

“Those esteemed moral philosophers and activists *Public Enemy* on the opening track of their album ‘Fear of a Black Planet’ sampled the phrase “If you don't know your past, you don't know your future.” And I’m ashamed to say for a while I did not know my past.

Even though my family heritage is of erudite, verbal chroniclers I shunned my past for the knowledge of what my classmates grandads did in the war. Like Terry Hall and Linval Golding of *The Specials* “Fashion became my only culture” in the ‘Do Nothing’ Britain of the early 1980’s. And it wasn’t until the late 80’s when fashion and culture combined with Soul 2 Soul and nights at the Africa Centre, that I actually did something - I started on the journey to know my past.

Some say that our history, in the one foot we have in the land we call father, has been deliberately erased. Some say that the price paid for our parents actualisation of their nomadic soul is that, as far as history is concerned, we have to ‘take the L’.

But the past can be as far back as Cheddar man, the moors of England, ‘*Belle*’ or the New Cross Fire. It can also be as far back as yesterday. As dramatists we can help the work of historians such as Onyeka, Kehinde Andrews, David Olusogo and Akala in chronicling our past for future generations. In recent years theatres have revived the work of Caryl Phillips, Winsome Pinnock, Roy Williams and the late great Mustapha Matura. But what of contemporary writers, who have been inspired by them, that have one foot in the past.

Juliet Gilkes Romero is one of those contemporary writer who believes that we should know our past. The former journalist spent a career in search of the truth. and she continued that that search in her various plays. Her past work includes her monologue in the *Soon Gone* series for BBC television chronicling and personalising the Windrush generation. And her future play will premiere at the Royal Shakespeare Company next year. *The Whip* will examine the slave trade.

But for me, it is her radio play - *One Hot Summer* that tells a story in the past so we can know our future. *One Hot Summer*, painstakingly researched, deals with events surrounding the race riots that broke out in Liverpool 100 years ago. Like any good radio play she did what the theatre could not. Like any good dramatist she engaged the head by engaging the heart. She managed, the no doubt difficult task, of getting a play that uses language that reflects the racist attitudes of the period on Radio 4 at 2.15pm unedited.

It was when the character of Johnson utters the line –“No one will ever know I lived” that made me look at myself, examine my own ignorance and made me ashamed that even though I was on a journey to know my past that I didn't know that there were black soldiers in World War I.

Ladies and gentlemen, the recipient of the 2019 Roland Rees award... Juliet Gilkes Romero.”

Rex Obano