of quarantine and a plantation animates artist Shiraz Bayjoo's multi-media practice, and the archives-in formation he creates. In this conversation Shiraz and art historian Anna Arabindan-Kesson will reflect on the convergence of extraction and confinement, of humans and natural world, of labor and memory in his Indian ocean landscapes. How does art help us understand the afterlives of these colonial histories, in our current experience of confinement, and provide alternative possibilities for working through this uncertain present?

Adelaide Bannerman: Welcome, everybody. Thanks for coming to the first conversation of the Global Plantation Series, A Land of Extraordinary Quarantines with art historian and writer, Anna Arabindan-Kesson, and artist, Shiraz Bayjoo, who is a participant of our Diaspora Pavilion 2 programme. Their full bios on our website. I'm Adelaide Bannerman, here with my colleague, Jessica Taylor of International Curators Forum. This series, initiated by Anna and Shiraz, is an ongoing examination through critical art practices and theories of the afterlife of slavery and plantation life and how it plays out in our contemporary moments. It manifests here with ICF as a discussion thread prefaced by modern day lynchings, custodial deaths, war and genocide, a global pandemic, demands for social justice and systematic changes and an end to supremacy of all kinds. This talk is approximately 45 minutes, followed by a 20-minute Q&A. The chat feature is enabled for you to send through questions through the Q&A and messages. Jessica and I will mute our mics to let our speakers proceed with their talk and we'll return at the end for the Q&A. Thank you very much.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: Thank you. Maybe just before we begin, I just want to acknowledge that today, June the 5th, is Breonna Taylor's birthday. She would have turned twenty-seven had she not been murdered in her home by police. And while this conversation between Shiraz and me does not directly focus on these events of police murder and white supremacist terror, we hope that the histories that we are dismantling in our conversation and we hope that as you look through Shiraz's art, you'll be able to find new ways and new tools for imagining alternative worlds. I think as South Asians, we've both benefited from the global antiblackness that we've

seen protesters fight against. But we also negotiate it in different ways as people from former colonies. So, I guess this is just from us to you as a sort of a message of solidarity and also how we hope these conversations will start to work to dismantle these histories that sustain our current condition.

So, I am here as a kind of interlocutor for Shiraz. And I'm going to be showing power points and videos and asking Shiraz questions. I'm just going to share my screen to begin with so that we're all on the same page. So, Shiraz, maybe we can begin with talking about the title of this conversation to begin with. And I'll play some of the video clips and show some of these artworks.

Shiraz Bayjoo: Thank you Anna. And I just wanted to say a quick thank you to everyone who's attended this talk today and to the ICF, for very graciously supporting the change of date of the talk this week, which we felt was right, particularly with everything that is going on around us and the emotional strain that I'm sure it has taken on many of you as well.

The title *Extraordinary Quarantines* comes from Mark Twain's book *Following the Equator*. And it's a chapter in which he arrives in Mauritius and he describes a quote, spoken to him by an English plantation owner. And in it, they describe almost the condition of how the island is managed. And if I relate back to you a quick part of that - He says "it is a land of extraordinary quarantines. They quarantine a ship for anything or for nothing. Quarantine her for 20 or even 30 days. They even once quarantined the ship because her captain had smallpox when he was a boy. This is an island administered by the French. Hence, it has no sanitation."

So, it gives you a small insight into some of the mindset of how island colonies were managed. And in a way, they present a kind of interesting and important space in which to understand the direct legacies of colonisation and without a doubt the most significant part of the wealth creation of empire, which was the plantation model. And maybe to give you a little bit of a background as to why my work focuses specifically around this region and my place of origin, Mauritius. Mauritius was an island that was not inhabited before colonisation began. And in this sense, everybody that is there today on the island, everybody that calls themselves Mauritian is there as a product of the mechanism of what empire is, and it is a place that was first started as a Dutch colony, where slaves were brought from East Africa and Madagascar and expanded through the French.

But it is also a place where indentured labour was experimented by the British before it was sent out to the rest of the colonies in a project that was called the Great Experiment. And so, Mauritius particularly, but also island colonies, they present really very special spaces in order to understand - as I said before - what these legacies are. But also, in relation to questions of origin and also around questions of shame and the legacies that are associated with that around slave histories. I hope that gives a bit of a starting point.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: Yes, that's great. And I think some of those questions we'll come back to, particularly questions around space, trauma and how these histories shape the architecture of everyday life now, too. I wanted to show a little clip from *Sea Shanty*, which I think also helps us to visualise some of these ways that Mauritius really was a centre of these into of these moving parts, moving transports, moving colonial histories. We'll listen to a bit and then maybe I'll turn my sound down and you could talk a little bit more about the idea of cartography, which we also saw in this work and that comes up in other works that you do. So, I'll just play a little bit and then I'll turn the volume down. Can you talk us through this clip Shiraz?

Shiraz Bayjoo: So, this is a video where it could see *Sea Shanty*, which is a very simple work. It is a photograph of the coastline of Mauritius from the beginning of the 20th century. And here it is in an installation at Fort Adelaide, which is a fort castle in Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. It is quite an iconic fort. It is built with black volcanic stone and each stone block has being hand carved and carried up by the hands of indentured labourers and slaves who at that point would have been in their apprenticeship. And for me, it's a very symbolic work, presenting it in the castle projected very simply against these black stones with the white minerals that have been slowly seeping out. And it is, as with a lot of the other works from this period where I was working a lot with 19th century, 18th century cartography, much of it's hand-drawn military maps of islands and atolls. And as many of you know, cartography is one of the simplest and most direct systems or methodologies of being able to begin to control spaces and territories. And at a very simple and metaphorical level, the person who draws the map of your space or the most accurate map, is perhaps also the creator of the image of your region. And in this sense, I use cartography as that symbol, as a way of trying to describe the space we inhabit today within the gaze of an outside presence. And in particular, the video work, *Sea Shanty*, where it's actually an Irish sea shanty being sung and it's a song that's speaking of the idea of loss, being lost at sea. When we presented this work in Mauritius, what was so beautiful and what was really interesting was how a lot of the local audience would come to me and ask what this magical voice was - for them, an exotic voice and for people back home, it is the voice of the other side of the journey.

So, in these sorts of works, as with a lot of my other work, I try and employ aspects of poetics in order to be able to cut through some of what we know is inherently violent within these systems. And cartography is an incredibly beautiful thing. And yet at the same time, it frames very real-world ambitions. And ultimately, these maps became so good, became so well created with such skill to improve the movement of goods out of the colonies. And that, alongside things like, for example, Mauritius very early on in its history under the British had a telegraph system and it had a postal system. And again, in the same way as cartography, these were very distinctive tools in being able to state territory as being part of your own sovereignty without ever really having to use an army or a soldier in the process of that. And that's quite interesting and becomes repeated throughout other spaces - the first post-delivery people were slaves, particularly on the colony. So, it starts to give you an idea about how these relatively banal civil systems are actually in these early moments, very much sharp tools in terms of creating the space in which the colony comes from.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: These systems of communication and technology still... We're seeing those played out in really powerful, violent ways now, both in terms of how they're being used in protests but also in the ways that my colleague Ruha Benjamin talks about, they also form part of this technology of race that allows us to see how racial discrimination continues to...

Shiraz Bayjoo: And interestingly, those same cable lines that were laid by the British in the 19th century are the same routes that most of the modern data cables are also laid upon. And places like Mauritius are actually data centres today for the likes of Google because they are geographically remote, they are geologically stable, and they are seen as relatively politically stable. So actually, you can pinpoint the places on the island where these giant cables actually come out of the sea straight to these secure data centres where information today is kept. So, without a doubt, there are direct connotations between that.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: I didn't realise that. That's really profound and very disturbing, but also just helps us see how these colonial imaginings continue, even though we don't see them that way

necessarily, that they are masqueraded. They require an unpacking to make themselves visible. How are these data centres seen by people in Mauritius?

Shiraz Bayjoo: I don't think that many people are very aware of them, to be honest. I wouldn't even be able to tell you exactly where those sites are on the island because they're pretty secretive. But certainly, you can follow the cables.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: It could be the next project. One of the other things that I just wanted to quickly point out with your work, too, is that cartography is also about a movement of images. And I think it would be helpful to maybe talk here too a little bit about how your thinking about your own image-making as a kind of archival creation. I put up these two images. But then there are also these photographs, the photographic series *Extraordinary Quarantines*, which I think is beautiful, and also really haunting. Partly because they have this strange trace of the tourist image, given this is a tropical island, so I just wondered whether you might talk a little bit about the circulation of photography and your intervention in that in this series.

Shiraz Bayjoo: Earlier on in my work, I became very interested - as with a lot of artists working with the archive - and this was partly searching for alternative tellings of histories away from necessarily the linear descriptions that you get from the Western canon, and by going into the archive and trying to see if there were differences in between things like public description, public understanding of events or tellings of events rather than understandings, as well as community tellings. And whether or not what the spaces were between what's seemingly the authoritative official recording of information that takes place within a governmental archive, for example. And the difference between the retelling of that particular event within a community and what is that space that perhaps is then presented between the two? And for me, very early on this was the place where perhaps one could start to renegotiate and look for a new space, for a new telling.

And as this work has evolved over the years, one of the things that I do find myself doing a lot of the time, is searching out the spaces, searching out the places where I know historical events have taken place, things that have perhaps shaped some of our understandings within communities. For example, in *Martius* there's a very famous story of how Gandhi came to the island whilst he was, as he did in many places, looking at the situation of indenture. And it's almost an infamous story of how he spoke to a group of Indian businessmen and 50 years later, the direct descendants of the Indian communities are the political or judicial elites of the island. And so, you can start to see these cruxes in these moments. And so, I would sort of start to seek out some of these spaces where these events have taken place. And unlike some other artists where perhaps one might go to a space to tell a story, look for the right aesthetics in which you can tell the story or get across this emotional space that you're seeking to tell, for me, it's actually the other way round. Actually, I want us to visit and think about these spaces where to certain degrees, as much as we can tell, there are certain types of accuracies. And that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a historically researched accuracy. It can also be the belief within a community that something has happened and has taken place within a space.

So, there is equal importance for me in this way. But then by being in these spaces, by then looking at the aesthetics that then exist within this space and thinking how can we then resonate the emotional impact that this has on the people directly affected around it? But also, how do we translate that into audiences, into degrees of understanding? And certainly, something that's been coming up this week a lot is the lack of any kind of mainstream education around the history of colonisation - something that we've all been talking about for many years. So, in this respect, how

do we start to create narratives that can be both communicative and also at the same time, where there are few records of the actual experiences of the people affected by these systems, they are very narrow voices that exist in terms of written accounts of what the experiences on the plantation or the colony or wherever. So perhaps by revisiting these spaces and particularly in terms of some of the geographical spaces or landscapes. One of the things on the island is that, it's a tiny island, it's twenty-seven miles across. And yet at its height, it was importing like eighty thousand slaves a year, which tells you that there was an incredible amount of people who were dying on the island. And so, you ask yourself the question then, what are sites of trauma? Well, for me, in many ways, the island is a site of trauma. And perhaps by revisiting those spaces, we can start to potentially start to understand what the psychology is of inhabiting that space. Perhaps there's a way then of potentially emotionally connecting to something that is otherwise completely intangible now, because there on their records of that.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: I want to just play a short clip from another work, *Ile de France*, because I think that your description of place, and trauma as inhabiting that site, is very evocatively brought out in this. So, there are two clips, so I'm going to play a little bit of this one and then a little bit of the second clip, which is in French. So maybe you could tell us a little bit more about those clips too. Do you want to talk us through this as I play it?

Shiraz Bayjoo: This is the ruin of what would have been a sugar refinery or a sugar factory on the island. And this is from a film work called *Ile de France*, which was made in 2015. And it explores different sites across the island. Both natural spaces that would have potentially been inhabited by maroon communities, as well as some of the ruins of these sugar factories and houses that had changed hands from colonist hands into the hands of ex-slave communities in the 19th century. And by moving through these architectural spaces and the soundscape that drives it, there's a hope that perhaps it starts to present some of these important moments in these communities that shift to where we sit today.

And to give a very basic breakdown of Mauritius, the Creole community, which would have been descendants from East Africa and Madagascar - which is something that all Mauritians are, we are all Creole in this sense. There is a huge denial of being connected to this community, but the reality is that our ancestors in the early parts of Empire were intermarrying and changing identities and changing spiritual identity. And this was an important way of trying to maneuver socially in a space where you had zero ability to move socially. So, there is a big crossing over of people and so in this sense, we are all very much Creole on the island. I just wanted to make that distinction because it is part of also the narrative of shame that exists within communities today. And so actually today to call somebody Creole in many, many situations can still be seen as an insult. That is the degree to which the association to slavery, the association to your ancestry stops on the island, it cannot connect beyond. Whereas for many people of the Indian or that we associate themselves as being in the Indian community - like I said, we all really are Creole on the island - but for the majority of that community, there is a big movement of Hindu nationalism. So, groups will homogenise to Modi's Hindu nationalism. We have Muslim communities that homogenise to the Middle East and to Saudi Arabia. And so, in this sense, to be Creole means to not be able to connect to anything beyond. And it has a very real and direct dynamic in terms of your agency and your presence within the mainstream society.

And so, within this film work, it starts to try to deconstruct and explore some of the dualities that exist within that. And so, for us in the Creole community, without anything that really allows you to connect back to your points of origin, there is Catholicism. And Catholicism is the main

homogenising factor for this community today. But as we know, it is also the main theological underpinning for the creation of the Code Noire and for the justification of slavery under the French crown. And today, with many people from the Creole community being of Catholic faith, there are these very twisted, dark dualities of what position you in one place, but also what has also been used as the tools within which to do that.

[And perhaps that allows us Anna to speak a bit more directly about what the plantation dynamics are in Mauritius. And perhaps a bit about the concept of the plantationocene as well. I thought maybe you might want to describe a bit about the plantationocene as a concept.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: I think your description of these social relations in contemporary Mauritius is a good starting point, because I think really the plantationocene is a theoretical term that really centralises the logistics, the logics of the plantation in terms of the human relations, in terms of labour relations, in terms of human and ecological intersections. It centres those relationships and those extractive logics - it's a very academic-sounding phrase, but I think that's the best way to kind of describe it - so it centralises those logics in our understanding of Western modernity, the racial capitalism that continues to shape us now.

It's a term that scholars like Donna Haraway have highlighted, but it's also a term that I think perhaps hasn't been given that same title, but it's something that scholars in black studies have been talking about continually. So, I would say that we can think about writers like Katherine McKittrick and Eric Williams and Robin D.G. Kelley, I think even Hortense Spillers' ideas really come out of this understanding of the ways that these relationships of extraction have and continue to sustain urban environments, politics, institutional racism. So, I think that as a term, it has a lot of buzz right now, but I think in some fields it's really been at a continuing thread. But I think your description was really apt because it really brings up those relationships, those historical relationships that were shaped by the plantation, by the forms of management and labour and shows how close those relationships continue. And your images of Mauritius as a kind of plantation space help us to visualise that, too.

Shiraz Bayjoo: And I was just going to add that how the plantation is seen as a concept, has also been positioned as a counterpoint to arguments around the Anthropocene. And one of the interesting things that Donna Haraway has brought up in one of her interviews, is that when we talk about the plantation as an economic, social power structure that in many ways has been inherited into the systems that manage us today. Some of the interesting things that have helped me to think through some of that, are things, for example, how even in the modern plantation, animals, human beings, plants, do not want to exist within the plantation. They are forced to be within the plantation. The plantation is a system of extractive wealth creation. And the idea that modern agricultural practices, modern relationships to nature, are all direct or natural positions for us to take as human beings. But what's interesting about the plantationocene as a concept is that actually it states that there have been earlier systems of agriculture, there have been relationships that Indigenous communities and First Nations communities that have long existed, and that actually the exploitative systems that we continue to practice are relatively new in terms of human practice.

So, it helps the kind of position why these conversations are quite important, why these concepts are quite important, not necessarily as a long-lasting theory, but it's certainly a theory for this moment. And a thinking space that perhaps can allow us to move to something that is more active and more permanent in its relation. And Anna, I was just wondering if perhaps it might be good

just to talk a little bit about what the plantation dynamics were in Mauritius? And this term of the sugar baron, which was coined in Mauritius. For example, one of the houses that Anna is showing you now, is a house which is owned by the Clezio family, which was the most powerful sugar baron family on the island. And the last custodian of this house Jacques (*inaudible*), who's very kind to support aspects of research, he spoke about how the first piece of land that the family bought in order to start their plantation was from a raided English ship. So, they had hired a French pirate to raid an English ship, and the goods of that ship which were auctioned off in Mauritius, where they first got their piece of land. And he described to me that the deed from the sale from that auction is still very much prized within the family. I can't speculate as to how accurate that is, but it starts to give you an understanding about where the wealth of these systems begins.

And part of the research that I was doing around African post-colony independence movements, an interesting piece that comes from Jane Hooper's writing, she talks about how when the Dutch arrived in Madagascar with the silver that they had taken from the Spanish mines of the Americas, they were ready to start their plantations. This is a sort of a slightly ad hoc quotation there. But what I find so interesting, is how the activities of the previous century, of the activities through piracy or exploitation of another corner of the world, was then leading to second phase almost of what became empire, which was the creation of plantations and the replication of the goods that were seized in other parts of the world in replication of production.

And so in Mauritius, as with lots of places, this becomes a dynamic and it made these families incredibly rich in relation. Which is where this term sugar baron comes from. And at some point, I'll share that interview online with everybody.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: Yeah, it's a pretty amazing interview. I want to just quickly go through now to some more contemporary work - these are family photos, right? They're connected to your family. And these are the contemporary habitations of these plantation spaces, of these plantation houses. And so, I realise we've got about five minutes left. But I think that these photographs are so powerful, particularly given the history that you just outlined, maybe you can talk a little bit about these architectural spaces in relation to something you said earlier about these being sites of trauma and the ways that people live around trauma and with trauma in a sense.

Shiraz Bayjoo: So, a lot of these houses in Port Louis, the capital. This particular photo - well the photo you just saw before - this is my grandmother's place, the house I was actually born into. And it's a little apartment that was part of what was once a grand house. And in Port Louis, there were many grand merchant's houses. They were not so much plantation houses, but they were certainly the homes by the port that were being built from the profits that were coming from this business. And in the 19th century, because of the widespread malaria epidemics - something I'm not sure we're going to get much time to speak about today, but we were hoping to get onto some of that. But the plantation families or the planter class, they moved out of the port city and they moved up to high ground, as they did in lots of places on mainland Africa, as well as in places like India, where the Hill Station was kind of created. These city spaces became uninhabited because of this idea that this was the place where diseases and epidemics were being spread. And so, these houses became abandoned and they became available strangely to the indentured labourers and the ex-slave communities, as they were at that point. And so, these houses then started to become occupied by multiple families, big houses broken up into small dwellings as they have been in other places, as they are today in cities. And the homes speak of the multiple layerings of people.

And what's so important to understand this, is this is the identity of black and brown being created within a white structure. And so when we also want to start to think about where these definitions and these boundaries around racial identity, and where we are positioned today, the language around this is being created in these moments, in this space and when you visit a lot of these houses today - and they are owned by black and brown families - they for me, speak also so much about how we build around, how we create around things that are unspoken. And often, this is the reality in so many places, is that we often don't have the language with which to speak of the traumas that sits so heavily in the room, the things that are so obvious. And the racism that is still also innate in the language. But it's not s racism of the same sort. It's not the racism that is used as a maneuver to minimise somebody. It's a language that is just so deeply engrained in the thinking that in Mauritius, we still have very specific racialised language relating to what jobs you're doing and what jobs people did traditionally, which today sounds unbelievably violent and horrific. But at the same time, they have been so deeply embedded into the way that people think, that they become almost invisible, but they still act out as these ghosts.

And so that's what I mean when I say we start to build around these traumas and how spaces are occupied - I hate that word curated - but in a sense, how they are curated and how what is allowed to deteriorate, what is allowed to be destroyed and what is preserved. And that those choices, no matter how subconscious they are, I think speak so much about how we learn to live.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: That was beautiful. I agree, and I think it's something that you see in a lot of former colonies, actually. And we've talked about this before, that one of the reasons I really do love this series is because it reminds me of home in Sri Lanka and the front rooms that I grew up in. And so, I think you're right, the language is so difficult to work through. Also, because some of it has been lost or been taken away through these colonial histories. Maybe we can end then with a more recent work where you're quite specifically engaging with these questions of language and stories, but how these stories can be used to build new solidarities - which I think is also embedded in these photographs, too. Do you want me to play it and do you want to talk over it, or do you want me to play?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Maybe I'll just say a quick thing about it - this new work, which was commissioned by Art Night London last year and showed at Dakar Art Summit this year, is called *Pran Kouraz*, which is a Mauritian phrase, which means to take courage. And just going back to how we were talking about the lack of written accounts of the experiences of ancestors within the periods of slavery and indenture - What's interesting is that today linguistics and linguists are being brought in alongside aspects of sociological and anthropological research in order to present a new way of tracing what's taken place in the past. And so, where there is no written account of the experience of the slave, then perhaps within Creole languages, which are still very prevalent and very strong on island spaces, that the languages allow an insight into the thinking. Because the Creole language is a language that comes from the slave camp. It is a hybridity of either French or English mixed in with an African grammatical structure as it's been defined today. It's just the words that are swapped out. And the use of the words and the use of particular types of words in context lead us into understanding potentially the ways of thinking. So, one very basic example of that in Mauritian Creole is the word 'rode'. The word 'rode' is a word that is used for the word 'to look'. But in French, 'rode' is actually the word that is used for roaming, for foraging in the forest. But we do not use the word 'cherche', which is the French word 'to look'. So, there are these swapping outs and there are things like the absence of the word 'I', the present 'I'. There is 'me', but there is no 'I', there is no existential 'I' within these languages. And so, they allow us to perhaps potentially

enter back into those spaces. And today, the Creole language has become very politicised in Mauritius because it is also a description of standing up and no longer wanting to remain within that space of shame. Shame that I am Creole. Shame that this was allowed to happen to me. The shame that this was allowed to happen to my ancestors. All of those levels of thinking. Whereas today, to speak in the Creole language - and for the very first time in the last few years it is being written - is a major, major statement that we are resilient and that we are strong, and we have survived. And that is, to a certain degree, the interpretation and interpretation of the communities that I have spoken with. And so, this is where this work comes from. Sorry, that was a very long description.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: No that was wonderful, and I think now I'll play it - and I think you were saying in other conversations that this is also, for you as much as it is a new empowered use of language and identity, it's also an assertion of a global solidarity or kinship in some way. So, I think that's an important space to end. I'll just play this and then we can go from there.

So, we'll stop there. And then we can open up to questions - is that ok Adelaide and Jess?

Adelaide Bannerman: Thank you both. I have a question to ask Shiraz, you mentioned about the uptake of the Creole identity. Is that being taken up by a younger generation? And how is that presenting itself?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Absolutely. Well, it is. It is something that's coming out of a younger generation. The Creole language and Creole music, Sega music, are two of the big defining parts of the identity of the island. These are things that are directly attributed back to the Creole community because these things formed out of the slave camps. And interestingly in Rosabelle Boswell's book *Le Malaise Creole*, she tries to explore why is it that for many in the Creole community they are still very much economically the bottom end of the society in Mauritius. And she speaks about this idea of homogenisation and how homogenising back to a bigger group that gives political strength to your base, how it still remains such an important factor and how this denial of being associated with slave communities and slave legacies is still this sense of shame. And yet, in spite of the language and the national music - things that would normally be such tropes of prestige for a nation - are still things that are so hugely denied.

And she speaks about how, for example, the dynamics between the economics of the tourist industry mimic that of the plantation. And how only the most beautiful people in the tourist industry, for example, are presented in the front of house in the same way that only certain types of people were allowed to work within the actual house. And how you then go through different degrees of invisibility, depending on your age, on the direct nature of your race. And so in this sense - I'm coming back round to this - women, black women, Asian women, Creole women have done relatively economically well in the tourist industry in Mauritius, partly because of that dynamic of being able to be employed, whereas the men are not. And so there has been a large-scale movement to become Rastafarian in Mauritius. If you are a young outwardly, as in visually, obviously black man for example, I say that because in my family we go from looking like me to yourself Adelaide, that is the spectrum and it's the case of many Mauritian families. But for those who cannot escape being clearly defined as being Creole, then actually economic opportunities become less and less, and you become socially marginalised. And so, for a lot of these young guys, it has become a way of homogenising to a group outside of the island. So, this idea of becoming Rastafarian gives you a political base of which to connect yourself and to give yourself a visibility.

And as we understand, visibility and visibility of voice are the things that in this age give you agency.

So, hence that's why the language has become a really important tool. And I will give you a really direct example, two friends of mine, the wife she works as a hotel manager and the husband he works as selling jewellery on the beach. And she says to me, 'I like the Indian part of my ancestry because it makes me a good businesswoman.' And he would say to me, 'I hate the Indian part of me because it makes me (*inaudible*), I am proud to be a slave.' These are the very directly racial language that we experience today. And that is still motivated so much by the lack of opportunity and the marginalisation that people still experience. And then when we fast forward to other parts of the world, like Britain and America, we can start to understand the erasure of indigenous identity, the taking of land, the creation of the plantation, the movement of people. We see the cracks in this society, and we know upon what they are built. When we build upon genocide, what do we expect?

Adelaide Bannerman: Thank you.

Jessica Taylor: There is a question here that is asking for clarification. Jillian is asking, did the African slaves come from West Africa?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Well, it's a good question. And Jillian, in Mauritius they were mainly from East Africa and from Madagascar and such became the demand for slaves in the Mascarenhas Islands. The Mascarenhas Islands is Reunion Island today, Mauritius - it's a whole chain of islands through the middle of the Indian Ocean. So much was the demand for it, that slave traders in Madagascar were importing slaves from East Africa to the west coast of Madagascar, taking them overland and selling them at the slave ports on the east side of Madagascar to places like Mauritius. But this started to take place as the slave trade, as it's described in a lot of accounts as this depletion of people from the West Coast, that the East African slave trade became more and more attractive.

Jessica Taylor: Do we have any other questions? Would anyone like to send any more questions through? If not, I've got one. I'd really like to know a bit about what contemporary engagement you've had with some of the ideas that you've talked through today in visual arts practice in Mauritius?

Shiraz Bayjoo: In terms of political discourse and engaging with the arts in Mauritius, it's very much in the live music scene. In terms of contemporary art, it's much less. But the music scene in Mauritius is very, very powerful. And so, as I described before, we have the Sega music, which is the music that came directly from the slave camps. And this has evolved now into what they call Seggae, which has been this this crossover with reggae. What's so interesting, also, is how the sounds, how these beats are so similar between Mauritius, Reunion, Martinique - that so many of these different Creole islands, these ex-plantation islands also have a very similar grammar, very similar language, very similar styles of music. And then in the same way as calypso and reggae, Saga evolved along a similar pathway.

Jessica Taylor: We have a question from Barbados asking, can you repeat the Creole word for to look again? And the context in which you were speaking about this, how it is particular to the Creole context in Mauritius.

Shiraz Bayjoo: So, the word 'rode' is the word for looking, which is more associated with the word for foraging than it is the word to look. In the *Pranz Kouraz* film, I worked through a lot of different phrases and a lot of them are things that I dug into. I don't know if there's any Mauritians in the audience, but they will sort of be very familiar with these - words like (*inaudible*) which means 'where did you spring from?' And these are everyday phrases, when we start to look at the origins of these phrases, there is so much about being invisible and being just out of sight, which is so much like the language of the maroon experience, as it's described particularly in Mauritius, which wasn't necessarily about people escaping the plantation forever, because they knew they couldn't escape it. They couldn't get off the island. But that people would perhaps disappear for a day, and that idea of resilience, of protest when you have no right to protest, you have no right to refuse, that passiveness, to become invisible. It's something that people have been talking a lot about recently, staying still as a form of protest, staying still as a form of resistance during the virus. But actually, it is one of the oldest forms of resistance. And so, in this sense, you find that these words are actually very prevalent in the everyday language.

Jessica Taylor: We've got two questions here that actually connect to each other, so I'm going to start with one and then lead into the other. The first one from Cecile is a question for Anna - can you speak further about the plantation as a theoretical space?

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: I'll speak about it as an art historian, because that's really how I've been thinking about work by artists like Shiraz. But also, I suppose, in conversation with historical experiences, because the plantationocene - as we discussed - is a kind of theoretical concept that scholars are using to try and analyse our contemporary moment. But also, contextualise it in relationship to these histories of slavery and colonialism, which are not really always part of the conversation when you talk about the Anthropocene, and I think that's a really important point. I think the other thing is that the plantation, while it still is a real space and people experience these forms of extraction in very real ways, and we can still see that today. You just have to look at the way labour practices work, who is labouring where, even during quarantine who can stay at home and who can't, and whose labour do we rely on? And so, I've been using it in my work as a way to bring those historical experiences, images into conversation with contemporary artists and contemporary social relations. And so artists like Shiraz really give me a way of talking about the past and give me a way of excavating the veneer of art historical conventions like the picturesque or the romantic, which were used to represent the plantation as a tropical space or a garden or a place where these logics of extraction were completely elided. And so that's how I use it, that's how I think about it and that's why I'm here and I'm doing this work.

Jessica Taylor: We have one more question from Nico saying, 'Cartography, plantations, data centres, control - How does growing up Creole influence your view of space and society when you find yourself in other countries?'

Shiraz Bayjoo: Good question - is that is that for both of us? You've also lived in multiple places Anna. For me personally, I grew up partly between Mauritius and Britain. I came here to school when my mum moved to be a nurse in the early 80s. And I grew up in a very quiet seaside town called Hastings, which did not have so many people from London in it in those days, there was virtually no one there. And it was a very sweet, middle class place with lots of old people. And when I would go back to Mauritius, luckily, I was able to be home for several months of every year with my grandmother, and we lived in Chinatown, on the edge of Chinatown and the Muslim quarter in Port Louis, very close to the port. And it was a very heavy, eclectic place that also was fueled with very heavy language. And what I perceived as being extremely racist as a young

person. So, in these two very different polar spaces. And yet, in many ways, to begin researching and repositioning my work back in Mauritius was an important part of being able to understand a lot of the questions that my contemporaries here and that many of us have explored for many years, which is the experience of the diaspora as well.

And I felt that I couldn't launch into that. I couldn't speak of those experiences here any longer without really, truly understanding the origins and the spaces in which we also inhabit. And also, where decolonisation has had to happen in a very real way and not just in an academic way, which is in the global south. I'm sorry, I'm slightly coming off the point of the question here. But in terms of physical space, the sea is and always has been a major part of my psyche and the way in which you see and feel space. And it's funny because, we come from a remote little island, but we never felt remote. We never felt far away from others because we didn't look at Europe as being the centre. We didn't look at Britain as being the centre from which things permeate. We saw ourselves as being interconnected. And something I know that you picked up on Anna, when I was speaking with some First Nation artists from Tasmania who said that from their traditional belief, we are not separated by the sea, we are connected by it. Which is almost the exact opposite to a lot of the mindsets of Western thinking in terms of its relationship to land and space. And this is something that we haven't really been able to start speaking about, but something that I hope we will be able to open up through the series of conversations. Which is how the relationship to nature and the relationship of taking from the environment is also something that is very much forged within this timeframe and something that is also very deeply connected to the way that we operate.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: I think that's why a concept like the plantationocene is helpful because obviously it's based in a physical space, but the relation that it's talking about between humans, the environment and power moves beyond that physically bounded plantation. So, you can think about it beyond, in places like Australia where there were plantations too but you're also talking about indigenous relationships with land and genocide. I think for me space has been shaped certainly by coming from Sri Lanka, living in Australia and New Zealand two settler colonies. I think what has led me to some of these questions is the way that, something that you talked about earlier Shiraz, is cartography and the ways that space is imagined through the colonial eyes in a sense. And so, growing up, that's how I understood space and I didn't realise that until I actually moved to the U.K. and realised what it was that I'd been seeing through. And so, I think that that's one of the aspects.

The other thing - and I just want to say this because it was mentioned in a question from a friend, Jillian Forrester - in that colonial cartography, there's a real tension between violence and beauty. And so that paradox is I think really important, again, highlighted in your work. But how do you sit in that space of beauty and brutality, or look at it?

Shiraz Bayjoo: For sure, we need beauty and poetics in order to be able to cut through the immensity of the violence that surrounds these stories. When I was going through my main period of research on the colonial history of Mauritius, I couldn't look at the landscape around me because all I could see was blood. Because such a small place with so much subjugation, so much misery. I couldn't see how any single spot could have been immune to that. And yet, as a child it was a place that you loved so much. And it was only by making that work and processing through it that I'm able to be back home in Mauritius and to see it beyond just that lens. For sure you do need beauty and poetics to cut through it. It is an enormity to be able to take it all on in one reading. Impossible.

Jessica Taylor: I very much agree, and I think actually connecting to that, because it would be great to hear a bit more from Shiraz, someone's asking about your performance. And I know that everyone got a short glimpse during the clip of some of the costuming that you've been doing as well. And she's asking, can you explain a bit more about the role of performance in your work? This is asked in reference to your work screened at Art Night last year.

Shiraz Bayjoo: So, this was quite new departure in my work. It's something that I've been wanting to experiment with for a very long time, to bring performance into my film work and to allow the experimentation around costume. But fundamentally, I feel - and by no means is this work done and I don't think it will be done in our lifetimes - but thankfully, there is a lot of unpacking and intersecting that is now taking place. And at the same time, I feel that where we are in terms of decolonising language, as Fanon speaks about decolonisation is the process where we need to arrive at the world in which we want to inhabit, is something that we have to collectively imagine. And whilst we are unpacking these legacies, we are also in need of creating language in space of which we can start to inhabit and start to potentially imagine what that decolonised world could look like.

And so, in this sense, this work was almost an urgency for me. It felt like it was at a crossroads for me, a juncture between being able to embark upon creating language of which we can inhabit and facing up to those deep-seated traumas and complications that are still stopping us from doing it. So, *Pranz Kouraz* is about facing up to trauma, but also to senses of complicity that exist within ourselves around that. And by understanding that this is a very dark space and that there are no easy answers around it. There is no undoing of the past. But it's only by understanding - and to a certain degree - embracing that that allows us to start to create and to author something beyond this barrier. I think it exists and stops many of us still today from being able to venture forward, and for sure we see it in the systems and the ways that we are policed and controlled. So, for me, it was a very important work and it perhaps allows an opportunity to start to create language that moves beyond just the unpacking. A language that allows for the potential of imagining, things that Afro-Futurism attempts to do. And perhaps this is my stepping into some of that space.

Jessica Taylor: I mean, I know a lot of the work that we saw today that was no human presence in some of the photography and some of the clips that we looked at. I know there is a film online that people can see on Ed Cross Fine Art, that is a different approach to filmmaking. But how is the negotiation of bringing bodies and performance - how would how did you kind of navigate that transition?

Shiraz Bayjoo: It's been a difficult one because for me, by creating absence of people, I've hoped that we've concentrated on the spaces that we inhabit, the clues that are left around us. And in a place like Mauritius, where race is still so prevalent, where to look Indian or to look black or definitely white can differentiate hugely your experiences. I did not want to place one type of face or one type of body into those works previously. Whereas, now I feel that the importance of presenting those bodies and the importance of the presence, so it's not just about working with the right types of performers, it's about working with people who are representative of (*inaudible*) symbolic of, who are embodiments of - I don't know if that quite makes sense. And that the physical presence of placing ourselves, perhaps allows for a different kind of symbolism within the work that is more immediate. But it's something that has to be done with great care.

Jessica Taylor: And of course, there's never enough time and one talk to address everything. You've got people asking for places that they could go to find more. One person is asking, Shiraz, if you could recommend any books about Mauritian Creole languages, and Anna, someone is asking if you could point them towards some of your colonial art historical research that people can look into further that might perhaps resonate with the Caribbean experience.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: My website has all of my articles and research. It's just 'anna arabindan kesson dot com'. And I actually have written... The Caribbean is actually what I've focused on most in this context. So, there's something I've written there about indentureship in Jamaica that might be helpful. And my book, which is on cotton, also deals with some of these histories of the plantation. And I should also just quickly say that I'm curating a show in October, at this stage we think it would be an online, but it's going to be held at Twelve Gates Gallery in Philadelphia. I'm using a lot of the works that we saw today, and it's called 'It is the Sea that Connects us.' So, there'll be more there too, and we'll keep you updated.

Shiraz Bayjoo: There's the Mauritian dictionary, I have a very basic one. They are not a lot of books that have been published around it right now, but there are a lot of good essays.

Jessica Taylor: Thank you both so much.

Shiraz Bayjoo: Thank you, everybody.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson: Thank you so much Jess and Adelaide for hosting this.

Disclaimer: Due to disruptions in the audio recording of the conversation there may be slight discrepancies in this transcription.

Shiraz Bayjoo studied Painting at the University of Wales, Institute Cardiff, and was artist in residence at Whitechapel Gallery during 2011. He has exhibited at Tate Britain and the Institute of International Visual Arts, London; 14th Biennale of Sharjah; 13th Biennale of Dakar; 21st Biennale of Sydney; and is a recipient of the Gasworks Fellowship and the Arts Council of England. His work is represented in the Sharjah Foundation collection, UK Government collection, and French National collection, as well as private collections both in Europe and Asia. Born in Mauritius, Bayjoo's work focuses on the Indian Ocean and the European historical legacies that have shaped the region. Bayjoo has been a visiting lecturer and critic at universities both in Europe and the USA, most notably the Courtauld Institute, Central St. Martin's college of Art, MONASH university Australia, and Princeton University (forthcoming) USA. Bayjoo is participating in the Diaspora Pavilion 2 programme.

Anna Arabindan-Kesson is an art historian and writer, who is jointly appointed as an Assistant Professor of Black Diaspora Art in the departments of African American Studies and Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. She has lived and studied in Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand and England and prior to completing her PhD in African American Studies and Art History in the United States, Anna was a Registered Nurse. Her personal and professional background inflect her academic and curatorial work which focuses on the relationship of vision and visibility to histories of race, empire, and migration.