

Global Plantation Series Q&A Transcript

With Shiraz Bayjoo, Sancintya Mohini Simpson and Jasmine Togo-Brisby moderated by Jessica Taylor

26 September 2020

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.

Jessica Taylor: Hi, everybody. My name is Jessica Taylor and I am the Head of Programmes at the International Curators Forum. And we have been lucky enough to be hosting the Global Plantation Series, which is a series of artist-directed conversations that were developed by an Anna Arabindan-Kesson and Shiraz Bayjoo, looking at both historical and contemporary engagements with the plantation - in this series - through the artworks of three artists, Shiraz, who is with us today, alongside Jasmine and Sancintya.

And so hopefully everyone has had a chance to have a look at the conversations that we have shared on the International Curators Forum website. How the process has worked is that Anna and Shiraz staged three conversations between June and August, focusing specifically on the works of the three artists participating in the series. And what we wanted to do today was all get together to have a conversation, to invite you in to join us. Really and truly to have a chat around the conversations that were held and the threads that connected up those conversations, the strategies that the artists employ to engage with the plantation through their work, to engage with archive, to engage with language, to engage with a series of interjections into the systems and institutions that we're all working within and to think about those strategies of resistance. But also, more collaborative practices, community engagement, and imagination as tools for tackling some of these issues and some of these ideas. And so, for those who have not yet had a chance to visit the conversations on the website, I am going to do an introduction, just a short biographical introduction to the three artists who are joining us. And then I'm going to lead off with the first question, but I really want to invite you to unmute yourselves if you have a question, throw it up in chat or Q&A. We really invite you to engage with us and in the conversation and let us know if you have any questions to contribute.

So, in his multidisciplinary practice of video, painting, photography and sculpture, Shiraz investigates the social, political and historical landscapes central to Mauritian cultural identity and the wider Indian Ocean region. His work considers collective identity, nationhood, migration and the legacy of European colonialism through historical photographs and artefacts drawn from personal and public collections. Jasmine is a fourth generation Australian South Sea Islander whose great great grandparents were taken from Vanuatu as children and put to work on an Australian sugar cane plantation.

Jasmine's research examines the historical practice of 'blackbirding', a romanticised colloquialism for the Pacific slave trade and its contemporary legacy and impact upon those who trace their roots to New Zealand and Australia through the slave diaspora. Based in Wellington, Jasmine is

one of the few artists delving into the cultural memory and shared histories of plantation colonialism across the Pacific. Her practice encompasses painting, early photographic techniques and processes, and sculpture.

And Sancintya is an artist and researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. She is a descendant of indentured labourers sent to work from India to South Africa on colonial sugar plantations. Her work navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the Colonial Archive. Her work moves between painting, video, poetry and performance to develop narratives and rituals. Her practice is grounded in collaboration and community engagement, engaging in wider narratives surrounding the indenture diaspora and community.

And so, my first question is quite simple. But I wanted to ask it because I was struck by the way in which this series opened up a discussion about the global nature of migrations and displacements that happened in order to create the plantation economies that fed the Western colonial empire, without actually locating any of these conversations in the North American and European contexts. So, at a time when it feels like the situation in the West is perhaps screaming the loudest when it comes to the pandemic and climate change and social upheaval, we know that everyone is being impacted in different and specific ways. So, it'd be great to hear from each of you how things are where you are, where your families are, and the different kinds of global contexts from which you're speaking, to really tap into that specificity before we begin. So, I'm not sure who wants to start first. Maybe do you want to go first Shiraz?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Sure. Well, I'm in London right now, so as some of us know the situation with the pandemic is on the rise again here. But for my family in Mauritius, there have been very few cases of Covid-19. Partly because Mauritius, like a lot of island spaces, have very old school quarantine laws that were very quickly put back in place, quarantine laws that have existed since the Victorian period. And so, they were really very able to mitigate any kind of large-scale outbreak of the illness. But in terms of the ongoing impact globally and then, of course, in terms of climate change, Mauritius, as some of you might be aware of, has been going through some major environmental problems recently. With specifically an ocean liner, an oil ship that had hit one of the reefs over the last couple of months and has caused a major environmental disaster. And now questions as to why that ship was so close to shore and what it was really carrying and the fact that its cargo hasn't been fully open to the public. And it's very secretive sinking by the government, unfortunately underlines and I think as these spaces continue to show how politically important and relevant they are, both historically and now, that corruption relations to climate change, movements of people, these are still very tight relationships that continue to go on. And Mauritius right now is seeing its largest protest since the independence of the island going on right now. So big, major impacts going on.

Jessica Taylor: Thank you. Jasmine, can I invite you to feed in?

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: I'm in New Zealand, I'm in Wellington. And most of my family is in Mackay in Queensland. So that's the largest sugar producing town in Australia, and the third largest in Australia. Also, the largest community of Australian South Sea Islanders. So, yeah, it's quite difficult at the moment not being able to travel, obviously, but that goes without saying. But I guess when I think about the restrictions and movement and how that impacts on Australian South Sea Islanders, I think about the way that that disrupts us being able to go back to the islands. And obviously, we want to keep the islands safe from Covid. But just thinking about how

that's a further step and just that disruption in being able to trace our ancestors' steps. Me and my family were supposed to go over in July and we were meeting with some Elders who had some pieces of evidence around our family. And it's just concerning to think about when we might be able to get back there and follow up with that research. But I don't know if that really answers the question but that's where we're at.

Jessica Taylor: And Sancintya?

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I'm in Brisbane, closer to your family Jasmine. And I'm on Turrbal and Jagera country as an uninvited guest. I have been very fortunate I think, to have my immediate family closer by because I'm quite used to my boarder family being quite distant from me in New Zealand and in South Africa. But what's going on around the corner and very close to me in Brisbane, is there have been men in detention up the road, refugees, and there has been for quite some time now, protests and continual watch by police outside of this hotel where these men are basically locked up, imprisoned. And now they're trying to suppress access and their voices even further by trying to take away their mobile phones. And so that's just happening up the road from me, as well as about a week ago, there was another Aboriginal death in custody. So, Aunty Sherry was in the Brisbane city in custody and passed away. And I think there are a lot of things there that are part of broader conversations that we are having, looking at Australia and this idea of keeping people away and locking people up and taking away people's freedoms and who is doing this and why. And for me, I think that's an important thing to acknowledge that this is happening in Australia here. But I guess across the world, too, restrictions of people.

Jessica Taylor: Thank you. And one of the things about this kind of conversation that we're having around not being able to move and see others and be with others as we're used to. And the pressures that that is putting on society. It made me think about the ways in which all of you speak about your relationship to landscape in your work. But multiple landscapes and this idea of being connected to multiple landscapes. So, I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about that relationship to landscape, how you define it in your own terms, in a way to explore it through your work. Shiraz do you want to go first?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Well, I might link it a little bit to both of your practices Jasmine and Sancintya, in that the way that you acknowledge your presence on the ancestral lands that you are currently living on. And, you know, Australia and New Zealand being places of origin. I often speak about this in this way when we've been in Australia or these spaces, that Mauritius is a place of displacement. So, it's a place where people were brought to. So, origin continues to endure as a major issue of people being able to describe themselves and not wanting to be associated with what are perceived as shame histories, which I think both of you have spoken about before. But what is also incredibly interesting, especially as I was just mentioning before, the protests that are going on in Mauritius right now, the youth and younger generation are starting to understand that by having ownership of these histories and reclaiming these traumatic relationships with spaces where atrocities, where traumas are now embedded - that there is a new sense of strength and resilience. And therefore, a new positioning of oneself in relation to the land and to the country.

So, for a long time - although as Mauritians we love our island, we love our country very dearly - there is also this duality of continuously connecting to ancestral origins. So, lots of Indians connect back to regions within India. And folks to the Middle East in different places. But for the Afro-Creole identity, this is not something that has ever been truly possible. Because that untraceable history just stops at a moment of violence, the moment of extraction and arrival in Mauritius. And

so, to re-evaluate those landscapes and those spaces within my work was definitely a process that I personally had to go through. And it's interesting to see how that takes place in the wider society in terms of youth movements right now, and particularly that seems to be taking place, to take hold in terms of language in relation to land as well. And our Creole language is very much something that is of Mauritius. It's not of other origin. And so that has been one of the major drivers or ways of expressing. And then therefore through Creole music, through the Sega music of the island, that has started to take a new sort of direction. And that's something that I don't think you would have seen on the island 20 years ago, something that has definitely taken place.

And in terms of my own work, when you read through the history of the island, it's almost impossible not to understand how anywhere is not a site of trauma. When I think in Megan Vaughan's book, *Creating the Creole Island*, she estimates something like 80000 slaves were brought to Mauritius in a four-year period in the late 1700s. And how such an enormous number of people could have been passing through such a tiny island - twenty-seven miles across - meant that ultimately the lifespan of slaves in early Mauritius was extremely short due to the demand for labour, as well as potentially being a slave port itself. So, when I was researching and going through the history - sorry I'll speak a bit faster - I couldn't see anything but violence in the landscape. And I remember as children, our love of the island, our love of the natural places. But whenever the sun went down, I was always really quite scared. I remember the stories of ghosts, of apparitions, of devils. Because also in those days, in the 1980s when the sun went down, the island was very dark. There wasn't a huge amount of electrification in those times. And I've come to realise through my research, that actually, those stories of ghosts and the unrested within the landscape, there were reasons why these stories and why these associations with the darkness and what takes place outside of view, where they've come from. And so, for me personally, it took working through all of that and making a lot of the film work and photographic work and definitely working with the archives for me personally to work through that, and eventually have a relationship with the place again now where I don't just see the violence of the land. But it took a very long time to get through that. And I think similarly perhaps for others, and certainly for folks within the island.

Jessica Taylor: Thank you. Jasmine?

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: My turn. How do I explore and define my relationship to landscape in my work? It's sort of shifted in the last five years since moving to Aotearoa. I was really conflicted before I moved over because I was really questioning if how I would have a place and space to belong and exist in New Zealand, if I didn't feel like I had that space and place to exist within Australia, the country that our culture was born into. And so, it was quite difficult to move. But I needed to make that change for the progression of not just myself, but my work and my studies. And as soon as I started to look around - for one, the Chelsea sugar refinery here, which is iconic in Auckland. It was the most bizarre experience to drive into this refinery, this sugary refinery, which has all the smells of Queensland plantations. You know, that molasses-y smell that's thick and smoky in the air. And then you look around and there's absolutely not one plantation in sight. And I started to question, well, where in the world is this sugar coming from? And after a little bit of research, it turned out that the sugar initially was coming over from Australia. So, off the backs of my people on Queensland plantations, through the plantations, they would ship out sugar product and then refine it in Auckland. And the infrastructure of the city, like the Auckland Harbour Bridge, is shaped in that way so that the Australian ships could come in with the sugar on it. And then it was refined and repackaged and re-marketed as New Zealand sugar.

So that was within my first 12 months of living here. And once I started to look at the landscape further, this research was then coming to me. People were coming to me and we discovered that - well, we didn't "discover" but - a historian that I work with, Scott Hamilton, told me that actually the first Pacific slave trade ship that went into Queensland, the Don Juan, is actually still visible at low tide here in South Island. So, I've just finished making a moving image work and a body of photography around that. So, to answer the question, the landscape is pivotal, it's always there. And I guess by me and my curiosity of trying to find that space to belong to, these pieces of landscape were revealed to me. Does that make sense?

Jessica Taylor: Definitely. Thank you. Sancintya, Jasmine's description of the smell of the sugar just reminded me so much of the installation that you were speaking about in your conversation. So, it feels very apt to hand it over to you now.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I think that's interesting. I think, for me, it goes back to this idea of belonging as someone who was born here in Australia. I grew up seeing this sugar cane, these fields, but not really being aware of very openly about my own familial history, and I guess our connections to sugar and the sugar industry. But also, this history of South Sea Islanders being taken and working these fields - it's not something people know about. So, this other history, these shared histories and these landscapes, also that was something that I have become aware of over time. And I think when I'm in these spaces and I'm looking at these landscapes and I'm looking at the sugar fields and looking the plantations, there's this - and I was speaking about this before with Shiraz - about this shared landscape, but like me as an outsider looking.

So, in South Africa, going back to Durban and seeing where my mom grew up and my family was from and where they would have been indentured, still as an outsider looking. And then doing a residency in Bangalore or going around India and South India. Even though this is where my family was from, I'm still an outsider looking. And I even came across these labourers, working the sugar fields, harvesting with really traditional methods. And it was a really lovely exchange watching them. But it's as an outsider looking at these different spaces and landscapes that I shared, those same trees, the same kind of humidity, there's the mangos and bananas and there' these things. But, yet the sense of sort of being outside of that as well. So, it's a bit different to Shiraz and Jasmine in that sense too.

Jessica Taylor: But I think this complexity of looking and speaking about these landscapes is something that obviously is very present in all of your work. And when I was thinking about the conversation today, I was recently watching this film that was shot in the Caribbean focusing on sugar cane plantations, and there was a text about it written by an arts institution in the UK, and the text spoke about the disconnect between the imagery - that being of the sugar cane plantation - and the dialogue in the film - which was a kind of historical reckoning with the exploitation of the industry and colonialism. And it struck me that this text saw these images of these sugarcane fields as being disconnected to this dialogue, as being something that someone would look at and not recognise as having this visual language behind it. And so, it made me think a lot about this idea of gaze and the kind of neutrality of these statements around who is looking and what that reading is. And so, given the complexity of that in your work, how do you then approach that when it comes to presenting it publicly? I'm thinking about audience and the institution in that presentation. I'll throw that up to anybody who wants to take it on.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: It's definitely something I think about. And for me, I guess there's one community I'm making it for, which are my family and this community who are connected to the

sugar industry through indenture and through this labour form. And then I think there's that thing about the work not being voyeuristic or traumatic. But people have different readings. In Queensland, a lot of people have a connection to this landscape in their own way. I'm probably interested to hear what Shiraz and Jasmine have to say about that as well.

Shiraz Bayjoo: I definitely try to explore the romanticism that frames the violence within the land quite directly by playing with that language of romanticism, particularly in a place like Mauritius that has become a tourist, a sort of pleasure place, a place that's framed as a place of relaxation. And how much the language of that was created throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century, through landscape photography and through that continuous outside gaze. I think it's almost impossible for any of us not to have to deal with what that means. And certainly, I think we've all spoken about how we have to continuously think through how the audience is engaging with that. And sometimes I worry, are people just not seeing the irony of how we're playing with the framing of romanticism? And that perhaps we are just continuing romanticism, I think that can sometimes be one of the dangers, or things that certainly I think of making sure that I try and walk quite a fine line against.

But also, the reality of sugarcane - we all have, and for anybody who has been close up to a sugar cane field, you find that they're very difficult to walk through, they're almost impenetrable. The leaves, there is a really horrible grinding sound, almost like rubbing chalk against each other. And the leaves also, you can get lacerated very easily if you try to walk through them quickly. Then you have the burning of the cane, which I don't know if they still do in Australia. They still do that illegally in Mauritius, it's ridiculous that people think they can get away with it because suddenly an entire hillside has gone black.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: They only do that in one region in Queensland, in the Burdekin, everywhere else it's illegal.

Shiraz Bayjoo: Yeah. And then you have that raining of soot that starts to come afterwards and you might not be anywhere near the fire, but the soot will rain down. And then, folks in Mauritius have some of the highest levels of diabetes related to sugar. So, there is also this insidiousness of where sugar continues to work its way through. And cancer rates and all of these types of illnesses are directly attributed. Perhaps less visible, but definitely connected to.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yes. It's the same within our community as well. Sugar diabetes is so prevalent within, not only the Australian South Sea Islander community, but the broader Pacific community. I guess the angle that I'm coming at it from would be about visibility. And as you keep mentioning Sancintya, nobody in Australia really knows about Australian South Sea Islanders. Nobody really knows about slavery and the plantations. And I often mention that it's partially due to a really successful mass deportation of my people, the largest to date mass deportation in Australian history. And then they swept straight in with the white Australia policy, which only allowed white European labourers on the sugar plantations - once of course, there has been 50 years of slavery and everything was established. So, I guess what I'm sort of battling with is about trying to create a visibility and trying to create spaces for South Sea Islanders to exist within, because there's so few. And I think, at the moment, I do it in New Zealand, in Aotearoa, where I am able to engage in the broader Pacific dialogue over here, which is also equally as important. I'm sort of rambling, but that's my angle with my work. And how I'm using the institution for my people.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I think I see my work being similarly... There's all these gaps and silences in the archive in terms of the representation of my community, in particular women. And can my work and the broader work that you're all doing fit those gaps or be a counternarrative to those gaps in that colonial archive? Can what we're doing in our work, sit in opposition, where we're representing our own people. Rather than representation coming from colonisers, it's coming through descendants. And that for me is really exciting and really important. And I think that's why this community is so important as well, because that visibility that comes from speaking together about these important histories really amplifies these discussions and these voices of unknown histories or histories that have been pushed aside through shame and through colonisation as well, that have been brushed away.

Jessica Taylor: And that actually leads into a question that we've got from someone who has joined us. And this is for everyone. And the question is, how is this experience of engagement through the recorded conversations, - which we're all so comfortable with - between the three of you and with Anna impacted your own ideas around your work? And do you see it expanding further?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Well, it's been really wonderful to speak with both of you and really assuring to look at some of the language that we use, but also some of our modes of making. And how those crossovers, for me personally, give a lot of strength and solidarity and knowing and reassurance that we are not just doing this on our own in a vacuum. And I think all three of us have used immersive projection, into spaces, onto surfaces, onto buildings. And I found that really interesting. Speaking a lot about our relationship with archive. And us literally reclaiming that history back. One thing that I've been thinking a lot about - I know we do a lot of historical unpacking, which is important, like you were saying, for creating visibility where there is none, reclaiming our history, reclaiming the relationship to it. But also, then perhaps what comes from that is also strategies of resistance and that we start to identify and start to realise, as with our conversations about community, is that this is empowering. That by making visible again and stating that these things have happened, and we are still experiencing the legacies of that, that all of it really can't be denied.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I agree completely with you, Shiraz, because I've been wanting to talk with both you and Jasmine for so long now. And I guess sort of connecting with both of you. So, I was really grateful for the opportunity to connect, even if it's just through video chat. So, so happy. But I think during our conversation last time, I'd been thinking about these things, the idea about resistance in the archive and resistance of representation. And I'd been thinking a lot about intergenerational trauma and how this work and engagement with our community can be a place for healing or dealing with these histories. But I think it's about, what is the impact and how do we go about it? And our conversation did get me thinking about that more, about how you all are dealing with that. And I think it's definitely one of those things that I haven't worked out yet.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yeah. I mean, I think this is great obviously. But to be able to connect with like-minded people whose identities are formed in a similar way to mine is kind of really fulfilling. Because outside of my own immediate family and my South Sea community back home, everybody else in this part of the world who are like our broader sort of family here, are all in connection with their language and their customs. And we're the only community, which is a very small community of Pacific slave diaspora. So, I'm always looking outside to other artists to connect with that I can relate to, just because sometimes it can be very isolating.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: And it's hard and heavy work. It's not just like, oh I'm making this work to tell people about it. But you're actually doing work for your family and yourself in terms of this healing. And the archive is not nice and it's not fun. It's exhausting.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yeah. It's an incredibly painful space. And you don't really take that on light-heartedly. I've spent one whole day, the family who owned my family, in their archives searching for any sort of trace of my family. And I had to call it quits. I couldn't last the whole day. It's just painful. I don't even have any other words to explain that, the complexities of looking for a needle in a haystack. So yeah, you're right. You guys, you both get that. So, to be able to connect and just have this space where we can just be ourselves is really lovely.

Shiraz Bayjoo: It's been really wonderful. Thank you for sharing that as well Jasmine. That's very hard. I just wanted to add, what's also nice, especially in relation to ICF hosting us, because my practice here in the UK is really often very dislocated to the sort of dominant discourses that take place here. And so it has been really nice that we have been able to host this towards an audience here and show the complexities and how many of our practices - And I know we have other artists who have joined us in the audience today - That there is a large group of voices. We are not necessarily located in one single space, but that we cover this region. And that this was not necessarily a discourse that had a lot of space 10 years ago. And it has taken a lot to carve that out. And yet we span a huge geographical area between us. So, what has also been really wonderful to hear from you both and other artists is that our relationships to origin and our home spaces and the spaces where we're living now, where our children and our partners are based, it's complicated. It's not an easy thing. And we're often authoring from a different country back to that space or from that space, taking it back to audiences in a different place. And they are continuously complicated conversations and relationships. And making sure that we don't fall into those spaces of sensationalising our own traumas towards Western museum audiences as well.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I think it's that continual distance and movement of people, that continuous shifting, and our communities belonging to a space - it's something that is complex.

Jessica Taylor: We've had a few more questions come through. So, I'm going to read one from Nusra Qureshi who says: Shiraz, would you like to talk about plantations and the birth of luxury economies, sugar, tea, etc., and current parallels? I see a strong link of violent dislocations to the production of luxury goods, slavery, sugar.

Shiraz Bayjoo: Absolutely. I think we all speak of this - it continues. And the origins of that were very much forged within these plantation colonies. Which is what this whole Global Plantation Series is about, particularly the talk series that will be coming through the symposium that is being organised by Princeton in a couple of weeks. We can look at it as very much continuing to live within the plantation economy. And that we often talk about the Anthropocene and we often talk about our relationships with nature and production are these continuations of what is natural to human beings, because we are connected somehow to nature. But actually, what I think what this series is trying to bring up is that we have, as human beings, had different relationships to nature, particularly through First Nations indigenous practices, that we can look towards that knowledge. And that this is not the only agricultural relationship that we have had and that actually this is the plantation methodology, the methodology of extraction for wealth creation, and that whether we are animals, human beings or plants, we are always continuously trying to escape that system because that system does not promote well-being for those within it. It's about extraction. I'm sure others could speak more.

Jessica Taylor: Would anyone like to? If not, I'll move on to another question from Sunil Shah. Hi Sunil. Sunil asked: to what extent is it possible for your work to be received by communities who can then use that work as a discussion point for the generation of counter archives? It feels like this would be a really positive outcome and siting for your work, but also for the communities who can begin to fill in blind spots. Would anyone like to have a go at that question?

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: I think... Sorry, I'm just trying to read the question again really quickly. For me, I'm just going to talk about the counterarchive. And hopefully that'll answer the question. What provoked me to create this, what I call a counter archive, this is body of work. Which is an imagined way of presenting South Sea Island identity and then inserting it back into the archive. So actually, it's one of the works that's behind me. So, it comes from my whole life of looking back at those archival images and the way that those images had been used to keep that in history, if that makes sense.

So, the archival images of South Sea Islanders of Kanakas in the plantations were always used in these articles. And it's just kind of started and ended there. And then whenever it is discussed, it's history and it's not anything but that, it doesn't have a culture of people who were born out of that or it doesn't have a legacy in any type of way. It's just, that was a moment in history. And these images were used in a way to keep it there. So, seeing that over and over and over again over my lifetime provoked me to create a body of work which inserts a point of difference. And using all of the stories of our oral histories within my family, of my granny and grandfather, I created these family portraits of myself and my mother and my daughter. And then imagined that they get reinserted back into the archives, to the South Sea archives. So, I don't know if that really answers it, but I do hope that that fills in blind spots. And I do see that my work is being used in that sort of way to talk about us as a contemporary culture, instead of "well, the South Sea Islanders happened and then they got deported. And then that was it. They went back home." There's so much conversation around that, which we don't have enough time.

Jessica Taylor: I was really struck, Jasmine, in your conversation with Anna and Shiraz, about the recognition of the strategy that you could use the Internet and search terms and titles to ensure that anyone doing research around the Wunderlich family, the family that you were speaking about before, encounters your work. And so, I thought it was exciting to think about this kind of counter archive being formed on two levels. So, on the level of within institutions and the conversations that we're having within our practices, but then also that anyone on Google would also have this happen and perhaps not be even cognisant of it.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yeah, it makes it all very real. And I think I mentioned this in my talk, you're always sort of striving for real change as an artist, but you don't know if you're ever really seeing it outside of the institutions. And so, when that happened, I'm still mind blown that the Internet can be used as such a great tool.

Shiraz Bayjoo: When I finished the *Ile de France* film, well one of the first things that I always try and make sure I do, is take work back to Mauritius to present back to community and not just as you were saying, keeping it to European museums, et cetera. And what I found there was that because there is so much fracturing that still goes on in terms community on the island, folks were saying to me, if you show it at this museum or in this little gallery or in this community setting, I won't go to that community or I won't go to that one. So, I had to do multiple screenings in lots of different parts of the island. Again, it's a very tiny island so it's a bit crazy. But we had the most

amazing public debates with sort of 50 to 100 people on average. We had folks from the white Mauritian community, which have come from the plantation folks. We had a lot of folks from the Indian indentured community and a lot of young kids from the Creole community. And there were big, big conversations going on. It was just so incredible to see that the work that we make can activate that conversation. And folks were talking about how on the surface the country is very much seen as being racially balanced, but that actually nobody socialises with each other. There is no discourse that takes place personally or outside of the workplace. And how these attitudes and these ideas of who is upper class, who is middle and who is lower in a sense, continue to go on.

And what was wonderful was to see this younger generation. And I think a lot of them are studying in the arts or studying history and sociology and things. And so, they do have some of the tools as well already and are bringing that to this conversation and saying that they demand a better language with which to deal with this. And that was really, really extraordinary. And I would say, not something that I personally see in my artist presentations here in the U.K., for example. So that was something that was really, really brilliant to see. That there was a thirst and a hunger for programming. And I think what you're suggesting there Sunil in your question about how this can move forward, I think there is a huge opportunity for all of us now. That we are, in a sense, continuing to create the archive, especially also as works are collected and are held on to properly. I think there is a major, major opportunity now for us to take what has been in the possession of museums and the outside pair of hands, and now place this back in. And what that can start to activate.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: This idea Shiraz, of shifting hands - I've actually been buying archival images and information off of eBay. And often they come from the UK or Europe, and they're like images of indentured Indians and Natal and all these sorts of things. And it raises questions like, why do you have it? Why do you own it? Why is it on eBay? And who has ownership of this archive and why? Who is collecting them and why are they collecting them? So, it's this idea of, if there is this colonial archive, how is it made more accessible? This amazing curator Imelda Miller from the Queensland Museum does that. She's a South Sea Islander woman and she makes that archive accessible. And communities come in and can interact with that archive and see, "oh, that's my grandparents. This is this." Amazing. But I think there is that other bit, which is that it's a very intense experience. And I think there is another bit, which is showing it in contemporary work and artwork, where there is a space for more conversation with broader communities as well.

So, for me, I've shown work here in Australia, in India. I've not had the privilege to show in South Africa. But when I've shown it here in Australia, especially in Queensland, there is a South Sea Island community here that comes. There's Indian diaspora from Fiji, Indo Fijians. I guess because we have so many migrants here from so many places, there are Indians from South Africa and they all have different experiences with the work. And I think that's the interesting thing as well about this. That there can be these shared archives or shared experiences that can be seen through the work or people can take some things away.

Jessica Taylor: Your comment about this practice of collecting through eBay and these strategies that allow certain objects and histories to enter into these spaces through your work and through this kind of interrogation of the archive, made me think of, Jasmine, your conversation around the dolls that your grandmother used to collect and that you've now worked into your work a little bit. I don't know if perhaps you could just give us a little bit of information on that as well. Because I think it feeds in really nicely.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yeah, I wasn't expecting to have this conversation. Growing up we lived in Townsville and my grandmother and most of our family, my aunties and uncles, all lived in Mackay. And as they still do. And it was common practice for my Nana to collect these black and brown dolls. And she had a whole room in her house which was filled with them, which was dedicated to these to these dolls. And growing up, I never really thought about it. I just knew that the collection was a celebration. I knew that much, they were adored and loved. And that spread out in our family where we all sort of love these dolls. And still now she's in a nursing home because she needs to be taken care of. And we all still now, when we go to visit her, take her... Like I took her a little doll last time I went over. So, it's still something which she cherishes. And as I got older, I realised that it was about being able to see yourself within something, even if it wasn't created for that. They were created out of from a negative space, not from being something positive. So, we, in my family, used them in that way. Because, again, it's about visibility, not being able to see yourself amongst anything apart from your own immediate community, obviously. But I don't know, I'm rambling about dolls now. I'm uncomfortable.

Jessica Taylor: There is a comment from someone. It's not a question, but it's a comment for you: "Jasmine thank you for sharing your experience of going through the family archives. The pain you have to go through in such an exercise is on the one hand validating, but also, an invaluable tool to re-owning the histories that have denied one the place or even existence." So, thank you very much.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Thank you.

Jessica Taylor: Are there any questions from anyone else that we can take up? If not, we can just keep chatting. I don't know if there is anything that has been brought up that anyone wants to go back to that we moved beyond. Any other thoughts that we haven't got to? I can throw in another question because I do have a couple. When we were talking about Anna's symposium that's coming up, I was doing some of the reading around the way that Anna has framed the global plantation. And one of the things that really struck me was not only this interrogation of the historical impact, economic impact, physical impact of the plantation on landscapes, but also the ways in which, the work of artists, of researchers, of archivists can turn to things like imagination, storytelling, worldbuilding as strategies to connect up the past and the present, in instances in which historical forgetting and archival gaps have failed us. So, I don't know if anyone would be willing to speak a little bit about the way that they do turn to imagination or storytelling in their work to make those connections.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I'll go, everyone is just raising eyebrows. Well, for me, when I was doing my research, I was just feeling this immense sense of loss because it started from trying to understand my familial history and just not getting any information and getting lots of roadblocks. So, I think that experience, for me, showed how biased that archive or that colonial documentation was. And I guess, what do I do with this immense feeling of loss? I can't really let that take over things. So, I think that's where I started thinking about how do I counter it or find my own space to fill that loss. And that was through doing research with this colonial archive but reimagining it in a sense that representation is shifted. So, thinking about smells and thinking about the intangible and what things looked like or experiences beyond what was just written, and reading through those lines.

And I think when people talk about critical archival practices, they do talk about how it's how you read those archives. And a lot of the time they've been read through this very prescriptive way of

thinking. So, for me, it was imagining - because I would do that anyway. I'd ask, what did they experience? What was it like? And it was the only way I could understand it, was imagining it. Because for me, my family members have passed away. It's just a thing that happens in South Africa. People die early. So, in my family, there's not many people around and the old people who did have that history didn't share a lot of it because of the shame surrounding it. So that was a really tough thing to feel. Having a lot of questions that my mother and I had that were unanswered. So, this idea of imagining their experiences through reading the archive in a different way was something really empowering for me. And the work for my family and where the work sits in terms of claiming that space and not being ashamed of this history anymore is a big thing for my cousins, my uncle, the family that's still there. This work is a really important way of us having that history and us being able to be really proud of it and where our ancestors came from. Even if it is imagined or is traces from the archive and traces from this. My mom will sing a song that she reads, but she might not sing it the correct way. These things have shifted, but there's still this essence there.

Shiraz Bayjoo: I mean, I can totally relate to that Sancintya. My own relationship to archive image in my painting is always about placing it into these abstract landscapes that create emotional spaces to re-position them. And so, what you were saying about thinking through the psychology. Rather than that academic, linear reading or existing reading of archive, that we're looking at the emotional reading of it. And what is taking place? What are the little clues in these images that perhaps we can pull out and make a different sense of?

And what I also love, not something that I necessarily personally make, but the way that Afro-Futurism has since the 1960s - like you were saying, where we have these huge missing gaps in our histories and where the only way that we are represented through the archive or through history writing is as a reduced identity, a reduced version of our former selves, or even how ethnographic photography, as it just seems to come in at that point, historically starts to exist. It's also at the point where communities, particularly First Nations communities, are perhaps at the end of the road of fighting and are reduced to famine. And so, there's always this image of this reduced identity. And what I've always loved about Afro-Futurism since the 1960s is that it's like, well, if this is the only version of us that exists in the archive, then as artists, as creatives, we have this total creative freedom to reinvent ourselves. Why not invent ourselves? If there is no other version available out there, then let's invent ourselves. And perhaps the more we create that space, the more we then start to inhabit it. Mentally, emotionally. And that's something that I think we perhaps all draw upon a little bit. And certainly, I think artists in this generation draw upon a lot more, not necessarily directly from Afro-Futurism. But without anything else to draw upon, we have a blank canvas. And I think that's something we can make a huge amount from.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: I guess the idea of the decolonial imaginary as well.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Do you want me to talk about it? I was thinking about creating, what you were saying Shiraz, we have that blank canvas and that's exactly how I think about my practice. Because there's not a lot of South Sea artists who have come before me in these contemporary, in these Western institutions anyway. So, there's something so great about having a blank canvas. And something so daunting. There are so many people to be accountable to. But that's definitely how I see it. And I'm looking at, as Islanders who don't have a culture, that's something that doesn't fit. In this part of the world, it just doesn't fit. And outside of our communities, people don't quite understand it. They have this homogenised view of what an islander is, and we are not

it. So, I'm constantly, I think, trying to create this material culture to represent our Pacific slave diaspora.

Hence why we are always adorned with ships and we've got these Western garments in my photography. And then in my sculptural and my installation works, I'm working with sugar and sugar bags. And I really re-claim those materials as our own material culture and my medium for my practice. So, for me, I'm always creating from the voids and you have to imagine what that is. What other tool do you have? And again, going back to the oral histories of my family and, my Granny, she was abducted when she was eight. So, she was raised and groomed into being a house slave, a house servant. And then my mother is the firstborn child. And my grandmother had to go back to work. So, my mother was raised by Granny, so she was raised by the Granny who was abducted from Vanuatu. So, we've got this very immediate handing down of oral histories from Granny who was taken, to my mother. And so, I work with the female body as well, because we have this matriarchal line in my family where they're the holders of the knowledge. And they're the ones who hold the responsibility of subtly handing down this really traumatic history and identity to the children. That's been an unspoken responsibility for the females in my family.

Jessica Taylor: Can I ask how you collect the ships? Where you found them? Do you have quite a large collection of them now?

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Oh, they're literally dripping from my roof. I've just always collected them. And then when I went to Vanuatu for the first time, you get these... Oh it might be reachable. You get these small, little ships. I don't know if you can see that. But it actually says Vanuatu on it. And that was really validating for me when I'd first seen that because I'd already been working with the ships for so long. And of course, when I was reading Edouard Glissant and the hold of the ship being where culture was created. And that really resonated with me so heavily. And I really just couldn't stop collecting. So, I collect all different types. I'm looking at a message one which is on my heat pump behind my computer. So, it's just ones which are visually pleasing to me. I've got one which is in a light bulb, which I got from Fiji when I was over there for a blackbirding symposium. And it's funny because sometimes when people come to my house, they ask why I don't have any waqas. A waqa is the traditional ship. The traditional vessels which islanders used to navigate between the islands. And I always say, well that's not how we were transported. That's not how we migrated. We weren't on a waqa. That's the difference, going back in to why it's quite different to identify as the Pacific slave diaspora. So, yeah, I collect them from all over the world. Wherever I am, I'm going to probably get a ship.

Jessica Taylor: It makes me think about Katherine McKittrick's book *Demonic Grounds*, where she also talks about the radical alternative geographies of the slave ship and creating those narratives to counteract the existing ones that completely dehumanise them as an object when realistically that's not the case. And I saw a great installation shot where your photographic works were showed in a museum that had ships in vitrines. There was an installation shot of some of the photographs on the wall, and it looked like there were ships in vitrines in the shot.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Did you see this on my Instagram?

Jessica Taylor: No, it was online. I was Googling, I was looking for images online and I came across it. I don't remember which site now. So maybe I am wrong.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: I have no idea. But I make my own vessels out of black crows' wings. So perhaps it was that. So, spending so much time in maritime museums and really feeling like that space wasn't created for us, although our history is part of that space. But there's absolutely no context for our culture and our history in that space. So, I started to think about how do I create my own maritime museum? And if I was to imagine what those vessels would look like and what could create them out of. And yes, the black crows' wings ended up being the medium of choice for those.

Jessica Taylor: Someone is asking me to repeat the name of the book that I mentioned, it's *Demonic Grounds* by Katherine McKittrick. And she speaks a lot about about the slave ship, particularly around this text that was written in Canada about a ship named Zong. But it looks at radical black geographies throughout history and into the present moment, about how we rethink geography. First, reflect on, obviously, the ways in which it was developed through colonialism, but then rethink it in radical ways of collectivity now as a strategy for carving out new spaces for these conversations. So, I'm going to ask if there are any more questions, if anyone else has any other questions for these artists? Or if there are any points anyone else wants to pick up on before we go. Well, I just want to say a huge thank you for having this conversation with us. It really was a nice end to this conversation series, to have everyone come together and to be able to explore some of these ideas in more detail. I hope that you all get to meet in person again at some point and continue this, because I think it's really exciting to think about these different connections across spaces and how we can work together to learn from and be in solidarity around these issues. Shiraz, I'm not sure if you want to say anything to wrap up?

Shiraz Bayjoo: Well, I just wanted to say thank you both to Jasmine and Sancintya. This has been such an incredible honour and reassuring to be able to host these conversations with you. And I think, as you said before, it's so incredibly important. I know that this morning this conversation is leaning slightly towards folks in the Western Hemisphere in terms of audience, but really, really brilliant that we are able to bring the practices into more focus here, which is something that is often missing. Thank you so much. And thank you to everyone who's joined us.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: Thank you so much, Jessica and Shiraz and Anna. It's been really fantastic to connect and talk about these things. And thanks for everyone asking questions and listening.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yes. Thank you, everybody. It was so lovely to meet you all. I can't wait to meet you all in person. It's gonna happen.

Sancintya Mohini Simpson: It will.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby: Yeah. This has been really nice. Thanks.

Jessica Taylor: Thank you, everybody. Thank you Sancintya and Jasmine for speaking to us so late on your Saturday evening. We very much appreciate it. It is very late for you now. So, thank you, everyone, for joining us. Have a fantastic weekend.

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

Sancintya Mohini Simpson is an artist and researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. She is a descendent of indentured labourers sent to work, from India to South Africa, on colonial sugar plantations. Her work navigates the complexities of migration, memory and trauma through addressing gaps and silences within the colonial archive. Simpson's work moves between painting, video, poetry and performance to develop narratives and rituals. Her practice is grounded in collaboration and community engagement, engaging in wider narratives surrounding the indenture diaspora community. Simpson's recent solo exhibitions include *New Old Archives*, Milani Gallery, Brisbane (2020); *Kūlī nām dharāyā/ they've given you the name 'coolie'*, Institute of Modern Art Belltower, Brisbane (2020); *Echoes Over Oceans* (with Shivanjani Lal), Firstdraft, Sydney (2020); *Remnants of my ancestors*, Boxcopy (Hobiennale), Hobart (2019); *Natal's Coolie Women*, CARPARK, Milani Gallery, Brisbane (2019); and *Bloodlines* at Metro Arts, Brisbane and Blak Dot Gallery (Next Wave Festival), Melbourne (2018). Her work has been exhibited and performed at a number of institutions, most recently at the Museum of Brisbane (2020); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2019); and QUT Art Museum, Brisbane (2018). In 2019 she undertook a residency at 1Shanthiroad in Bangalore, India, awarded through Asialink Arts Creative Exchange. Simpson is represented by Milani Gallery, Brisbane, Australia.

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.

Jasmine Togo-Brisby is a fourth-generation Australian South Sea Islander, whose great-great-grandparents were taken from Vanuatu as children and put to work on an Australian sugarcane plantation. Togo-Brisby's research examines the historical practice of 'blackbirding', a romanticised colloquialism for the Pacific slave trade, and its contemporary legacy and impact upon those who trace their roots to New Zealand and Australia through the slave-diaspora. Based in Wellington, Togo-Brisby is one of the few artists delving into the cultural memory and shared histories of plantation colonisation across the Pacific, her practice encompassing painting, early photographic techniques and processes, and sculpture.

Jessica Taylor is a Barbadian curator and producer based in London. As the Head of Programmes of International Curators Forum, Jessica co-curated the Diaspora Pavilion exhibitions in Venice and Wolverhampton, and multiple film and performance programmes such as *An Alternative Map of the Universe* at Guest Projects in London, *Migrating Cities* as part of the Spark Festival in Hong Kong, *Sensational Bodies* as part of the Jerwood Staging Series, and *Monster and Island* with artist Sheena Rose at the Royal Academy London. Jessica also produced the exhibition *Arrivants: Art and Migration in the Anglophone Caribbean World* at the Barbados Museum and the multi-site programme *Curating the International Diaspora* in Sharjah, Barbados and Martinique.