Race and Digital Colonial Capitalism:

#FassonStRedGoldBrickLane; Graffiti Ethno-map of Fashion Street's Colonial History

Abstract: This comment piece reassembles a colonial history of Fashion Street London, through the refracted prisms of a graffiti ethno-map and social media hashtag. It does so through my black British feminist conception of colonial digital capitalism.

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So I leave it for four months and then I repaint. So essentially it's like a gallery, if you come here; if you make visits to London, if you wanna come down to Shoreditch you are going to see different paintings of mine; every time you come. That's kind of my thing. I use social media in a way; I use Instagram in the way you would use a gallery. So I have my photographs, I have the person next to the painting and then I have the back story, so you can read the back story. (Extract: Unstructured, Qualitative Interview; Video Transcription: Proximity of Brick Lane, London, May 2017)

The social media hashtags, #FassonStRedGold and #FassonStRedGoldBrickLane were launched in September 2019 succeeding the publication of my books entitled *Adsensory Urban Ecology* (Vol. 1 and Vol. 2). Dedicated to the application of postcolonial critical theory to the analysis of a form of gentrification in which the body is integral as subject and object, my books feature a case study of Brick Lane street artists. Emerging from the aftermath of this empirical research, the social media my concepts of colonial digital capitalism and colonial neurodiversity is the social media hashtag #FassonStRedGoldBrickLane have crystallised further a central premise of the books, i.e. that social media has become integral to an online/offline continuity in adsensory gentrification in which, the body is both subject and object. Axiomatic to the books' case study of street art and Brick Lane is evident a phenomenon I define as graffiti ethno-maps, in which race and ethnicity elide with the street artist's proximal positioning in space so as to disrupt the perspectivism of rational linear teleology. Indeed, the street artist's device of proximal positioning at the intersections of deeply racialized urban ecological historical trajectories is revelatory in its resistance to adsensory forms of gentrification. Graffiti ethno-maps, retrace the intersections of race, ethnicity and gender that direct the topography of urban streets and do so in conjunction with a cognizance of the esoteric truths of online mythology as part of their curation of virtual galleries for their street art. Indeed, the extract of my interview with a street artist in May 2017, is incisive as an exemplar of graffiti ethno-maps in process. For, Brick Lane and Fashion Street provide for impressive canvases upon which auto-biographical portraits of women of colour have been inscribed; but while a familiar visual theme unites the Brick Lane portraits, the Fashion Street display diverges deliberately in its inference of an intervention and disruption in the linear Eurocentric narrative of African colonial history. An issue that was recently eluded to in the Twitter *talk* that annotates the exchange featured in figure 1.,

whereby @jamessummer2 (dataset name[1]) responds to my Tweet with the statement: "*Not your comment but Brick Lane was pretty awful to visit ??*". So as to further empirically case study this I explore an event during a then, recent London Mayoral campaign as an example of, one dimensional spectacle seeking two dimensional currency, a phenomenon I define as Adsplashing.

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[1] "dataset name" Vs "variable name" - the latter is an indicator of value and the former is just symbolic. Thus .if N=0 then "1" unique posting is significant.

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← **Tweet**

#FassonStRedGold: "Fashion Street ... originally Fasson Street, but it was known as Fashion Street as early as 1708" (Wheatley & Cunningham 1891). Graffiti ethno-maps, Fashion Street's urban topography; Fassons as prospectors of London's Brick Lane & Africa's colonial gold coast.
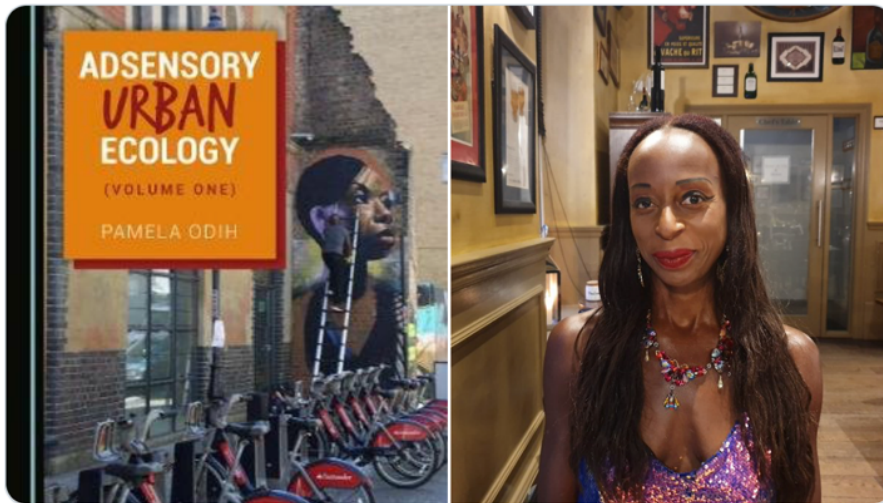
7:09 AM · Sep 18, 2019 · Twitter Web App

⎪⎪ View Tweet activity

3 Retweets   **28** Likes

Replying to @geraldi23591291 and @guardian

Aker @AndrewB45017541 - Sep 20th 2019

Reply Message: "Very interesting thanks for tweeting"

James @jamesummer2 - Sep 22nd 2019

Reply Message: "Not your comment but Brick Lane was pretty awful to visit ??"

Figure 1.: #FassonStRedGold: "Fashion Street ... originally Fasson Street, but it was known as Fashion Street as early as 1708" (Wheatley & Cunningham 1891). Graffiti ethno-maps, Fashion Street's urban topography; Fassons as prospectors of London's Brick Lane & Africa's colonial gold coast.
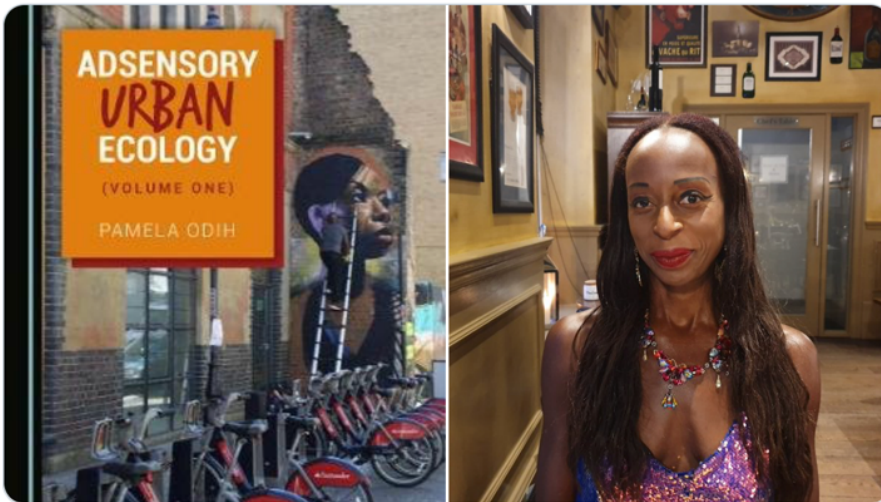Available at: https://twitter.com/geraldi23591291/status/1174203713478639616?s=19

Figure 2.: Sign: #FassonStRedGoldBrickLane Neglected colonial history: "Fashion Street, originally Fasson St, but it was known as Fashion Street as early as 1708" (Wheatley & Cunningham 1891). Graffiti ethno-maps, Fassons as prospectors of London's Brick Lane & Africa's colonial gold coast.
Available at: https://twitter.com/geraldi23591291/status/1175705430238142465?s=19

Axiomatic to graffiti ethno-maps is a non-linear genealogical street artistic technique designed to enable the viewer to experience and decipher simulacra, and their disconnects, signifying the time-shifting and space-shifting of adsensory gentrification. Indeed, consider the street scene imagery captured in the book jacket featured in figure 1., and figure 2. Situated in Fashion Street, London (proximity to Brick Lane) the photograph's inclusion of the Santander bicyclical rank (cycle lease) coupled with the subtle red and gold hue of the colourings is evocative of a legacy of finance capital, aesthetics and continental Europe. One's elementary French qualifies a tentative translation of Fashion Street into Fasson Street and this is confirmed as follows: "Fashion Street, Spitalfields, leads from Brick Lane to White's Row – a very unfashionable locality. The name was originally Fasson Street, but it was known as Fashion Street as early as 1708" (Wheatley and Cunningham 1891: 33). The "1708" date is epochal as it positions Fasson Street's development within the context of British and French colonisation of West Africa. Named after the dynasty of fine Fasson pewters (Markham 1909, Massé 1921) that are recorded as once resident in the now historically obsolescent Pewter Lane (Stow 1633, Wakefield 1794), Fasson Street was prospected from Brick Lane, some indication of this urban ecological visionary is evident in historical texts e.g., "Fashion-Street, Brick-Lane, Spitalfields … it leads into White's Row …" (Lockie 1810). Accepting this, I contend that the Fassons financialised the Fasson Street development from the prospecting of "red gold" (Herbert 1984) in French colonial West Africa. Accomplished in the production of elegant pewter objects the Fassons demonstrated dexterity in the application, to pewter of "de belle fasson" and "fasson d'argent" (Bell 1913:42). Given that the latter translates into "fashion of silver" and is associated with Côte d'argent itself defined as the "silver coast" (Baedekers 1981:105) one might question my association of the Fassons with the French colonial expropriation of "red gold" from Africa's gold coast. But while emulating "fasson d'argent" pewter is a copper infused metal alloy; and Red Gold (i.e. copper) during this colonial era was largely expropriated from British and French colonial West Africa (Davis 2003).

Returning to my case study of the Brick Lane graffiti street artists, it is my contention that graffiti ethno-maps exceed colonial binaries of truth versus mythology. For, the offline/online assemblages of graffiti ethno-maps precipitate *talk* i.e., critically engaged (re)connections that agitate creatively for visionary change as exemplified through the refracted prism of the Twitter social media hashtag: #FassonStRedGoldBrickLane. Indeed, the capacity of this hashtag to open-up a dialogue within the internecine spaces of the political discourses discerning place, ethnic identity and belonging was intriguingly evident as the hashtag's theme became momentarily entangled in an offline/online assemblage concerning a London 2020 mayoral candidate's campaign "walkabout" in Brick Lane. Firstly, consider the *talk* elucidated in figures 3 and 4.

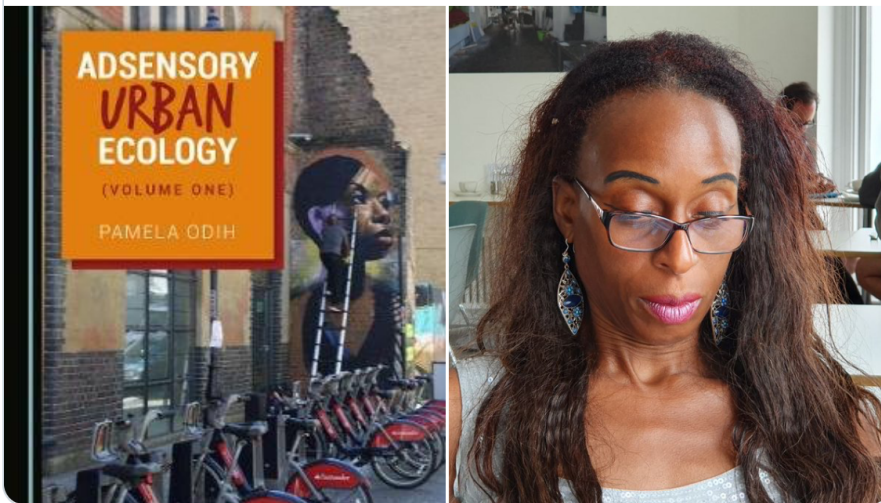Figure 3.: Poetic: "This country life is for me" @_FishMilk salutations! I write on afro-Caribbean male identity mentors & role models. My siblings also experience the generational complexities of space, place & British born immigrant male self. Hence, my messages. Available at:
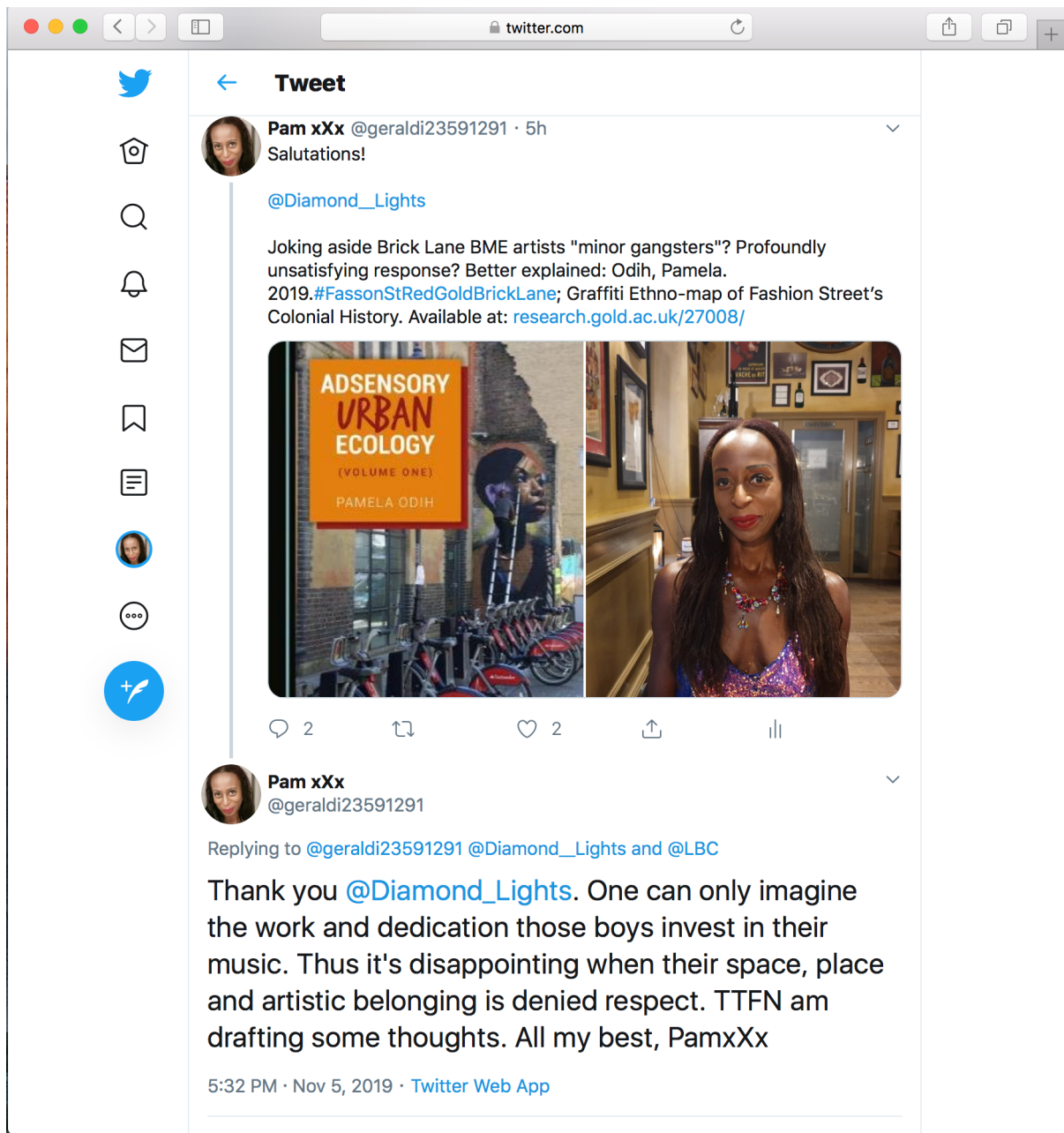https://twitter.com/geraldi23591291/status/1191245237890490369?s=19

Figure 4.: Salutations! ... Joking aside Brick Lane BME artists "minor gangsters"? Profoundly unsatisfying response? Available at: https://twitter.com/geraldi23591291/status/1191737139689672705?s=19

Eluding to *talk* about postcolonial critique evident in the interjection "*Not your comment but Brick Lane was pretty awful to visit ??*" might initially appear as an inconsequential redirection towards a touristic speculation about the cultural display of graffiti art in Brick Lane. Conversely, when situated within the shifting tectonics of race, class and gender in the fledgling initiation of a London mayoral campaign the @jamessummer2 "… awful to visit??" is intriguing and perspicacious. Further to my retweet of a Guardian (2019) editorial @jamessummer2 tweets in reply: "Don't he's a chance of being Mayor of Nowhere [emoji]". Specifically, the Guardian (ibid.) editorial elucidated an event in which London/Dublin based BME[2] musician group HARE SQUEAD, were invited, by a London 2020 mayoral candidate, to participate in a video recorded as part of a campaign "walkabout" in Brick Lane. One needs to caveat, there is limited verification, but according to the Guardian's (ibid.) editorial one may appropriately discern, that a misrecognition occurred in the aftermath of the encounter, whereby the self-defined London/Dublin based BME musicians' complex relation to the space and place of the encounter was allegedly abnegated. Specific details of the alleged abjure elude verification and the resulting Twitter storm vilification colluded with an opportunistic mobilization of the incident for political gain. Additionally, it is with dubiety and critical theory skepticism, in to which one ventures speech radio, in the pursuit of verifiable empirical data. Nevertheless, I listened assiduously on 5th November 2019 to the aforementioned Mayoral candidate featuring live on the Global Media and Entertainment Limited flagship speech radio, LBC. Seemingly unperturbed by the genre's pseudo-individualistic, formulaic orchestrated pugilism, the Mayoral candidate tentatively recapitulated the Brick Lane encounter with the London/Dublin based BME musician group. Now, reframed in the peculiarly distorted guise of a cultural misadventure in Brick Lane vernacular, it was proffered that caprice and witticism should signify the incident as a mere escapade in the gaiety of disharmonized black music cultures. Content, with this English nationalist ethnically cleansed rendition of the Brick Lane encounter the speech radio's "live" broadcast, reformulated the audience, host, guest orchestration into clickbait morsels cascaded through homologous edacious social media digital channels. Whereby, insatiate and dissatisfied dispersed audiences can unite reiteratively in the irretrievable pursuit of the story; albeit scattered into unsatisfying soundbites. It is amidst this fragmented online and offline broadcast social media that the space, place and belonging of the BME creative artists was reconstituted facetiously as a misspoken aphorism. In this respect, one needs to discern the words of the Mayoral candidate:

Audience Member/Caller: *Do you think it is appropriate for someone to use comments like "minor gangsters" to be Mayor of London?*

Mayoral Candidate: *… Four and a half months ago in Brick Lane, I was walking down the road and an Irish band came up to me and were teasing me, quite understandably, because people like to tease politicians by doing fake gang signs. And I was referring to it four and a half months later; and trying to continue the joke by trying to illustrate it for the audience in order to tease myself; and say how much people on Twitter like seeing people teasing politicians. But I absolutely accept that, that is a joke they can participate in, but it is not a joke that is appropriate for me to participate in and I was wrong to do it and I apologize.*

(Source audio visual: @LBC 2019)

For the purposes of my research into the elision of the online and offline in the gentrification of post-industrial urban space, the Mayoral candidate's social and broadcast media reformulation of the encounter, elucidates the significance of a reciprocity of perspective to the operation of adsensory sign technologies. Whereby, as formulated in Odih (2019), in the post-industrial urban ecology of inner-city regeneration, adsensory technologies collude and collide as they extend avariciously into the infrastructure of neoliberal, managerialist gentrification.

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[2] Black Minority Ethnic (BME).

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