


Small Anthropology, and Black Everyday Life, Material Culture and Narrative: An Overview


12th December 2022

Professor Shawn Sobers
University of the West of England






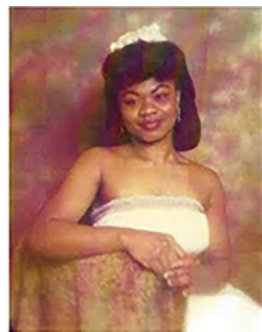
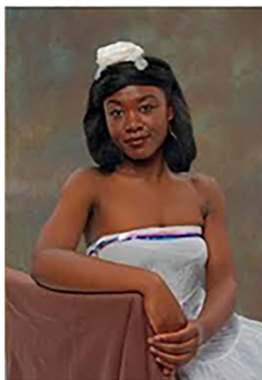
BA (Hons) Film & Photography
Newport Film School (Uni South Wales)
1996

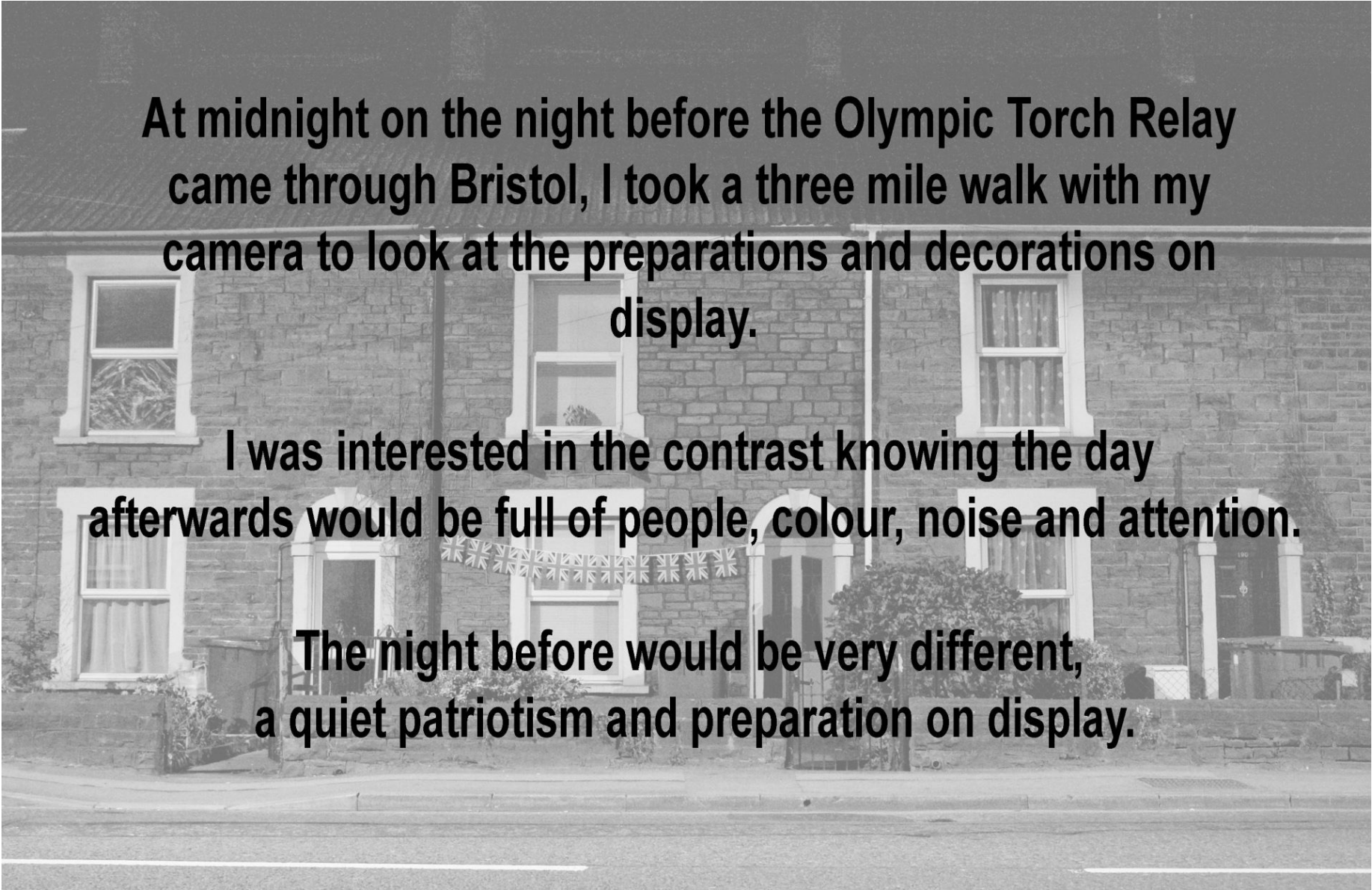


MA – Social Anthropology
(Media Anthropology)
SOAS, Uni of London
2000



PhD – Anthropology of Community Media
UWE
2010





At midnight on the night before the Olympic Torch Relay came through Bristol, I took a three mile walk with my camera to look at the preparations and decorations on display.

I was interested in the contrast knowing the day afterwards would be full of people, colour, noise and attention.

The night before would be very different, a quiet patriotism and preparation on display.











Home grown rituals

Interview with [REDACTED] the owner of one of the houses photographed, where she lived with her husband [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Interview taken place via Facebook Messenger on 5th March 2013

Method: Photo-elicitation

1) What are your memories of putting up the flags? When and how did you come to the decision? Did you have them already or have to buy them?

We decided to celebrate by buying some flags and banners to put on the house as this was going to be a very special occasion in our lifetime, we thought I would be nice to get the children involved in what would be a really nice celebration.

2) How did you organise it? Who did what? Did the children get involved?

As a family we all helped to put the flags and banners up, my husband and the children bought the flags and we all put it up as a joint effort, the children were really excited and we had a lot of interest from people going past and commenting on them.

3) About how much in advance did you put them up, and take them down afterwards?

We put them up a few days before hand, and didn't take them down for at least a week after.

4) Did you take photos of it after you put them up? Is this the first time you have put them up? What memories have you got of this?

We did take some pictures of the house to keep for the children for future reference, the last time we put a flag up was on St George's Day last year.

5) How did it feel on the day of the actual Olympic Relay? What are your lasting memories of the day?

There was a real buzz on the day of the relay, everyone was excited, we invited friends over to celebrate with us, there were hundreds of people lining the streets in great spirit, everyone was really happy, it reminded me of the Silver Jubilee when I was a child myself (which was a long time ago).

Everyone cheering and clapping, it was great, a lovely atmosphere.

It was extra special for us as the Olympic Torch went past our front door which was good, we put loads of chairs in the garden.

It was a really lovely day, it was a smashing, the sun was out and everyone was very happy.

After it was over we continued to celebrate with a few drinks in the garden.

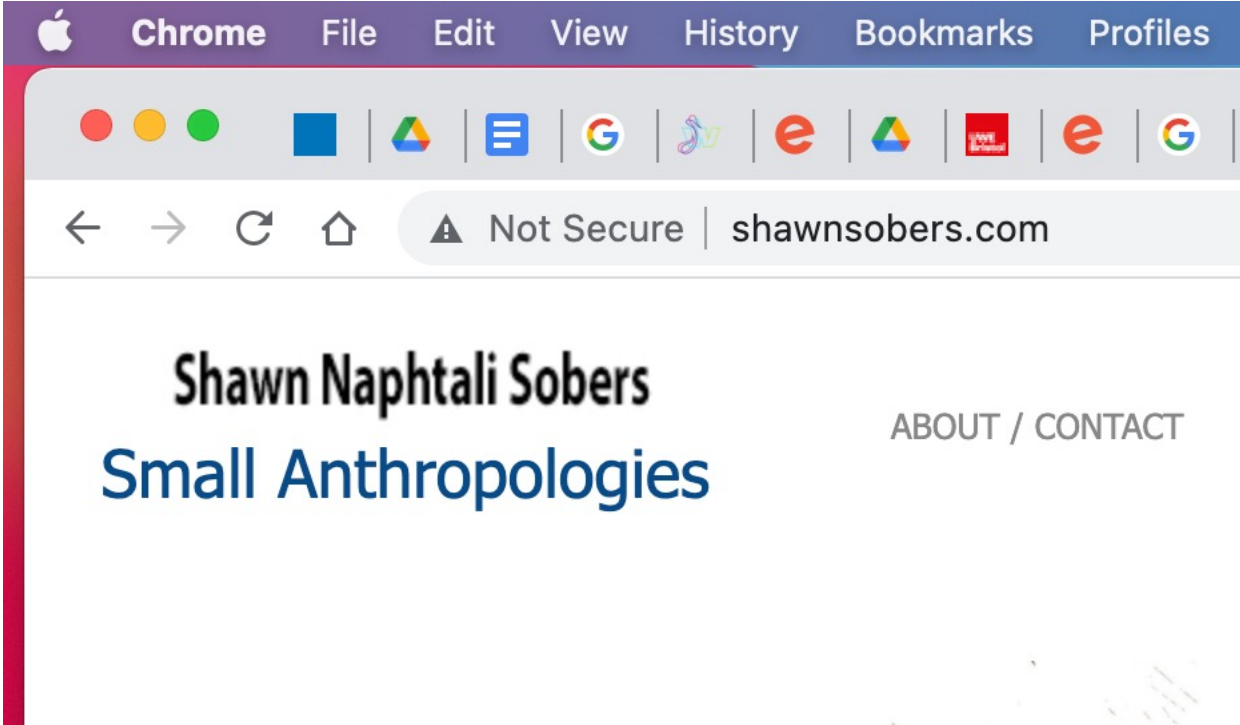
I would like the children to remember this when they are older as fond memories as do I when I think of the Silver Jubilee in 1977.

Ends.



Mrs Williams and Nadia Williams
2012
Shawn Sobers

Circa 2016....



“A painting used to hang in the ante-room of former President Kwame Nkrumah. The painting was enormous, and the main feature was of Nkrumah himself, fighting, wrestling, with the last chains of colonialism. The chains are yielding, there is thunder and lightning in the air, the earth is shaking. Out of all this, three small figures are fleeing, white men, pallid.

One of them is the capitalist, he carries a briefcase. Another is a priest or missionary, he carries the Bible. The third, a lesser figure, carries a book entitled ‘African Political Systems’: he is the anthropologist.”

Johan Galtung (1967)

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Johan Galtung (1967)



Aka
Also the Photographer!

(The realization that I am BOTH!!)

“The term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.”

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2006: 1

Decolonizing Methodologies



Returned Gaze (Empress Bless)
2013
SSobers

“To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly agree with all that has been said about us.

To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves.

The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.”

Linda Tuhiwai Smith
Decolonizing Methodologies

Qualities of Small Anthropology

CHALLENGING
KNOWLEDGE
HIERARCHIES

No inherent hierarchy between academic and 'community' sources of knowledge

No inherent hierarchy between text, visual and audio material

Engaging with narratives from family, friends and non-academics

KNOWLEDGE
VALUES

Not making grand narratives or universal claims

Learning from the everyday and the mundane

Reflexivity of the researcher and inclusion of autoethnographic positionality and vulnerability

CREATIVE
INQUIRY

Privileging intergenerational dialogues and learnings

Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary theoretical positioning

Mixed methods in research approaches and output style

SHOWING
BTS

Celebrating and accepting nuance, serendipity, and embracing the unplanned

Making the method transparent, conflating process and output

OUTPUT
VALUES

Storytelling

Narrative Fragments

Plain language and accessibility



DIRECTIONS IN CULTURAL HISTORY

BLACK EVERYDAY LIVES, MATERIAL CULTURE AND NARRATIVE

Tings in de House

Shawn Sobers



March 2023

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Chapter 1 - Front Door / Hallway sign



WELCOME

When you come here

What you see here

What you hear here

What we do here

What we say here

When you leave here

Let it stay here.

Barbados



The enthusiastic singular message of the “Welcome” sign, is immediately cautioned with the more reluctant sentiments contained in the poem, which is hung directly beneath, tied with the same string. In smaller letters the name ‘Barbados’ lies underneath the poem, yet we know that the repeated ‘here’ of the poem is not speaking about Barbados. We understand the country name speaks the accepted language of a souvenir, communicating the place of purchase (Lasusa, 2007: 274).

The repeated ‘here’ of the poem is (of course) referring to the place where your feet are planted when you are standing there reading the sign in real life – this house. If we are still under any illusion where the ‘here’ is referring to, the wooden plaque that the poem is printed onto is in the shape of a house. The collective messaging of these signs is;

“You are welcome here....but....”

“Do.Not.Bring.The.PoliceTo.My.Front.Door!”

Mum



Invasion

Macka B

Track 3 on [Sign of the Times](#)

Invasion Lyrics

[Intro (spoken)]

Look here old chap it's us who gave you civilization

Invasion!

[Verse 1]

If a man in your house

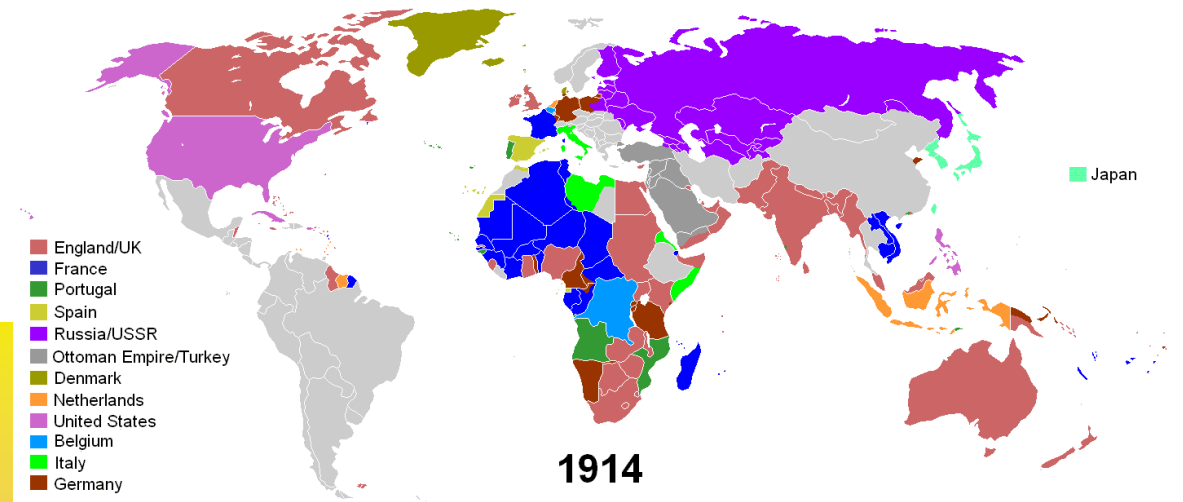
Told you to come out

And told you to live in the garden

If it happened to you

Tell me: What would you do?

Wouldn't you fight and fight and fight them?







I think back to my mum's warning about not bringing police (aka trouble) to the front door. I wonder if the mothers in West Africa before colonialism told that to their children when they went out to play. Strangers came to the village doors bearing gifts, and as hospitable African people were, they were invited in.

In the modern world, with scammers looking for any opportunity to gain access to your home, bank account, email account, social media passwords...the list is endless.

There are lessons to be learned about who to let in the front door, (and in 2020, in the era of Covid19 pandemic when many were confined to their homes, that worry took on an added meaning).

Maybe more cautionary lines need to be added to the witty poem in our hallway.

Chapter 2 (Living Room) – Photo wall





All the handiwork of my mum, it is in-keeping with the domestic aesthetic. The display of photos themselves – not the content of the images - speaks volumes about the limitations in how we perceive identity in relation to our personal pursuits and achievements. I asked my mum to list all the roles she played in society and the family sphere, the list included – nurse, wife, mother, grandmother, committee member, Christian.... and at no time did she say photographer, curator or archivist, yet growing up she operated in all those roles.

She was the photographer of our house, I do not recall ever seeing dad hold a camera. Mum is the custodian of the family photo archive, compiler and keeper of the family albums, and responsible for their ‘public’ display in the home.



1977

(Complex
Emotional
Attachment)



1977



2009



The Wedding
Julie and Sandra
1968 and 2021



The Wedding
Julie and Sandra
1968 and 2021

When Sandra reached out and asked me her initial question, she was enacting an embodied sense of national cultural narrative, and seeking the reconstruction of a national identity that related to the self. Narrative identities provide a framework from within which we are able to navigate an understanding of proximity with the familiar. This framework is particularly so in spaces where we do not originate from, or have made homes away from home. According to Stuart Hall (1996: 623),

National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a discourse – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves.

National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about “the nation” with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it.

National cultural narratives face both ways – from the state outwards in the form of nation building, and from the citizens inwards in the form of identity formation.

CHAPTER 8 (Front Room) – Souvenirs and Ornaments



Sankofa





CHAPTER 4 (Living Room) – Sewing Machine



I don't know if any of you have heard this saying, "You eat the flour and wear the bag!"

Everyone on the Zoom call laughs, nodding in agreement.

In those days shopping used to come from the store in large 50lbs flour bags. You'd wash them and bleach them, they would come out so white. It would always get turned into something.

This is my mum talking about how children in Barbados used to joke about having to wear clothes that were obviously homemade, even though it was something that everyone wore. I have brought together elders from the Bath Ethnic Minority Senior Citizens Association (BEMSCA) to talk about some of the objects discussed in this book, sewing machines being one of them.



The gendered dynamics underpinning lots of the conversation and representations around the sewing machine are clear to see, and it is (unfortunately) far from a revelation that the association with sewing, and also the burden of household chores, is often pointed towards the female members of the house.

Even though in my interviews and discussions about this topic there was talk of male tailors, (more of which below), the female voice and connection with the sewing machine, as seamstresses or machinists, is strong, and tailors, who were all men, felt like a slightly separate special entity.

Within the family unit, the expectation of using sewing machines was more placed on girls, and it was often used for functional needs within the immediate household...



Lubaina Himid,
Six Tailors (2019)



In celebrated artist Lubaina Himid's 2019 painting 'Six Tailors', we see five Black men sat around a table covered with pieces of material and sewing implements, and one man walking behind with possibly trouser material over his shoulder.

Three of the seated men appear to be looking at the man on the far left, who is monochrome and less defined than the others, possibly dishevelled, more of a shadow of man, possibly lost in his own thoughts.

Maybe the other five are making him a new a new outfit, or alternatively maybe he is the elder teacher passing on his skills to the younger generation



“They’re all trying quite hard not to be the most dominant man in the room. They’re making something together, working quite hard on the moment, perhaps creating their way out of trauma. I do like their cotton reels... The idea was to get that many men in a space and have them not planning, exactly, but being and thinking.”

(Himid & Higgins, 2021)

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