

**Creolising London: Black West Indian
activism and the politics of race and
empire in Britain, 1931-1948**

By

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Submitted for examination for Ph.D

Declaration of Authorship

I, Daniel James Whittall, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

This thesis explores black West Indian activism in London between 1931-1948. It does so through a focus on those black West Indian activists who involved themselves in the work of four campaigning political organisations, namely, the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA), the International African Service Bureau (IASB), and the Pan-African Federation (PAF). The thesis argues that the presence of colonial subjects in 1930s and 1940s London contributed to a process of creolisation, whereby complex internal and external colonial pressures worked to transform the imperial metropolis. The thesis therefore uses the study of black West Indian activists in Britain in order to trace the geographical networks, 'contact zones,' spaces and places through which this process of creolisation took place in 1930s and 1940s London. In order to do so, it focuses primarily on certain distinct modes of political practice in which the LCP, IAFA, IASB and PAF engaged. In particular, chapters focus on how these organisations sought to contest the racialisation of space in London and the wider empire through a range of attempts to open establishments which countered the prevailing colour bar; utilised public gatherings as sociable spaces in which diverse political work could be undertaken; and produced and circulated periodicals that provided a platform on which to debate the contours of the African diaspora and the fundamental features of modern racism and racially-based identities. The thesis also explores the relationship between these different modes of political practice through a study of the response of black West Indian activists in Britain to the Caribbean labour and social unrest of the 1930s. Overall, the thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of how the politics of race and empire were constituted in 1930s and 1940s London.

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this work, but for now I'll let him get away with just drawing all over the drafts. Thank you, with love.

Wat a devilment a Englan!
Dem face war an brave de worse,
But me wonderin how dem gwine stan
Colonizin in reverse.

Louise Bennett, 'Colonisation in reverse' (1966)

Introduction: ‘Colonizin in reverse’

Shortly after returning to the Caribbean in 1937, after a five year stay in London, the black Jamaican feminist Una Marson published a collection of poetry entitled *The Moth and the Star*. Amongst the poems in this collection, described by James Weldon Johnson in a letter to Marson as a ‘beautiful book,’¹ Marson included ‘Little Brown Girl,’ a poem narrated by a white Londoner reflecting on an encounter with a West Indian woman. The poem begins,

Little brown girl

Why do you wander alone

About the streets

Of the great city

Of London?

Why do you start and wince

When white folk stare at you?

Don’t you think they wonder

Why a little brown girl

Should roam about their city?

Their white, white city?

¹ Letter from Johnson to Marson, cited in D. Jarrett-Macauley (1998), *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-1965* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 120.

Anticipating Franz Fanon's later explication of the experience of encountering the phrase 'Look, a Negro,' Marson uses her poetry to explore the everyday experiences of being black in the imperial metropolis, but does so through the eyes of a metropolitan inhabitant.² In doing so, Marson offers a more complex interpretation than does Fanon of the disjuncture brought about by the presence of colonial migrants on the streets of an imperial capital. Marson's metropolitan inhabitant is troubled by the identity of this 'little brown girl,' literally struggling to place her.

And from whence are you

Little brown girl?

I guess Africa or India

Ah no, from some island

In the West Indies

But isn't that India

All the same?³

United with other colonial peoples by the indiscriminating gaze of a bemused metropolitan inhabitant, Marson's 'little brown girl' thus comes to represent the experiences of a broad range of colonial people marked out as racially different on entering the metropolis. The poem closes with a reflection on the gap which separates metropolitan inhabitant from colonial migrant.

Little brown girl

² F. Fanon (2008 [1967]), *Black Skin, White Masks* London: Pluto: 84.

³ U. Marson (1937), *The Moth and the Star* Kingston: 13.

You are exotic
And you make me wonder
All sorts of things
When you stroll about London
Seeking, seeking, seeking.
What are you seeking
To discover in this dismal
City of ours?
From the look in your eyes
Little brown girl
I know it is something
That does not really exist.

Marson's poem presents an ideal departure-point for this thesis. It offers a literary depiction by a West Indian migrant reflecting on the ambivalent reactions of a 1930s Londoner to the experience of being confronted by a racially distinct, colonial woman on the streets of the imperial capital, written through the eyes of that Londoner his- or herself. The poem reflects on the complex process through which metropolitan identities came to be troubled by their relationship to a city which was increasingly populated by non-white people from the colonies. For those Londoners willing to see it, 'their white, white city' – always, of course, a fictional entity – was itself being colonised, as people from afar began to 'stroll about London', searching for that 'something / that does not really exist.' But Marson also gestures at the difficulties faced by black West Indian migrants in London themselves, coming to terms with life in a city in which they were often viewed as strange and alien. When Marson has her

narrator speak of ‘their ... city’ and, in the final stanza, this ‘City of ours,’ she deploys a language of ownership which highlights the exclusion experienced by nonwhite people in a city marked by the operation of what became known as the ‘colour bar.’

This thesis takes as its focus the activities of black West Indian migrants in 1930s and 1940s London. 1930s London was a city which had been deeply shaped by empire. It was also a city in which race played an important role, and these two aspects – the politics of empire and of race – often intersected with one-another. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have recently argued, the early years of the twentieth century witnessed a hardening of global racial attitudes as a result of which a group of ‘white men’s countries,’ including imperial possessions such as Australia and South Africa, as well as Britain herself and the USA, had come to be given privileged status as the bastions of civilisation.⁴ Such global shifts, driven by fears of a challenge to the pre-eminence of whiteness within the empire, had ramifications within Britain. For example, Paul Rich has written of how, in the early years of the twentieth century, doctrines of racial segregation ‘enjoyed fairly wide approval amongst sections of the intelligentsia and middle class’ in Britain.⁵ In the 1930s, as Susan Pennybacker puts it, ‘the Empire was a central foundation of Britain’s life and ... a source of much of her wealth.’ From London in particular ‘flowed much of the Empire’s power, investment, and governance,’ and the city played an important role in what Pennybacker terms ‘the vast inter-war imperial order,’ shaped by global flows of commodities, finance, knowledge, and people.⁶

⁴ M. Lake and H. Reynolds (2008), *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵ P. Rich (1998), *Race and Empire in British Politics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 94.

⁶ S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: 1-2.

These flows did not travel only in one direction, however. London's position within the wider imperial social formation involved aspects of the empire shaping the metropolis in return, such that, in the words of Antoinette Burton, empire was 'not just a phenomenon "out there," but a fundamental and constitutive part of English culture.'⁷ By the 1930s, colonial peoples were increasingly present on the streets of London.⁸ Not all such people were marked by racial difference. As Angela Woollacott has argued in her work on Australian women in London, 'White colonials have ... been a substantial, shaping constituency of London,' though these white colonials often still found themselves being 'held to be less than quite civilized' by residents of the imperial metropolis.⁹ 1930s London was, as an Australian journalist described it on the brink of that decade, '[t]he world's magnet, where one happens on friends and well-known personalities from the uttermost parts of this far-flung Empire of ours.'¹⁰ However, for those visitors and migrants more visibly marked by racial difference, London offered a different prospect altogether. For black colonial migrants coming to Britain, faced by what David Killingray has called 'the deeply ingrained racial antipathy that permeated official and private institutions and many white individuals,' the connections between racial attitudes and identities in Britain and the politics of empire were, as shall be seen

⁷ A. Burton (2003), 'Introduction: On the inadequacy and indispensability of the nation,' in A. Burton (ed.) *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* London: Duke University Press: 3.

⁸ B. Porter (2004), *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 258-259.

⁹ A. Woollacott (2001), *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 14-15.

¹⁰ Cited in Woollacott, *To Try her Fortune in London*: 9.

throughout this thesis, many and varied.¹¹ As Eric Walrond, a writer from British Guiana better known for his role in the Harlem Renaissance, wrote whilst working in London for Marcus Garvey's periodical *The Black Man*, 'It is indeed a paradox that London, capital of the largest Negro Empire in the world ... should be extremely inexpert in the matter of interracial relations.'¹²

It is this supposed paradox which sits at the heart of this thesis. In particular, this study will examine some of the ways in which members of one particular region of this 'largest Negro Empire in the world' attempted to challenge prevailing understandings of race and racial difference in Britain and the Empire, and in doing so articulated a relationship between ideas about race and the process of racialisation which transcended the division between colony and metropole. Through an analysis of how black West Indian activists negotiated the politics of race and empire in imperial London, the thesis will interrogate the ways in which colonial subjects marked as racially other practised forms of political activism which enabled them to draw attention to the existence of racial oppression in Britain and the Empire, and slowly to engage in the task of ensuring that such incidents and attitudes could be open to challenge.

In particular, the thesis seeks to address the following primary research question:

- How did black West Indian activists understand, interpret, and contest the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s London, and how might an analysis of the modes of political practice through which such an engagement

¹¹ D. Killingray (2008), "'A good West Indian, a good African, and, in short, a good Britisher'": Black and British in a colour-conscious Empire, 1760-1950,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* **36: 3**: 375.

¹² Eric Walrond, 'The Negro in London,' *The Black Man*, March 1936: 10.

took place enhance understanding of the relationship between London and the empire in this period?

In order to address this question, the thesis asks a series of related sub-questions, each of which is designed to enable the main research question to be better broached.

- What modes of political practice did black West Indian activists deploy in order to engage critically with the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s London?
- What were the particular geographies of these modes of political practice, and how did they connect black West Indian activists in London to wider currents of thought and activism in Britain, the colonies and the wider African diaspora?
- Within what political networks were black West Indian activists in 1930s and 1940s London positioned, and what were the relationships between these networks and the modes of political practice in which black West Indian activists were engaged?
- Can 1930s and 1940s London be understood as a city undergoing ‘colonisation in reverse’ and, if so, how appropriate is the framework of creolisation for understanding the relationship between London and the British Empire, in particular the Caribbean, in this period?
- What role, if any, did black West Indian activists, and the political practices they engaged in, have in helping to creolise London in the 1930s and 1940s?

These questions seek to bring together empirical research into the historical geographies of black West Indian migrants in 1930s and 1940s London with theoretical concerns to

explore the relationship between space and politics. In particular, by taking as its focus distinct modes of political practice, this thesis directly engages with a diverse body of work which has concerned itself with the idea that practices and performances are not merely representational tools, but are also active technologies in the construction of social and political worlds. Taking its inspiration from recent works which have sought to combine theoretical exploration of these questions with historical-geographical research into particular empirical contexts,¹³ the thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of how the politics of empire in 1930s and 1940s London was constituted through the actions and interactions of a variety of people and objects in diverse spaces and through complex geographical networks.

The focus of this thesis falls primarily on those years prior to the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury docks in 1948. The arrival of this ship has often been given a special status as the founding moment of West Indian migration, and of the migration of non-white peoples more broadly, to Britain. Much scholarly work has been done to debunk this myth, and it is now clear that, as Stuart Hall has written, ‘The *Windrush*, which is often given an originary status in the narrative of the formation of a black British diaspora, was not really the origin of anything.’ Instead, the *Windrush*’s arrival ‘served as an important hinge between the large numbers of black men and women already represented in many walks of British social life before the war ... and the later arrival (in significantly enlarged numbers) of black people as an identifiable group.’¹⁴

¹³ D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-global Networks* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; M. Ogborn (2007), *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* London: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁴ S. Hall (2007), ‘Preface,’ in P. Gilroy, *Black Britain: A Photographic History* London: Saqi: 7.

Hall's comments draw attention to one of the central issues surrounding the arrival of black West Indians in Britain, namely, the question of race. This thesis focuses primarily on black West Indians, taking the term black generally to relate to persons of African descent. Questions of racial identity will be discussed at greater length in chapter two, but for now it is important to note that the definition of what was meant by the term black, and of related terms such as 'coloured' or 'African,' was one of the central preoccupations of the organisations and individuals at the heart of this thesis. Racial identities in 1930s Britain were not fixed and settled, but were instead being negotiated, defined and redefined through a widespread process of debate. Alastair Bonnett and Anoop Nayak have noted that racial terminology can at times work to 'make space seem irrelevant' by detaching identity from territorial and locational referents.¹⁵ However, this thesis will demonstrate some of the ways that, in 1930s and 1940s London, racial terminology and racialised identities were themselves forged through a range of practices and performances, on the written page, in hostels and cafes, and at a range of public gatherings, and that the spaces in which these identities were being articulated were in turn crucial to how these identities were framed and how understandings of racial identity were transmitted. By exploring some of the spaces in which this process of definition and redefinition took place, and the practices through which it was articulated, the thesis will examine the relationship between the politics of empire and the process of racialisation in 1930s and 1940s London.

A geographical approach to these issues is particularly relevant because, as Ian Baucom has argued, 'the rhetorics of spatiality and the subrhetorics of locatedness' have

¹⁵ A. Bonnett and A. Nayak (2003), 'Cultural geographies of racialization – The territory of race,' in K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Geography* London: Sage: 300.

been ‘central to imperial culture and anti-imperial critique’ in a variety of ways.¹⁶ Indeed, this thesis takes this argument further, arguing that in 1930s and 1940s London, spatiality mattered to the politics of race and empire in Britain in ways which were more than merely rhetorical. Baucom argues that imperial culture has often functioned ‘by defining imperial space as something subordinate to but quite different from English space,’ but he goes on to note that ‘[a]s Nigerian, Indian and West Indian women and men took residence in England ... [and] took their places within the locations of Englishness, they also took partial possession of those places, estranging them, and, in the process, transforming the narratives of English identity that these spaces promised to locate.’¹⁷

Much work has now been done to reconstruct the individual lives of particular black West Indian activists who spent time in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s. There are now important studies of figures such as Una Marson,¹⁸ C.L.R. James,¹⁹ George Padmore,²⁰ Amy Ashwood Garvey,²¹ W. Arthur Lewis²² and others. However, there has to date been considerably less work done which brings together these diverse individuals and attempts to examine the histories of their time in Britain collectively.

¹⁶ I. Baucom (1999), *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* Princeton: Princeton University Press: 6.

¹⁷ Baucom, *Out of Place*: 6, 38.

¹⁸ Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson*.

¹⁹ C. Høgsbjerg (2010), *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain, 1932-38* Unpublished PhD, University of York.

²⁰ J. Hooker (1967), *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* London: Pall Mall.

²¹ T. Martin (2007), *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-African Feminist and Mrs Marcus Garvey No. 1, or a Tale of Two Amies* Dover: Majority Press.

²² R. Tignor (2006), *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

This thesis will hope to partially fill this gap. In order to do so, it focuses primarily on the main campaigning organisations established by black West Indian activists in Britain during these years. The reasons for doing so are discussed at greater length in chapter two, but here it is important to outline something of the history of these organisations.

The League of Coloured Peoples

The League of Coloured Peoples was primarily the brainchild of the black Jamaican doctor, Harold Moody, and was first established in 1931. Moody came to Britain in 1904 to study medicine at Kings College, London. Upon graduating, Moody hoped to find himself a job in a London hospital or medical practice, but was continually rebuffed on account of the colour of his skin. Instead, Moody opened his own medical practice in Peckham, South London, which he ran for the rest of his life. It was in that part of London that Moody lived throughout his life in Britain with his English wife, Olive Moody, née Tranter, and raised a family. Moody's marriage to a white woman itself provoked prejudice, and reportedly upset both families.²³

Moody became an important figure in British religious life. In 1927, he was appointed to the Metropolitan Auxiliary Council of the London Missionary Society (LMS), during the 1930s he was first London, then national President of the Christian Endeavour movement, and in 1943 he was appointed chairman of the LMS. David

²³ D. Vaughan (1950), *Negro Victory: The Life Story of Dr Harold Moody* London: Independent Press: 27-28; D. Killingray (2004), '“To do something for the race”: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,' in B. Schwarz (ed) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 59.

Vaughan, Moody's friend and biographer, noted that by the 1920s 'He was rapidly becoming a national figure in the religious life of Great Britain,' and more recently David Killingray has suggested that 'the most decisive influence in Moody's life was his conversion to Christianity' and that 'Christian doctrine underwrote Moody's ideas of humanity and race.'²⁴

In the late 1920s, Moody's contacts with Christian organisations led to him being involved in the founding of an organisation devoted to challenging the colour bar in Britain, known as the Joint Council for the Understanding Between White and Coloured People in the United Kingdom. Founded by the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers, this group was launched in 1931 as a result of discussions which had taken place following a Quaker conference at Friends House in London, at which Moody had been amongst the speakers.²⁵ Moody was vice-chairman of the group, and other prominent members included Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain. Whilst Moody was the most prominent black man in the organisation, he was not alone – the British Guianan J.A. Barbour James, Barbadian Arnold Ward, and the African-American musician and vocalist John Payne were all members.²⁶

Moody was, however, becoming increasingly convinced that Christian-run organisations had too much other work to do to be able to focus sufficient energy on challenging the colour bar. In 1931, Moody therefore made his own plans to establish

²⁴ Vaughan, *Negro Victory*: 57; Killingray, 'To do something for the race': 55-56.

²⁵ Friends House Archive (FHA), Papers on the Colour Question, 1929-36, L051.7; 'Conference on the colour bar in England,' *The Friend*, 6 December 1929: 1126.

²⁶ The full committee is listed on a propaganda leaflet distributed by the Joint Council. See FHA Papers on the Colour Question, 1929-36, L051.7. 'The Joint Council to Promote Understanding Between White and Coloured People in Great Britain' leaflet. Barbour James, Ward, and Payne would all be associated with the LCP at various points in the coming years.

an organisation run primarily by non-white people. With the encouragement of Charles Wesley, an African-American Professor of History at Howard University in the USA, who was active in the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (NAACP), and who Moody had met at a meeting of the Central Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) on Tottenham Court Road, Moody founded the League of Coloured Peoples, intending it to be modelled in part on the NAACP.²⁷

The LCP was intended to 'interest members in the welfare of coloured peoples in all parts of the world,' and included amongst its membership people from Africa, the West Indies, the USA, Asia and Britain. As Killingray writes, '[t]he LCP executive was mainly West Indian with some Africans and the occasional Asian member,' and amongst its most active and prominent members aside from Moody were the West Indians Una Marson, W. Arthur Lewis, and Learie Constantine.²⁸ Prominent white supporters of the League included the imperial historian Margery Perham, the Irish humanitarian Lady Kathleen Simon, and the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Moody saw the LCP as a 'Christian organisation,' a perspective which many though not all other members would have agreed with.²⁹ The organisation held regular meetings and social events – often addressed by colonial officials or leading intellectuals – campaigned against the colour bar in Britain and the empire by writing to and meeting with government officials, offered support and assistance to non-white people confronted by the colour bar in all walks of life, and also published its own periodicals, known as *The Keys* in the 1930s and the *LCP News Letter* in the 1940s.

²⁷ Vaughan, *Negro Victory*: 54-55; Killingray, 'To do something for the race': 61-62; 'League of Coloured Peoples,' *The Times*, 16 March 1931: 15; 'Opposing the colour bar: Another London organisation,' *West Africa*, 21 March 1931: 342.

²⁸ Killingray, 'To do something for the race':62.

²⁹ Killingray, 'To do something for the race': 63.

The International African Friends of Abyssinia, International African Service Bureau, and Pan-African Federation

Aside from the League of Coloured Peoples, this thesis also focuses on another group of organisations which were closely interrelated in the 1930s and 1940s, and which were again primarily founded and led by black West Indian activists. In 1935, following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Trinidadian C. L. R. James established the International African Friends of Abyssinia with the assistance of his fellow West Indians Amy Ashwood Garvey and Chris Brathwaite, alias Chris Jones. Shortly after its founding, two other prominent West Indians, George Padmore and George Griffith, alias Ras Makonnen, became important figures in the group, which was launched at a public meeting in London on 23 July 1935.³⁰ Padmore later recalled that ‘the main purpose of this organization was to arouse the sympathy and support of the British public for the victim of Fascist aggression and “to assist by all means in their power in the maintenance of the territorial integrity and political independence of Abyssinia.”’ Padmore recalled that the officers of the organisation were ‘Mr C. L. R. James of Trinidad as chairman; Dr Peter Milliard of British Guiana and the Hon. T. Albert Marryshaw of Grenada as vice-chairmen; Mr Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya as honorary secretary; Mrs Amy Ashwood Garvey ... as honorary treasurer,’ whilst the remainder of the executive consisted of Padmore himself, Sam Manning from Trinidad and Mohammed Said from Somaliland.³¹

³⁰ *West Africa*, 27 July 1935.

³¹ G. Padmore (1956), *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle For Africa* London: Dennis Dobson: 145; J. Murray-Brown (1972), *Kenyatta* London: Fontana: 197.

Initially, the IAFA passed resolutions calling for the League of Nations to intervene against the Italian government. James in particular, being a committed Marxist at this point, recalled the incident as a ‘blunder,’ though one which they soon reversed by voting against ‘any appeal to the League of Nations’ because ‘most of us ... had a conception of politics very remote from debates and resolutions of the League,’ a point which also struck Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, when he attended an IAFA meeting.³²

The IAFA held regular protest meetings in London, and James considered sending a fighting force from Britain to support Abyssinia.³³ However, in 1936 the organisation wound itself up. As Padmore recalls, ‘[t]he society disbanded its activities when a number of influential English friends ... decided to carry on the propaganda work under the auspices of the Abyssinia Association.’³⁴ Throughout 1936, efforts were made by the former members of IAFA to establish a Pan-African Federation in London. Several public meetings were held under this name, and the group was also advertised in the press.³⁵ For reasons as yet unknown, this group once again changed its name in

³² C. L. R. James (1974), ‘Black intellectuals in Britain’ in B. Parekh (ed.) *Colour, Culture and Consciousness* London: Allen and Unwin: 158-159; ‘A London diary,’ *New Statesman and Nation*, 3 August 1935.

³³ James, ‘Black intellectuals in Britain’: 158-159; ‘Negro army for Abyssinia,’ *News Chronicle*, 26 August 1935: 2.

³⁴ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*: 145; on the Abyssinia Association, see D. Waley (1975), *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War* London: Maurice Temple Smith: 114-116.

³⁵ Reports from 14 June 1936 and 3 July 1936 in The National Archives, Kew, KV2/1787, and KV2/1817; Notice written on headed paper of Pan-African Federation, no date but 1936, in KV2/1817; *New Times and Ethiopia News*, 26 September 1936: 2; J. Derrick (2008), *Africa’s ‘Agitators’: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* London: Hurst: 337.

1937, relaunching as the International African Service Bureau.³⁶ This group was intended to support ‘the demands of Africans and other colonial peoples for democratic rights, civil liberties, and self-determination.’³⁷ Padmore chaired the group, whilst James, Kenyatta, Makonnen, Jones and I. T. A. Wallace Johnson, from Sierra Leone, made up the other leading figures.³⁸ Makonnen recalled that he drafted a constitution for the organisation, and consciously designed it in to link pan-African politics to socialism and cooperative models of economic ownership.³⁹ The group again held regular public meetings, and also published a number of different periodicals, developed links to several Labour MP’s such as Arthur Creech Jones, and also included as patrons socialists such as Mary Downes, Nancy Cunard, Frank Ridley and Victor Gollancz. Padmore, formerly a leading Communist in Moscow, brought to the group a diverse global range of contacts, including throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and with black activists in France, and Wallace Johnson was able to link the organisation to a number of West African radicals.⁴⁰

The membership and associated membership of the IASB was diverse, but it was the West Indians who appear to have been its driving force. Indeed, James would later

³⁶ Makonnen noted of the name change that ‘We had naturally considered the possibility of reviving DuBois’s [sic] pan-African movement, but it seemed safer to operate under the umbrella of service rather than risk a frontal attack by taking a bolder pan-African title.’ R. Makonnen (1973), *Pan-Africanism From Within*, ed. King, K. London: Oxford University Press: 117.

³⁷ *Africa and the World*, June 1936.

³⁸ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*: 146-149.

³⁹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*: 118.

⁴⁰ James, ‘Black intellectuals in Britain’: 158; B. Edwards (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* London: Harvard University Press: 241-305; Derrick, *Africa’s ‘Agitators’*: 389.

describe the organisation as ‘the most striking West Indian creation between the wars.’⁴¹ Aside from holding meetings and publishing their own periodicals, its members also wrote prolifically for periodicals of the British labour movement, and Padmore in particular saw his writings published in the colonial and African-American press. IASB members also published several books of their own in these years. However, as war drew close James travelled to the USA, Wallace Johnson to Africa, and this, combined with financial problems, saw the IASB’s activities begin to slow. During wartime, whilst the remaining members in London continued to be politically active, the IASB itself ceased to function altogether.⁴²

However, in the post-war years Padmore and Makonnen once again revived the idea of a Pan-African Federation operating in Britain. This renewed body incorporated several other organisations based in London, including the West African Students Union, the Kikuyu Central Association, and the membership of the IASB. Founded in 1944, and based largely around Makonnen, who had by now moved to Manchester, the Pan-African Federation played the major role in organising the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester. It also held protest meetings in London and elsewhere, and published a periodical entitled *Pan-Africa*. As well as Makonnen, Padmore and his partner Dorothy Pizer were leading figures, as were the socialists Dinah Stock and Reginald Reynolds, as well as the South African writer Peter Abrahams. The group was active for four years, until in 1948 financial pressures once again forced the organisation into decline.

⁴¹ C. L. R. James (2001 [1963]), *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd Ed. London: Penguin: 310.

⁴² C. Polsgrove (2009), *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 47, 54.

Thesis Structure

The above brief outline summarises the two main organisations on which this thesis is focused. However, the thesis does not purport to offer a complete history of each of these organisations, nor detailed biographies of their individual members. Instead, the thesis uses these organisations and individuals to approach wider themes relating to the presence of the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s London, and the relationship between these forms of politics and diverse types of spatialised political practice. Each of the individual chapters thus explores a particular aspect of the political practices in which black West Indian activists were engaged in 1930s and 1940s London. In the next chapter, attention turns to framing some of the key conceptual terms operating in this thesis. The chapter discusses what is meant by the figure of the West Indian, and by the notion of the ‘politics of empire’. It puts these concepts into dialogue with geographical approaches to the study of race, and in particular to ways of framing and understanding the African diaspora. Finally, the chapter offers an overview of previous literature on the history of West Indians in Britain.

Chapter two then turns its attention to the relationship between London and the empire, with a particular focus on the Caribbean. Setting out a theoretical approach to understanding London as a colonial city undergoing a process of creolisation, the chapter also lays out some of the more material ways in which empire coursed through London in the 1930s and 1940s. The chapter closes by drawing out some of the methodological implications for understanding London as a colonial city undergoing a process of creolisation.

Chapter three looks at some of the ways that West Indian activists challenged the racialisation of space in 1930s and 1940s London. In particular, it explores three projects led by the LCP which were explicitly aimed at challenging the colour bar and altering the ways in which London had been racialised by opening social spaces which would primarily cater for African diasporic peoples. Exploring such projects, the chapter insists, enables us to witness the gradual creolisation of London through the ways in which colonial subjects sought to alter the racial dynamics of everyday life in the city.

Chapter four then explores how black West Indian activists in 1930s and 1940s London utilised a broad array of public gatherings. Tracing the places within which such public gatherings took place, and exploring the relationship between these and the wider networks within which West Indian activists were embedded, the chapter casts light on the role of public gatherings in bringing the politics of empire to the fore within the imperial metropolis. Studying these diverse gatherings, their wider relationship to the political aims of each organisation, and the networks of which they were a crucial part, reveals some of the ways in which the creolisation of London came to be performed in a diverse array of locations.

Chapter five turns its attention to the periodicals published by the various organisations outlined above. In doing so, it treats these texts as circulating objects which enabled these organisations to build connections and solidarities with other organisations and individuals, and also as representational tools through which these organisations articulated their understandings of the politics of race and empire. By tracking the distribution and reception of some of these periodicals around London, the chapter demonstrates that the creolisation of London was something which was

performed through the material circulation of particular ideas and events represented in textual form.

Chapter six brings together the concerns of the previous three chapters – with contesting the racialisation of space, with public gatherings and performances, and with the production, circulation and reception of texts – through an examination of how these diverse practices operated in relationship to one another around a focus on one particular event, namely the response of West Indian activists in Britain to the Caribbean labour unrest of the mid-1930s. Looking at how West Indian activists hosted colonial West Indian visitors in social spaces around London, organised and participated in public gatherings centred on the West Indian unrest, and produced various forms of texts designed in different ways to engage with the events in their homelands, this chapter shows the process of creolisation in practice. For a brief period, the West Indies became a central concern within the wider politics of race and empire being articulated in London. By exploring the various ways in which the events in the West Indies came to be played out in London, this chapter highlights the relationship between spatial practices, events, and public performance.

Chapter seven offers conclusions drawn from the earlier chapters. It summarises the arguments made in earlier chapters, and draws out the usefulness of understanding 1930s and 1940s London as a colonial city undergoing a process of creolisation. In particular, this argument is developed in order to suggest that whilst, in the post-war years, London might be usefully understood as a city being colonised by its own imperial subject, the processes taking place in the pre-war and wartime metropolis are better understood through the lens of creolisation, a process of contestation and entanglement that laid the ground for the later process of reverse colonisation.

Two decades after the endpoint of this thesis, the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett, known popularly as Miss Lou, returned to the themes written about by Una Marson in her poem ‘Little brown girl.’ Bennett’s now well-known poem ‘Colonisation in reverse’ looks again at the relationship between Caribbean migrant and imperial city. However, whilst Marson’s poem highlighted the uncertainty which characterised both the response of metropolitan Britons to colonial migrants, and the experience of West Indian migrants upon arriving in the ‘Mother Country,’ Bennett’s poem is much more celebratory. It begins,

What a joyful news, Miss Mattie;
I fell like me heart gwine burs –
Jamaica people colonizin
Englan in reverse

As Carolyn Cooper has written, Bennett’s poem ‘gleefully celebrates the transforming power of Jamaican culture as it implants itself on British soil in a parodic gesture of “colonization.”’⁴³ This celebratory attitude marks a stark contrast from the uncertain exploration of similar issues published by Marson nearly 30 years before. Looking back to this earlier period, prior to the post-war era of increased migration from the West Indies to Britain, this thesis examines the spatial practices through which black West Indian activists engaged with the politics of race and empire in London, the imperial metropolis, and argues that these spatial practices formed a crucial part of the process of creolising London, itself an important step on the way towards ‘colonizin in reverse.’

⁴³ C. Cooper (1995), *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the ‘Vulgar’ Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* London: Duke University Press: 175.

Chapter One

Black West Indians in Britain and the Spatial Politics of the African Diaspora

Introduction

This chapter sets out to accomplish three main tasks. The first of these is to define the theoretical vocabulary which is drawn on throughout the remainder of the thesis. To begin with, this involves exploring the figure of the West Indian, as a particular social category, and its relationship to Britain and Britishness. Once this has been done, the chapter moves on to engage with the broad range of work on the African diaspora. In doing so, it will focus specifically on the spatial frameworks which have been used to analyse black politics and cultures, arguing for the importance of an approach to the notion of diaspora which both attends to the diversity within black internationalist cultures, and foregrounds the particular ways in which diasporic unity is articulated and practised. Such a perspective is then linked to wider work on the spatialities of political networks, in order to develop an approach to transnational political and social movements that remains attentive to the particular geographies through which such movements come into being. In particular, the usefulness of examining ‘modes of political practice’ from a geographical standpoint is established here. Finally, the chapter moves to a discussion of the previous historiography of black West Indians in Britain, with a particular focus on the twentieth century. In surveying this previous work, the aim is to illustrate how the present work enhances that which has gone before it.

The West Indian

The central characters in this thesis are defined as West Indian activists. The use of such a category immediately raises questions about what is meant by the term ‘West Indian,’ and what its relationship is to the politics of race and empire in Britain. The historian Catherine Hall has shown that the social category of the West Indian has acquired and dispensed with a broad range of meanings throughout its history. Beginning in the 1500s as a term which described people inhabiting the Caribbean prior to the arrival of Columbus, by the mid-1600s the term had come to mean those people living in the Caribbean but being of European descent. In other words, as Hall puts it, ‘the West Indian had been whitened.’¹ Yet this process of whitening the West Indian was not straight forward. Hall emphasises that white West Indian settlers had an ambivalent relationship with the metropole, and that their status as settlers meant that they were often considered to be ‘both colonisers and colonised.’² Elsewhere, Hall has tracked the complex relationship between the West Indies and the metropolis throughout the nineteenth century in more detail, and other scholars have also made the case that white creole West Indians – white settlers born in the West Indies – were viewed by the metropole, and often by themselves, as somehow different from metropolitan Britons.³ The ambivalent status of the white West Indian, at once both English and not so in their

¹ C. Hall (2003), ‘What is a West Indian?’ in B. Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 34.

² Hall, ‘What is a West Indian?’: 35.

³ C. Hall (2002), *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* Cambridge: Polity; David Lambert (2005), *White Creole Culture: Politics and Identity During the Age of Abolition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

own and the metropolitan imagination, began to become clearer during the 1830s. The question of slavery, and in particular of its abolition, was central to this development. When abolition passed in the metropolis, Hall writes that ‘it was clear that in the public mind slavery and the ideals of England could no longer coexist. West Indians, it followed, could not be English.’⁴ In this sense, Hall insists that ‘Emancipation marked a critical break in ideas about the West Indian.’⁵

In the post-emancipation years, a range of British intellectuals visited the West Indies and published important books on the nature of West Indian society.⁶ Amongst the most significant in the present context was James Anthony Froude’s 1887 book *The English in the West Indies or the Bow of Ulysses*. Froude, an ardent imperialist, argued that England had a responsibility to white West Indian society, and sought once more to reconnect the white creole settlers in the region with their English identity. Froude’s book is, in the present context, perhaps not most significant for the arguments made therein, but for the responses it engendered.⁷ In 1889, a Trinidadian schoolmaster by the name of J.J. Thomas wrote a detailed response to Froude, entitled *Froudacity: West Indian Fables Explained*, in which he rebutted many of Froude’s most openly racist assessments. In doing so, Thomas became ‘a challenger of the racist norms advocated by the great and good of Victorian Britain.’⁸ In Hall’s view, *Froudacity* marks ‘one of

⁴ Hall, ‘What is a West Indian?’: 40.

⁵ Hall, ‘What is a West Indian?’: 41.

⁶ For example, A. Trollope (1999 [1859]), *West Indies and the Spanish Main* New York: Carroll and Graf. For an overview of these texts, see F. Ledgister (2010), *Only West Indians: Creole Nationalism in the British West Indies* Trenton: Africa World Press: 37-77.

⁷ F. Smith (2002), *Creole Recitations: John Jacob Thomas and Colonial Formation in the Late Nineteenth Century Caribbean* London: University of Virginia Press.

⁸ Ledgister, *Only West Indians*: 77.

the symbolic starting points for a new kind of West Indian identity – one in which brown and black men, and it was mostly men, could claim collective rights as islanders, as diasporic Africans, as West Indians, and as Britons, citizens of empire.’⁹

With Thomas, then, a West Indian identity freed from the racist norms of nineteenth century British thought, and prepared to embrace non-white subjects as political agents in their own right, finds its voice. Yet Hall’s final phrase, ‘citizens of empire,’ points to a significant aspect of Thomas’s formulation. For, as Ledgister makes abundantly clear, Thomas was no anti-colonialist. He wrote as part of a longer tradition of what Ledgister calls ‘critical political thought by black and brown West Indians that went back to the early nineteenth century,’¹⁰ but he also shared some of the ‘same basic assumptions’ as Froude and other British intellectuals with regards to the belief that ‘Western civilization, and in particular the British version of it, is superior to all others.’¹¹ In this sense, Ledgister notes that ‘Thomas shared a large part of Froude’s world view.’¹² As Wilson Harris once put it, Thomas’s critique of empire ‘could not supply a figurative meaning beyond the condition he deplored.’¹³

Hall writes that with the publication of *Froudacity*, ‘it was no longer possible to maintain the fiction that the West Indian was white.’¹⁴ Thomas had asserted ‘the ability of British Caribbean residents generally to chart their own destinies,’ and built on the

⁹ Hall, ‘What is a West Indian?’: 44.

¹⁰ Ledgister, *Only West Indians*: 64; also S. Cudjoe (2003), *Beyond Boundaries: The Intellectual Tradition of Trinidad and Tobago in the Nineteenth Century* Wellesley: Calaloux: 301-302.

¹¹ Ledgister, *Only West Indians*: 72.

¹² Ledgister, *Only West Indians*: 74.

¹³ W. Harris (1981), *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles, 1966-1981* Aarhus: Dangaroo: 20-42.

¹⁴ Hall, ‘What is a West Indian?’: 47.

longer history of Caribbean thought to argue in favour of a broader, collective and multi-racial West Indian identity.¹⁵ Yet it remained the case that, as Gordon Lewis has written, ‘Caribbean history throughout has been, first, the history of European imperialism and, second, the history of slavery.’¹⁶ This history combined to render the Caribbean as a culturally hybrid space, whose society was constituted by people from across the world, including European colonisers, enslaved Africans, and indentured Asians. As Shalini Puri has written, ‘cultural hybridity’ has been central to the history of the Caribbean to such an extent that now, ‘the very vision of the Caribbean as a place of historical possibility turns on the question of hybridity.’¹⁷ The dual processes of slavery and migration enacted through colonialism drew together an extraordinary diversity within West Indian society, within which the list of cultures brought together is, in the words of George Lamming, ‘always incomplete,’¹⁸ and where, in Stuart Hall’s phrase, ‘it is impossible to locate in the Caribbean an origin for its peoples.’¹⁹ It is in this sense that, as Bill Schwarz has written, ‘the story of the Caribbean peoples, as a modern people, has been one of movement,’ and ‘the experience of migration and diaspora’ has been formative to Caribbean identities.²⁰ Hall has written that in the

¹⁵ F. Smith (1999), ‘A man who knows his roots: J.J. Thomas and current discourses of black nationalism,’ *Small Axe* 5: 2.

¹⁶ G. K. Lewis (1968), *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* London: Macgibbon and Kee: 49.

¹⁷ S. Puri (2004), *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-nationalism and Cultural Hybridity* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 43.

¹⁸ George Lamming (2005 [1960]), *The Pleasures of Exile* London: Pluto: 17.

¹⁹ S. Hall (1995), ‘Negotiating Caribbean identities,’ *New Left Review* I: 209: 5.

²⁰ B. Schwarz (2003), ‘Introduction: Crossing the seas,’ in B. Schwarz (ed), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 9; Also Hall, ‘Negotiating Caribbean identities.’

Caribbean, ‘Everybody there comes from somewhere else.’²¹ The focus of this thesis is on West Indians of African descent, and who considered themselves to be part of an African diaspora, but that is not to suggest that these were the only West Indians to move to Britain. Work has been done on West Indians in Britain who were not, in this sense, black – if that term is taken to mean thinking of oneself as of African descent. Jean Rhys, for example, who came to Britain first in 1907 from Dominica as a white creole woman troubled by her own racial identity,²² or Adrian Cola Rienzi, an Indo-Trinidadian labour organiser who also spent time in Britain.²³

For black West Indians in the twentieth century, seeking to develop their own approaches to the question of West Indianness, Thomas’s work was significant. In the introduction to a 1969 re-print of Thomas’s *Froudacity*, C.L.R. James articulated a vision of Thomas as part of a pantheon of significant West Indians who had taken on world-historical importance in the ‘struggle for human emancipation and advancement’, and had been important elements of a ‘particular type of social activity which we can definitely call West Indian.’²⁴ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, James engaged extensively with the notion of a West Indian Federation.²⁵ Ironically, this was also the

²¹ Hall, ‘Negotiating Caribbean identities’: 6.

²² H. Carr (2003), ‘Jean Rhys: West Indian intellectual,’ in B. Schwarz (ed), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

²³ K. Singh (1982), ‘Adrian Cola Rienzi and the labor movement in Trinidad (1925-1944),’ *Journal of Caribbean History* **16**: 11-35.

²⁴ C. L. R. James (1969), ‘The West Indian intellectual,’ in J.J. Thomas, *Froudacity: West Indian Fables Explained* London: New Beacon: 27.

²⁵ On James and West Indian Federation, see M. Stephens (2005), *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* London: Duke University Press: 204-267.

period in which the dream of Federation itself – the forging of a unified political community from the disparate territories of the Caribbean – became an impossibility. 1962 saw the emergence of Jamaica and Trinidad as independent nation states, and as Michelle Stephens has written, this ‘national triumph also marked an accompanying failure, for with the withdrawal of Jamaica and Trinidad as the two largest English-speaking islands in the West Indian federation, this particular movement ... reached its political end.’²⁶ In spite of this political failure, James continued to argue for the importance of a significant tradition of West Indian history around which he could build an image of the ‘worldwide contributions’ made by the Caribbean region. As he wrote in 1975, ‘Internationally the impact of the peoples of the Caribbean goes far beyond relations between neighbouring countries,’ and ‘the contributions which West Indians have made and are making to the culture of other countries, and particularly to black people everywhere’ were central to this.²⁷ As early as 1963, only twelve months after the collapse of the federation dream, James wrote a new appendix to his 1938 book *The Black Jacobins*, in which he told the history of the only successful slave revolt in history, that of San Domingo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the 1963 appendix, entitled ‘From Toussaint L’Ouverture to Fidel Castro,’ James explicitly linked that history to the more recent Cuban revolution, arguing that ‘despite the distance of over a century and a half, both [events] are West Indian. The people who made them, the problems and the attempts to solve them, are peculiarly West Indian, the

²⁶ Stephens, *Black Empire*: 28.

²⁷ C. L. R. James (1984 [1975]), ‘Presence of blacks in the Caribbean and its impact on culture,’ in C. L. R. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory: Selected Writings* London: Allison and Busby: 221-222.

product of a peculiar origin and a peculiar history. West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution.²⁸

James thus positioned the West Indies as a diverse, multilingual, multi-racial community, but one which was bound together through its history and culture, both of which James took to be paradigmatically modern. His preferred method of demonstrating this history was to focus on a tradition of significant Caribbean figures – almost always male – around whom a West Indian history could be built. At different times, this pantheon included such diverse people as Aimé Césaire, Fidel Castro, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, J.J. Thomas, and Stokely Carmichael, amongst others.²⁹ In each instance, the importance of the contribution made by these figures revolved not only around their own contribution to West Indian history and culture, but in the fact that they had contributed significantly to histories and cultures beyond the bounds of those societies. This global contribution emerged, argued James, not simply from the particular greatness of certain individuals, but from their position as West Indians.³⁰ As James put it, the contribution which these figures ‘have made upon the consciousness and civilization of Western Europe and the United States, is the result not of the work of certain brilliant individual men, but is due in reality to our historical past, the situation in which our historical past has placed us.’³¹

An important element in James’s pantheon of significant West Indian figures, though one which he does not dwell on at length himself, is the question of migrancy.

²⁸ C. L. R. James (2001 [1963]), *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* London: Penguin: 305.

²⁹ James, *The Black Jacobins*; ‘The West Indian intellectual’; ‘Presence of blacks in the Caribbean’.

³⁰ On James’s conception of individual agency, see in particular A. Smith (2010), *C.L.R. James and the Politics of Culture* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 108-134.

³¹ James, ‘The West Indian intellectual’: 27.

Almost all the figures James holds up as examples of West Indianness spent at least some time outside the region of their birth, as indeed did James himself. This corresponds to George Lamming's suggestion, in his 1960 book *The Pleasures of Exile*, that 'no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in foreign territory.'³² Lamming suggests that most people from the Caribbean see themselves as corresponding to particular territories until they meet others from the same region in foreign lands, after which a broader sense of West Indianness begins to emerge. This bears similarity to James's own suggestion that '[t]he colonial peoples, particularly West Indians, scarcely know themselves as yet,' the implication being that the limits placed upon colonial life by the imperial power inhibited any real development of self-identity amongst colonised West Indians.³³ Historically, figures such as Theophilus Albert Marryshow, who spent several periods away from the West Indies including to attend the 1921 Pan-African Congress, have been able to provide a sense of West Indianness rooted both in their experiences of living in the region and, concurrently, of being part of a Caribbean diaphora, though it is worth emphasizing that the idea of Federation had wider purchase amongst Caribbean nationalists in the early twentieth century, suggesting that migrancy was not essential to the development of a sense of common West Indian identity.³⁴ That said, for some figures migrancy was clearly important to the development of their sense of West Indian identity, and it is this vein that Lamming suggests that 'most West Indians of my generation were born in England,' especially since England was the primary location for

³² Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*: 214.

³³ C. L. R. James (2005 [1963], *Beyond a Boundary* London: Yellow Jersey: 32.

³⁴ E. Duke (2009), 'The diasporic dimensions of British Caribbean Federation in the early twentieth century,' *New West Indian Guide* **83**: 219-248.

post-war West Indian migrants. Such a recognition of the potential importance of migrancy to West Indian identity formation enables Lamming to make the important claim that '[t]he category West Indian, formerly understood as a geographical term, now assumes cultural significance.'³⁵

By the 1960s, then, West Indian thinkers, including C.L.R. James and George Lamming, were articulating a particular vision of what it meant to be West Indian. For them, the West Indian was one who had been forged by the particularities of Caribbean history, a history which was understood as being central to the constitution of the modern world. As early as his 1938 edition of *The Black Jacobins*, James had written of his belief that enslavement and the Atlantic cycle of commerce placed the West Indies at the centre of the modern world. Indeed, James argued that the enslaved people of San Domingo, 'living together in gangs of hundreds on the huge sugar-factories which covered the North Plain, ... were closer to a modern proletariat than any group of workers in existence at the time.'³⁶ David Scott has argued convincingly that, when he wrote *The Black Jacobins* in 1938, James's concern was to 'draw a parallel between the factory-like conditions of slave life and those of the modern industrial proletariat so as to be able to make out a case for the revolutionary education that comes from working in certain conditions.' By the time he added a new appendix to the book in 1963, however, James's concern had shifted. Here, his preoccupation was with 'building up a story of modern civilization' in order to 'underline the fact that the West Indian is, in a fundamentally original way, both an object of modern power and the subject of a

³⁵ Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile*: 214.

³⁶ James, *The Black Jacobins*: 69.

modern life.³⁷ In James's own words, from its origins in slavery and the Atlantic cycle of commerce West Indian life was 'in its essence a modern life.'³⁸ Elsewhere, he writes that the most important figures in West Indian history have been those who have 'enriched the content of world culture, its variety of forms and modes of expression.'³⁹ It is this sense of them being fundamentally modern subjects, at the heart of a global history of modernity, which sits at the heart of C. L. R. James's understanding of what it means to be a West Indian.

Of course, not all definitions of the West Indian follow James's. V. S. Naipaul, to take just one example, has often been damning in his criticism of the region and its people, in particular because of what he sees as its failure to contribute to history in any meaningful way.⁴⁰ As Catherine Hall's work makes clear, the term West Indian can and has meant a variety of things to widely differing people over the years. Bill Schwarz has noted the fact that James's formation of a tradition of West Indian intellectuals took place within the wider context of the politics of the 1960s. As Schwarz explains in a passage worth quoting at length,

James came to write about the West Indian intellectual, as a specific object of study ... at a time when insurrectionary politics took hold of

³⁷ David Scott (2004), *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* London: Duke University Press: 128-129.

³⁸ James, *The Black Jacobins*: 306.

³⁹ James, 'Presence of blacks in the Caribbean': 221.

⁴⁰ Perhaps Naipaul's most famous denunciation of the West Indies, and one which directly challenges the claims of James, is his claim that 'History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies.' V. S. Naipaul (1963), *The Middle Passage: Impressions of Five Societies – British, French and Dutch – in the West Indies and South America* London: André Deutsch: 89.

public life across the globe and when, in the Caribbean, Black Power emerged as a new political force. It was in this context that James and those around him found it necessary to recover John Jacob Thomas and to inaugurate a tradition of West Indian intellectuals, so named ... Indebted though we are to James for his recuperation of Thomas, we can also appreciate that the historical circumstances in which this recovery took place imposed certain silences ... We can't, in other words, take James's tradition on trust.⁴¹

This is an important point, particularly when thinking about how to understand the West Indian amidst the context of 1930s Britain. As Schwarz writes, 'We can't elevate all the particular, contrary figures ... into a single, undifferentiated West Indian *tradition* ... for all James's insights, it is the plurality and internal differentiation of this body of intellectual thought which best serve us.'⁴² Indeed, it will become clear throughout this thesis that West Indian activists in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s operated from a wide range of standpoints, and these points of departure resulted in important practical differences. This being the case, what is the significance of the West Indianness of this group of people? Rather than serving to collect them all within a particular tradition in which their geographical origins somehow determine the ways in which they acted in later life, it is more appropriate to think of the West Indianness of these particular activists as setting the conditions of possibility for their later activities in Britain and as being, as Lamming suggested above, of cultural and social significance, rather than merely geographical. In other words, whilst their West Indian roots do not determine the

⁴¹ Schwarz, 'Introduction': 19.

⁴² Schwarz, 'Introduction': 18.

way they acted in later life, and whilst non-West Indians may well have acted and thought in similar ways, being brought up in West Indian society at the turn of the twentieth century, *and then moving away from it*, did nonetheless shape the lives of the individuals within this thesis to a significant degree. George Lamming has suggested, in answer to the question ‘what is the West Indian identity?’, that ‘it is that process in which West Indians are, and will be involved, as they choose their tasks and recreate their situations.’⁴³ This may seem too unsuitably vague to some. However, Lamming’s sense of West Indianness is important in that it treats the West Indian identity as something open and in flux, to be actively created and forged anew by the practices of West Indians themselves. However, Lamming’s sense of what it means to be West Indian is not immune from acknowledgement of the importance of historical inheritance, and elsewhere he also notes that besides the pursuits of West Indians themselves, ‘[i]t is [also] their common background of social history which can be called West Indian.’⁴⁴ To understand more of why this is the case, it is essential to explore some of the contours of West Indian society at the turn of the twentieth century, when many of the activists who feature in this thesis were born.

West Indian society at this time was characterised by what Gordon Lewis has called ‘the special character of West Indian education in its social aspects,’ namely ‘[t]he exclusion of the masses from anything save a rudimentary primary schooling.’⁴⁵ Whilst the bulk of West Indian society therefore had little access to education, those fortunate enough to receive any form of education were brought up with a world view

⁴³ G. Lamming (1973), ‘The West Indian people,’ in A. Salkey (ed.), *Caribbean Essays: An Anthology* London: Evans Brothers: 15.

⁴⁴ Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*: 225.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*: 87.

centred on the cultural, economic, social and political accomplishments and advancements of Britain. Reflecting on his time at Queen's Royal College in Trinidad, C. L. R. James described just such an educational experience. James remarks that in particular he and his schoolmates 'learnt and obeyed and taught a code, the English public-school code.' He even went as far as to explain that he had 'educated myself into a member of the British middle class,' describing himself as a 'British intellectual' by the time he came to leave Trinidad for Britain.⁴⁶ Lest James's experience be considered particular, it is worth noting that Eric Williams wrote in 1942 of Caribbean schooling that 'English examinations, set by English examiners in England, are the rule.'⁴⁷ As Robert Tignor has put it, the educational system across the Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century was 'intensely and purposefully Anglicizing.'⁴⁸

However, despite the English-centred nature of West Indian education, a non-white intellectual class was able to emerge and to articulate patterns of thought which both engaged with the Anglocentric intellectual heritage in which they had been raised,

⁴⁶ James, *Beyond a Boundary*: 32, 43, 146. It is important to recognise that the specific contours of Trinidadian, and more broadly West Indian, schooling at the time James encountered it were the result of a longer set of processes. In Stephen Howe's words, its appearance 'required conscious decisions, acts of will – on the part of both colonisers and colonised,' and thus positioned it as part of a broader process of 'complex cultural contestation.' S. Howe (2003), 'C.L.R. James: Visions of history, visions of Britain,' in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 155-156.

⁴⁷ E. Williams (1942), *The Negro in the Caribbean* Washington: 75-76. These reflections are paralleled by George Lamming's fictional depiction of 1930s schooling in Barbados, at one point in which the narrative focuses on the celebration of Empire Day and the attempts by a school headteacher to preach the virtues of British imperialism to his schoolchildren. G. Lamming (1987 [1953]), *In The Castle of My Skin* Harlow: Pearson.

⁴⁸ Robert Tignor (2006), *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* Princeton: Princeton University Press: 12.

and sought to move beyond them. This class of intellectuals has been characterised by Ivor Oxaal as ‘creole nationalist’ in orientation, given the way in which it worked with European intellectual cultures but often moulded them in such ways as to fit their Caribbean surroundings.⁴⁹ As Selwyn Cudjoe has shown with a specific focus on Trinidad and Tobago, this creole intelligentsia began to challenge specific aspects of colonial rule at least as early as the start of the nineteenth century, and began to link such a challenge to nationalist agendas from at least the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁵⁰ Winston James has identified the absence of suitably high-ranking jobs, especially within the civil service, for non-white West Indian intellectuals, who were restricted from most government posts on account of their skin colour, as amongst the driving factors both for potential political radicalisation, and for a desire to migrate out of their homelands in the early twentieth century, highlighting the frustrations felt amongst intellectual black West Indians at the barriers raised against them in their homelands on account of race.⁵¹

Whilst creole intellectuals of all races in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century West Indies began to challenge particular aspects of colonial rule, they often failed to extend their critiques to a thoroughgoing denunciation of colonialism itself. As Harvey Neptune puts it, writing of Trinidad in particular, these ‘trenchant detractors of Crown Colony rule ... never quite called colonialism into question, never quite suspended the presumption of Britain’s imperial mandate.’ Neptune describes these

⁴⁹ Ivar Oxaal (1968), *Black Intellectuals Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* Cambridge: Schenkman.

⁵⁰ S. Cudjoe (1997), ‘C.L.R. James and the Trinidad and Tobago intellectual tradition, or, not learning Shakespeare under a Mango tree,’ *New Left Review* **223**: 114-125; Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*.

⁵¹ W. James (1998), *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* London: Verso: 39.

thinkers as offering a ‘prologue’ to the appearance of ‘political actors confident enough to doubt Great Britain’s greatness’ in the interwar period, and most especially in the 1930s. Neptune defines this emergent interwar generation of thinkers and activists as ‘Creole patriots,’ a term which bears many resemblances to Oxaal’s notion of creole nationalists.⁵² By linking what Edward Said has termed ‘cultural resistance’ to newly emergent ‘assertions of nationalist identities,’ such intellectual-activists began to make the step towards imagining freedom from colonial rule.⁵³

It would be disingenuous, however, to imply that this shift in attitudes emerged in a linear, evolutionary fashion. Whilst creole nationalists and patriots became more prominent in West Indian public life in the 1930s, not all intellectuals followed them in articulating explicitly anti-colonial sentiments. Neptune argues that the nineteenth century thinkers who challenged specific aspects of colonialism prefigured the multi-racial community of creole nationalists. He terms this earlier group ‘Crown patriots,’ given that they were able to imagine a world in which the Caribbean would gain increasing self-rule – hence their patriotism – but not one free from British rule.⁵⁴ Neptune’s definition of Crown patriots implies that they were superseded in the interwar Caribbean by creole nationalists. However, this is a narrative which is too linear in its framing. Whilst some West Indians were beginning to frame their resistance in nationalist terms, many remained unable – or unwilling – to fully escape their belief in the virtues of the British, and often articulated what Anne Spry Rush has termed a

⁵² H. Neptune (2007), *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 4.

⁵³ E. Said (1994), *Culture and Imperialism* London: Vintage: xii.

⁵⁴ Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees*: 202 n. 14.

sense of ‘imperial Britishness’.⁵⁵ These imperial subjects continued to believe in the virtues of imperial rule, often advocating reform of imperial structures in order to make colonies politically and socially more inclusive, but refraining from advocating the end of empire. Indeed, they often perceived imperial rule as positively beneficial.

Thus, amongst West Indian intellectuals and activists in the first half of the twentieth century there existed a complex relationship between various forms of creole nationalism and Crown patriotism. The black West Indian activists at the heart of this thesis were forged politically and intellectually against the backdrop of this emergent culture.⁵⁶ Yet, as black colonials they were also shaped by broader factors. Here, the work of Philip Zachernuk is useful. Writing of the colonial Nigerian intelligentsia, Zachernuk has argued that these ‘African thinkers’ must be understood within the context not just of colonial Nigerian society, but instead within the context of the intellectual culture of the ‘modern Atlantic world.’⁵⁷ Zachernuk argues for the importance of extending the postcolonial critique of European intellectualism to colonial subjects. As he puts it, ‘If European intellectuals invented Africa, so too, we should presume, did African intellectuals.’ Such an approach enables Zachernuk to move beyond previous approaches to colonial intellectualism, arguing that ‘what had been seen as a story of Africans accepting or rejecting foreign ideas becomes instead a complex world of inventions – mutual, antithetical, and unconnected – in which African

⁵⁵ A. S. Rush (2002), ‘Imperial identity in colonial minds: Dr Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931-50,’ *Twentieth Century British History* **13:4**: 356-383.

⁵⁶ B. Schwarz (2007), “‘Shivering in the noonday sun’”: The British World and the dynamics of “Nativisation,” in K. Darian-Smith, P. Grimshaw, and S. Macintyre (eds.), *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* Victoria: Melbourne University Press: 19-44.

⁵⁷ P. Zachernuk (2000), *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* London: University Press of Virginia: 1.

intellectuals engage with others' ideas of Africa to invent their own.⁵⁸ Zachernuk is critical of 'assessments of the intelligentsia that treat them as a unified group,' and instead argues for the need to 'restore heterogeneity to representations of colonial subjects, to refuse to reduce them to essences.'⁵⁹ Such an anti-essentialist perspective requires that scholars explore 'the nature of the world in which colonial intellectuals functioned and ... the need to attend to specific contexts within the colonial situation.'⁶⁰ Such a framework can be productively extended to interrogate the expansive spatial frameworks within which activists, as well as intellectuals, operated. Indeed, Zachernuk himself takes his analysis in this direction, particularly when discussing the activities of the West African Students Union in Britain.⁶¹

Zachernuk's work is useful in enabling us to conceptualise the West Indian activist in Britain. Previous historiography has had a tendency to construct black subjects in Britain as alienated 'others.'⁶² An opposite tendency has been to describe West Indians as thoroughly Anglicised, as when Gordon Lewis writes that 'West Indians, then, as a people, have been shaped mainly by England, and they are indeed not the least English when they are in revolt against the system England has created.'⁶³ Following Zachernuk's approach allows us to see the flaws in both of these approaches. West Indian activists operated within the context of a broader global and Atlantic circulation of ideas, people and objects. In this context, they borrowed both from

⁵⁸ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*: 6.

⁵⁹ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*: 9.

⁶⁰ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*: 11.

⁶¹ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*: 95-102.

⁶² For example, M. Banton (1955), *The Coloured Quarter: Negro Immigrants in an English City* London: Jonathon Cape.

⁶³ Lewis *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*: 69.

modern European history, and from that of the colonies and in particular the African diaspora in order to form their own diverse responses to the modern world. Whilst shaped by the Anglicising influences of their upbringing, as well as the colonial power relations in which they had been placed, they were not determined by either. Instead, they borrowed ideas and practices from a broad range of traditions, shaping them for their own purposes and redeploing them and reinventing them to their own ends.

Race, space and the politics of diaspora

Spatiality has long played a central role in black politics and culture, even if this has not always been expressed in these terms. As Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods suggest, black political activists have historically ‘struggled, resisted and significantly contributed to the production of space.’⁶⁴ Geographic terminology has also played an important role in conceptualising black political activism. Primarily, this is because of the foundational importance of global movement to modern black cultures. The trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved peoples led to the enforced movement of large numbers of African people on a global scale, and particularly around the Atlantic world, in what Sibylle Fischer has called ‘one of the first and most brutal appearances of modernity.’⁶⁵ Ali Mazrui, focusing on the legacy of this trade in enslaved peoples for later political cultures, has argued that ‘Africa has experienced a triple heritage of slavery –

⁶⁴ K. McKittrick and C. Woods (2007), ‘No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean’, in McKittrick and Woods (eds.), *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* Toronto: Between the Lines: 6; K. McKittrick (2006), *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* London: University of Minnesota Press: xiv.

⁶⁵ S. Fischer (2004), *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* London: Duke University Press: 12.

indigenous, Islamic and Western,’ whilst also emphasising that ‘Because the trans-Atlantic slave trade was tied to expansionist global capitalism, the Western slave trade itself accelerated dramatically.’⁶⁶ The enforced migration stemming from this trade is termed by Mazrui ‘the diaspora of enslavement.’ However, he also adds another layer to this migratory schema. As well as the ‘diaspora of enslavement,’ he urges that we attend to ‘the diaspora of colonialism,’ which he summarises as ‘the dispersal of Africans which continues to occur as a result of disruptions of colonization and its aftermath.’⁶⁷ Together, Mazrui argues that these two diasporas form what he calls ‘Global Africa,’ a term intended to capture the global spread of African and African-descended peoples in the context of contemporary claims for reparations for the ills caused both by enslavement and colonisation.

Mazrui’s notion of ‘Global Africa’ is a good way in to recent debates over the spatialities of black politics. By emphasising the importance of ‘two migrations,’ the first an enforced result of the transatlantic trade in enslaved peoples, the second a result of colonial power dynamics, Mazrui is able to bring attention to the multiple processes which have shaped the African diaspora. However, by focusing on Africa, and indeed by framing his argument as an explicit engagement with the Organization of African Unity, Mazrui implicitly builds upon earlier attempts to define black diasporic politics under the rubric of pan-Africanism.

Writing in 1962, the historian George Shepperson noted that ‘the term “PAN-AFRICANISM” has been bandied about ... with disturbing inaccuracy’. To counter this, he asserted that ‘it may be found helpful...to use, on some occasions, a capital “P” and, on others, a small one’, whereby “Pan-Africanism” with a capital letter is a clearly

⁶⁶ A. Mazrui (1994), ‘Global Africa: From abolitionists to reparationists,’ *African Studies Review*, **37:3**: 1.

⁶⁷ Mazrui, ‘Global Africa’: 2.

recognisable movement', whilst small-p pan-Africanism 'is rather a group of movements, many very ephemeral' in which '[t]he cultural element often predominates.'⁶⁸ Big-P Pan-Africanism, then, is structured around the Pan-African Conference and Congress movement, whilst pan-Africanism with a small-p relates to a more diverse and diffuse set of ideas and organisations.

In distinguishing between these two forms, Shepperson was not making a straight-forward distinction between big-P Pan-Africanism as political, and little-p pan-Africanism as being solely cultural; as he noted, this dichotomy was clearly 'not absolute' given the many 'obvious interacting elements.'⁶⁹ Rather, he was simply hoping to make a distinction between the Pan-African movement, centred on the American W.E.B. Du Bois, and a broader network of diverse aesthetic expressions and political institutions. The context for doing so, marked by the politics of the Cold War era, was a discussion of where to place the movement which became known as Garveyism in relation to pan-Africanism. Given the strong split between Du Bois and Garvey, Shepperson was able to classify Garveyism outside of 'Pan-Africanism' yet still within 'pan-Africanism.'⁷⁰

In 1974, Immanuel Geiss produced one of many extensive treatments of pan-Africanism, and entitled his opening chapter 'an attempt at a definition', in which he drew explicitly on Shepperson's work. Despite noting that it remained 'difficult, perhaps even impossible, to provide a clear and precise definition of Pan-Africanism', Geiss nonetheless described it as consisting of 'intellectual and political movements

⁶⁸ G. Shepperson (1962), 'Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism": Some historical notes,' *Phylon* **23**:4: 346.

⁶⁹ Shepperson, 'Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism":' 347.

⁷⁰ Shepperson, 'Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism."'

amongst Africans and Afro-Americans who regard or have regarded Africans and people of African descent as homogenous. This outlook leads to a feeling of racial solidarity and a new self-awareness'.⁷¹

Shepperson's earlier work closes with a call for the study of both 'pan-Africanism' and 'Pan-Africanism' to be carried out 'in its full international perspective, in time as well [as] in space'.⁷² Brent Edwards has recently reconstructed the political and intellectual context within which Shepperson was writing as part of his own attempt to chart the post-war history of interpretive frames for the African diaspora. As Edwards shows, Shepperson's 'turn to diaspora arises not in terms of black cultures in the New World but in the context of revising what Shepperson calls "isolationist" and restrictive trends in African historiography'.⁷³ Edwards's praises the way that 'Shepperson rereads the term [pan-Africanism] precisely to make room for ideological difference and disjuncture in considering black cultural politics in an international sphere,' as well as the way that he avoids 'either assuming a universally applicable definition of 'Pan-African' or presupposing an exceptionalist version of New World 'Pan-African' activity'.⁷⁴ He also emphasises that the notion of Pan-Africanism itself 'arises as a discourse of internationalism aimed generally at the cultural and political *coordination* of the interests of peoples of African descent around the world'.⁷⁵ Edwards thus highlights the fact that Pan-Africanism – and he does not distinguish between big-P and little-p varieties – emerged as a discourse of coordination, whilst demonstrating that in

⁷¹ I. Geiss (1974), *The Pan-African Movement* New York: Africana: 3-4.

⁷² Shepperson, 'Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism"': 358.

⁷³ B. Edwards (2001), 'The uses of diaspora,' *Social Text* **19:1**: 52.

⁷⁴ Edwards, 'The uses of diaspora': 50.

⁷⁵ Edwards, 'The uses of diaspora': 46.

practice it contained within it a broader array of ideological differences which contained within them the seeds of separation.

The concept of pan-Africanism no longer seems appropriate as an analytic spatial category for global black politics, though it remains an important way of understanding the political motivations of many in this period. Ronald Segal, for example, has argued that since the diaspora was itself originated by racist practices of enslavement then the conceptual focus should fall on ‘the blackness of the Diaspora [sic] rather than on its geographical genesis.’⁷⁶ A related criticism charges that pan-Africanism as an analytic frame too often becomes a version of Afrocentrism, where the quest for roots and authenticity take priority over analysis of particular historical events and articulations.⁷⁷ Edwards too shares this sense, writing critically of concepts which seek ‘an easy recourse to origins.’⁷⁸ Such criticisms of the search for origins which sometimes inflects pan-African and Afrocentric approaches is perhaps best showcased in the work of Paul Gilroy. In his efforts to position ‘the framework of a diaspora as an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in ‘racial’, ethnic or national essences,’ Gilroy has argued that the concept of ‘Pan Africanism [sic]’ is ‘inadequate as anything other than the most preliminary description, particularly as it can suggest mystical unity outside the process of history or even a common culture or ethnicity which will assert itself regardless of determinate political and economic circumstances.’⁷⁹ In later work, Gilroy again criticised what he called a ‘brute pan-Africanism’ which he saw as essentialising, and which was ‘frequently

⁷⁶ R. Segal (1995), *The Black Diaspora* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: xiii.

⁷⁷ S. Howe (1999), *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* London: Verso.

⁷⁸ Edwards, ‘The uses of diaspora’: 64.

⁷⁹ P. Gilroy (1992 [1987]), *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* London: Routledge: 203, 208.

wheeled in when it is necessary to appreciate the things that (potentially) connect black people to one another rather than think seriously about divisions in the imagined community of the race.⁸⁰ Such a critique forms one small part of Gilroy's broader assault on modes of thought which are too tightly bound by the space of the nation-state, or which preoccupy themselves with a search for roots.⁸¹

Whilst Gilroy's challenge to nationally-centred accounts of black political activity has been influential, his spatial frame of the black Atlantic has limitations. For example, and as Kate Baldwin has pointed out, a focus on the significance of the black Atlantic is disrupted when we attempt to include other important sites for black politics, such as the USSR, within Gilroy's schema.⁸² However, whilst we might question Gilroy's black Atlantic framework, his broader focus on the significance of diaspora to black politics and culture seems more useful. Rather than treating diaspora in the abstract, Gilroy insists on the need to attend to 'the distinctive historical experiences of this diaspora's populations.'⁸³ Ever since his earliest work, Gilroy has positioned what he calls 'the framework of a diaspora' as central to his account of black cultures.⁸⁴ However, he has also insisted on the need to understand the particular role of blackness within the diaspora as having been politically formulated, rather than being a naturalised occurrence. As he puts it, the 'anti-ethnic ... diaspora sensibility' which he proposes 'makes blackness a matter of politics rather than a common cultural condition.'⁸⁵

⁸⁰ P. Gilroy (1993), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* London: Verso: 24, 31.

⁸¹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*: 3.

⁸² K. Baldwin (2002), *Beyond the Colour Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922-1963* London: Duke University Press: 9-10.

⁸³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*: 45.

⁸⁴ Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*: 203.

⁸⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*: 27.

The framework of diaspora for the study of black politics and culture has gained broader purchase in recent years. As Penny von Eschen has noted, ‘the notion of a diaspora invokes a profound history and materiality,’ and with it ‘a story about how people got from one place to another – in this case, the story of the expansion of Europe and the consequent dispersal of black laborers throughout Europe and the New World.’ von Eschen notes that historically, ‘diaspora identities had a powerful resonance and diaspora politics achieved a particular political efficacy,’ and also notes that many of those who have argued for the notion of an African diaspora have not done so in order to ‘posit themselves as members or potential members of a nation,’ nor to ‘advocate a return to Africa in the sense of a back to Africa movement.’ That said, holding on to the African element of this political formulation can be important because ‘the politics they fashioned did constitute a re-turning toward Africa and an identity defined in relation to Africa.’⁸⁶

In an important contribution to this debate, Tiffany Patterson and Robin Kelley have stressed that scholars must focus on ‘the historical construction of the African diaspora,’ and that in doing so attention ought to fall on the fact that ‘diaspora is both a process and a condition.’⁸⁷ They argue for attention to the significance of ‘specific historical spaces’ within any diaspora in order to demonstrate ‘the importance not only of local histories but also of how these histories are connected to global

⁸⁶ P. von Eschen (1997), *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* New York: Cornell University Press: 3-4.

⁸⁷ T. Patterson and R. Kelley (2000), ‘Unfinished migrations: Reflections on the African diaspora and the making of the modern world,’ *African Studies Review* **43:1**: 13, 20.

developments.⁸⁸ Their goal in doing so is to stress the ways in which the African diaspora connected (and connects) with the wider world, and also to call for examination of the ‘diaspora-in-the-making’, as something to be articulated and practised rather than as an already-existing and static phenomenon. Examining these multiple histories of diaspora is important, for as Patterson and Kelley point out,

black internationalism does not always come out of Africa, nor is it necessarily engaged with pan-Africanism or other kinds of black-isms. Indeed, sometimes it lives through or is integrally tied to other kinds of international movements – socialism, communism, feminism, surrealism, religions such as Islam, and so on.⁸⁹

This way of understanding diaspora marks an important intervention. It combines the anti-essentialist approach advocated by Gilroy with a materialist reading which insists on the importance of particular historical and geographical contexts for the formulation of diaspora, as well as a spatial framework which is less confining than Gilroy’s Atlantic-centred account. Such an approach bears a close relationship to the recent work of Brent Edwards, who has provided perhaps the most sustained critical engagement with the concept of diaspora as it relates to black politics. For Edwards, as highlighted above, the term diaspora is useful in that it ‘makes possible an analysis of the institutional formations of black internationalism that attends to their constitutive

⁸⁸ Patterson and Kelley, ‘Unfinished migrations’: 24; also A. Oboe and A. Scacchi (eds.) (2008), *Recharting the Black Atlantic: Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections* Abingdon: Routledge.

⁸⁹ Patterson and Kelley, ‘Unfinished migrations’: 27.

differences.’⁹⁰ Edwards’s interpretation of diaspora and black internationalism rests on his deployment of the French concept of ‘*décalage*.’ Emphasising the spatialities of diasporic internationalism, Edwards suggests that ‘internationalism ... necessarily involves a process of linking or connecting across gaps – a process we might term *articulation*.’ In this framework, diasporic formations take shape through the forging of solidarities across barriers of both time and space, requiring processes of articulation in order to establish and maintain such connections. This diasporic unity is forever haunted by the disunity which existed prior to the articulation of diaspora. Edwards suggests that *décalage* be used as the term to represent this haunting, translating its meaning as ‘either a difference or gap in time ... *or* in space.’ He thus deploys the term to highlight the heterogeneity of diasporic politics and cultures. Diasporic unity, Edwards suggests, comes about merely temporarily, and *décalage* ‘indicates the reestablishment of a prior unevenness or diversity’ within diaspora, a sort of disunity which Edwards sees as always sitting beneath the artificial unity of any racially-constituted diaspora.⁹¹ It is in this sense that we should understand Edwards’s assertion that ‘*décalage* is proper to the structure of a diasporic racial formation, and its return in the form of *disarticulation* – the points of misunderstanding, of bad faith, unhappy translation – must be considered a necessary haunting.’⁹² In other words, Edwards is keen to emphasise the fact that not all black internationalist writers, thinkers and activists articulated their diasporic identities in the same ways, and that when they sought to align these competing senses of

⁹⁰ B. Edwards (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* London: Harvard University Press: 11.

⁹¹ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 13-14.

⁹² Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 14.

diaspora this often served to mask broader differences and disagreements covered over by the artificial unity of racially-articulated community.

Throughout this thesis, the concept of diaspora will be used to engage with the transnational political frameworks within which the League of Coloured Peoples and International African Service Bureau / Pan-African Federation positioned themselves. In doing so, I will follow Edwards's assertion that 'a discourse of diaspora functions simultaneously as abstraction and anti-abstraction;' abstraction in the sense that it positions 'transnational initiatives in a history of 'scattering of Africans' that supposedly offers a principle of unity,' and anti-abstraction in that it 'points to difference' and 'forces us to think not in terms of some closed system of African dispersal but explicitly in terms of a complex past of forced migrations and racialisation.'⁹³

This invocation of 'forced migrations' returns us to Mazrui's notion of the 'two diasporas' at the heart of his concept of Global Africa. Of particular relevance to this thesis is Mazrui's assertion that 'Jamaicans in Britain are a dual diaspora – of both enslavement and colonization.'⁹⁴ Mazrui is not alone in claiming that Jamaicans – and by extension, other West Indians in Britain – are the product of multiple diasporas. Stuart Hall, for example, has argued that he and others from the Caribbean who moved to Britain have been 'twice diasporized.'⁹⁵ This notion of West Indians in Britain as part of a 'dual diaspora' is important. Throughout this thesis, the study will be framed within the broader contours of the African diaspora as a political and cultural project. However, drawing on the emphasis on materialism and practice argued for by Patterson

⁹³ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 12-13.

⁹⁴ Mazrui, 'Global Africa': 2.

⁹⁵ Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean identities': 6.

and Kelley, Edwards and others, attention will also be given to the ways in which notions of Africa, Britain, blackness, race and imperialism all took shape within this project, rather than being pre-defined identities which determined the political activities of those ‘twice diasporized’ figures. Yet drawing out the ways in which such identities and intellectual constructs featured in the political activities of West Indians in Britain requires attention to the geographies of these activities. Such an approach focuses both on the global geographies of the African diaspora and the British Empire, but also on the ways in which such geographies played out in the streets, on the platforms and the pages of periodicals in Britain. Consequently, this requires the development of an approach to understanding transnational social and political movements which draws on recent geographical work on the spatialities of political activism.

Spatiality and modes of political practice

At the heart of Brent Edwards’s conception of diaspora is the idea that diasporic identities are articulated through dialogue between diverse ideological perspectives. However, Edwards’s framework does not confine the production of identities merely to fields of discourse. Instead, he insists that ‘diaspora can only be conceived as the uneasy and unfinished *practice* of such dialogue.’⁹⁶ The connections which link diverse figures across a diaspora, and which mean that diaspora can only be articulated ‘in forms that are provisional, negotiated, asymmetrical,’ are not, for Edwards, the result of ‘predetermined “solidarity,”’ but instead emerge as a result of ‘a hard won project only practiced across difference, only spoken in ephemeral spaces.’⁹⁷ Edwards himself

⁹⁶ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 110.

⁹⁷ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 318, 186.

focuses primarily on textual articulations of diaspora, and thus constrains the modes of practice through which diaspora can be articulated, neglecting modes and spaces of practice which are not tied to the written word. However, his insistence that diaspora emerges out of situated historical and political practices which work to articulate a shared identity from diverse, often contradictory, starting points has much in common with recent geographical theorisations.

As Tim Cresswell has recently noted, ‘Practice is a term which has begun to make a significant impact on cultural geography.’⁹⁸ Work on the politics of everyday life in the modern world has fastened onto the concept of practice in order to attend to the way in which politics is performed through everyday acts, and not just through textual and discursive iterations. Practices, from this perspective, are broadly construed as ‘productive concatenations that have been constructed out of all manner of resources and which provide the basic intelligibility of the world.’⁹⁹ Nigel Thrift has contended that any attempt to grapple with social worlds must be attentive to ‘networks of practice,’¹⁰⁰ insisting on the importance of studying ‘mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites.’¹⁰¹ Such an approach takes as its starting point the belief that social and political life is constructed out of ‘heterogeneous entanglements of practice.’¹⁰²

⁹⁸ T. Cresswell (2003), ‘Landscape and the obliteration of practice,’ in K. Atkinson, M. Domosh, S. Pile and N. Thrift (eds.), *Handbook of Cultural Geography* London: Sage: 275.

⁹⁹ N. Thrift (2007), *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* Abingdon: Routledge: 8.

¹⁰⁰ Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*: 8.

¹⁰¹ N. Thrift (1997), ‘The still point: Expressive embodiment and dance,’ in S. Pile and M. Keith (eds.) *Geographies of Resistance* Abingdon: Routledge: 142.

¹⁰² A. Latham and D. Conradson (2003), ‘The possibilities of performance,’ *Environment and Planning A* **35:11**: 1901.

This emergent focus on practice has implications for the conceptualisation of political action. As Kevin Hetherington has argued, ‘spatial practices’ are central to any interpretation of political action because the political sphere itself is constituted largely through ‘practices ... that are situated in spaces that actually matter.’¹⁰³ Much work is now being done on the relationship between space and politics, recognising that ‘space is an element of politics that can contribute to social change as well as social control.’¹⁰⁴ As Margaret Kohn has argued, such work addresses the question of ‘how spatial practices can contribute to transformative politics.’¹⁰⁵

For Henri Lefebvre, the political nature of spatial practices were central to his exploration of the multiple ways in which space itself is produced. Lefebvre argued that social spaces came to be defined as such through the particular forms of ‘spatial practice that they express and constitute.’¹⁰⁶ The task for anybody seeking to interrogate the production of space was thus, from Lefebvre’s perspective, to insist that ‘an already produced space can be decoded, can be *read*.’¹⁰⁷ He believed that although ‘there is no general code of space,’ it was nevertheless the case that ‘there may have existed specific codes, established at specific historical periods and varying in their effects.’¹⁰⁸ These codes, Lefebvre argued, served to characterise particular forms of ‘social/spatial practice,’ and thus they needed to be understood as ‘part of a practical relationship, as

¹⁰³ K. Hetherington (1998), *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* London: Sage: 141.

¹⁰⁴ M. Kohn (2003), *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* London: Cornell University Press: 15.

¹⁰⁵ Kohn, *Radical Space*: 7.

¹⁰⁶ H. Lefebvre (1991), *The Production of Space* Oxford: Blackwell: 16.

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*: 17.

¹⁰⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*: 17.

part of an interaction between ‘subjects’ and their space and surroundings.’¹⁰⁹ Space is produced, argued Lefebvre, in large part through the ‘spatial practices’ in which a society, or elements within a society, operated.¹¹⁰

More recently – and derived in part from Lefebvre’s insistence on the importance of both the ways in which space is produced, and the importance of practice to that production – inquiry into the spaces of the political has witnessed a marked turn towards the study of social movements.¹¹¹ Such a focus is useful, it has been argued, in that it shifts the analytic perspective ‘away from an exclusive concern with the machinations of the state,’ because it can facilitate inquiry into ‘how different types of social movements challenge state-centred notions of hegemony, consent and power,’ and because it enables broader work on ‘how local contexts of resistance may interplay with global processes.’¹¹² Within this body of work, a networked conceptualisation of transnational political action has been significant. As Paul Routledge writes, this is largely because ‘[g]lobalising resistance is all about creating networks: of communication, solidarity, information sharing, and mutual support.’¹¹³ Such networks, however, are not understood to be merely natural occurrences. Instead, there is a focus on action and agency which returns us once again to the importance of practice for the constitution and maintenance of political networks. As Dave Featherstone puts it, the

¹⁰⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*: 17-18.

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*: 38.

¹¹¹ W. Nicholls (2009), ‘Place, networks and space: Theorising the geographies of social movements,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **34**: 78-93.

¹¹² P. Routledge (1996), ‘Critical geopolitics and terrains of resistance,’ *Political Geography* **15:6/7**: 509-510.

¹¹³ P. Routledge (2000), “‘Our resistance will be as transnational as capital’”: Convergence space and strategy in globalizing resistance,’ *GeoJournal* **52**: 27.

formation and perpetuation of the kinds of solidarities and connections which spatially stretched ways of doing politics require often demands ‘dynamic, radical forms of transnational political practice,’¹¹⁴ as well as ‘a politics of identification on the basis of shared *practices* of resistance.’¹¹⁵ By treating political action as emerging out of networked sets of spatial practices, this body of work has been able to both ‘focus on the processes of articulation through which connections and solidarities have been constituted,’ and also to interrogate how political activism in diverse contexts has ‘sought to remake social and material relations through particular spatial practices.’¹¹⁶

Yet these geographically diffuse networks have not been conceptualised as freely-floating, ungrounded and naturally occurring. The focus on practice has enabled a reconceptualisation of transnational political networks as participating in what Routledge has called ‘localized global actions ... whereby different social movements and resistance groups coordinate around a particular issue or event in a particular place.’¹¹⁷ As such, the focus on flows and networks is conjoined with attentiveness to the localised conditions out of which transnational political alliances are formulated, facilitating the production of ‘relational account[s] of place-based political activity as always already intervening in the construction of flows and routes of political activity.’¹¹⁸ If, as Doreen Massey argues, ‘the impetus ... for a space of flows, can only

¹¹⁴ D. Featherstone (2007), ‘The spatial politics of the past unbound: Transnational networks and the making of political identities,’ *Global Networks* 7:4: 436.

¹¹⁵ D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell: 162.

¹¹⁶ Featherstone, *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities*: 179.

¹¹⁷ P. Routledge (2003), ‘Convergence space: Process geographies of grassroots globalization networks,’ *Transactions of the Insitute of British Geographers* 28:3: 342.

¹¹⁸ Featherstone, *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities*: 16.

ever be achieved through the construction of (temporary, provisional) stabilizations,’ then the implication is that in order to fully grapple with networked and relational conceptions of the political, it is equally important to interrogate the sites and places in which connections are forged and out of which solidarities can emerge.¹¹⁹ Such an approach, which attends to the ‘convergence spaces’ through which political networks coalesce, does useful work in enabling ‘theoretical approaches to networks ... to be grounded in the materiality of practical politics.’¹²⁰ As Featherstone writes, such an approach draws attention to how ‘the practices through which geographies of power are contested have effects on the identities formed through political struggles.’¹²¹

In order to develop such an approach, this thesis mobilises the concept of ‘modes of political practice’. Developing previous geographical work on the relational nature of the political, this concept nevertheless attends directly to the material circumstances out of which wider trajectories of political action emerge. It takes seriously the insistence that ‘geographies of connection ... are actively produced through particular configurations of relations between technologies and social activity,’ drawing attention to the importance of the places in which politics is practised as well as the wider networks through which it operates.¹²² Simultaneously, it remains attentive to the fact that the political is articulated through diverse practices, and thus is called into being through a variety of modes. Such a perspective insists that in order to analyse political activism, it is as important to attend to the sites, spaces and networks through which such activism operates, as to interrogate its discursive frameworks and

¹¹⁹ D. Massey (2005), *For Space* London: Sage: 95

¹²⁰ Routledge, ‘Convergence space’: 345.

¹²¹ Featherstone, *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities*: 54.

¹²² Featherstone *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities*: 33.

ideologies. In doing so, it attends to the multiple ways in which political networks are ‘enacted through the localized practices of movements within them,’ whilst also creating space for the acknowledgement of the ‘tensions, contradictions and opposing subject positions’ which often characterise activist networks.¹²³

Work on networked political practices often focuses on late twentieth century social movements opposing neoliberal globalization. Featherstone argues that one consequence of this is that ‘the constitution of the spaces of the political through flows and networks is [often] regarded as an ‘entirely’ new development.’¹²⁴ Featherstone’s own work is amongst an important body of recent scholarship which has sought to challenge this division between past and present by highlighting what is ‘lost if a spatially dynamic and networked present is counterposed with a settled, bounded past.’¹²⁵ In recent years, a significant body of work has emerged which has argued that networked conceptualisations are useful for the interpretation of imperial politics.¹²⁶ Frederick Cooper has argued that if ‘Empires are a particular kind of spatial system,’ then it is essential to acknowledge that the ‘spatial imagination[s]’ on which they were based were ‘neither global nor local, but built out of specific lines of connection.’¹²⁷

¹²³ A. Cumbers, P. Routledge and C. Nativel (2008), ‘The entangled geographies of global justice networks,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 32:2: 185, 197; A. Cumbers and P. Routledge, *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹²⁴ Featherstone, ‘The spatial politics of the past unbound’: 433.

¹²⁵ Featherstone, ‘The spatial politics of the past unbound’: 449.

¹²⁶ D. Lambert and A. Lester (2006), ‘Introduction: Imperial spaces, Imperial subjects,’ in D. Lambert and A. Lester (eds.) *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Career in the Long Nineteenth Century* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-32.

¹²⁷ F. Cooper (2005), *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* London: University of California Press: 101, 109.

Scholarship on the history of empires now pays increased attention to the ‘networks or webs of global connection that are built in various ways to link people, places, ideas and objects together in dynamic configurations.’¹²⁸ Such a focus has meant that historians of empire now devote considerable energy to ‘analyzing and tracking particular sites, connections and movements’ in order to illustrate the varied ways in which ‘imperialism is constituted through its arrangements of spaces, places, landscapes and networks of connection.’¹²⁹

A large body of work has now examined the multiple practices through which the politics of empire have been articulated.¹³⁰ However, a focus on practices, spaces and networks is as yet largely absent from the wider body of work examining the politics of imperial scepticism and criticism, particularly in Britain. Imperial scepticism is taken as a broad term useful for capturing the diversity of forms of criticism of imperialism. Whilst some imperial sceptics were thoroughgoing anti-imperialists, believing in the need for the root-and-branch removal of all empires, many imperial sceptics took more reformist stances. As Gregory Claeys argues, ‘the term “anti-imperialism” must be used advisedly: those who were skeptical about the existing empire did not necessarily reject the concept *tout court*, and were sometimes happy to

¹²⁸ M. Ogborn (2008), *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 5.

¹²⁹ M. Ogborn (2007), *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company*: 3, 4.

¹³⁰ Lambert and Lester (eds.), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire*; Ogborn, *Indian Ink*; D. Lambert (2005), ‘The counter-revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian petitions and proslavery networks,’ *Social and Cultural Geography* 6: 3: 405-420.

hedge their bets.’¹³¹ Writing of anti-colonialism in Africa, Cooper has argued that movements seeking to criticise colonialism and imperialism were able to do so ‘largely because they linked activists in African towns and cities with principled groups in the metropolises,’ suggesting that ‘the success of anticolonial ... movements cannot be explained on a colony-by-colony basis,’ but must instead attend to the ‘wider contingent affiliation of people, inside and outside metropolises and colonies, who convinced each other that the apparent normality of colonialism or white domination could not be sustained.’¹³² Conceptualising imperial scepticism in these terms is helpful in enabling us to appreciate the complex networks through which it operated, crossing boundaries and linking people in one part of the world to events, objects, ideas and individuals in other parts of the world.

Similarly, work on the history of anti-racist organisations and individuals has also often failed to integrate analysis of the spaces in which anti-racism takes place, the networks through which it operates, and the practices through which it is expressed. Countering this tendency, Alastair Bonnett has argued for an approach which explores ‘the production of anti-racism as a social and historical process,’ and which treats anti-racism itself as ‘a topic of social scientific, historical and geographical enquiry.’¹³³ To this end, Bonnett argues strongly for attentiveness towards ‘the ways anti-racism is

¹³¹ G. Claeys (2010), *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 8. See also N. Owen (2007), *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1-21; B. Porter (2008 [1968]), *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge* London: I.B. Tauris: xxiv-xxix, 5, 19; S. Howe (1993), *Anticolonialism and British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* Oxford: Clarendon: 1-2

¹³² Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*: 110, 200.

¹³³ A. Bonnett (2000), *Anti-racism* London: Routledge: 2-3.

practised,' in the process delineating 'six forms of anti-racist practice.'¹³⁴ These are: everyday anti-racism; multicultural anti-racism; psychological anti-racism; radical anti-racism; anti-Nazi and anti-fascist anti-racism; and the anti-racism of the representative organisation. Bonnett's account emphasises the 'range and diversity of anti-racist practice,' and his typology of anti-racist practice usefully draws attention to the 'variety of pathways in anti-racism,' the multiplicity of forms it can take and the 'political division' which often exists within different modes of 'anti-racist practice.'¹³⁵ Of course, these various modes of anti-racist practice ought not to be considered entirely separate, and we will see examples of all or most of these modes of practice throughout this thesis. This thesis advances Bonnett's framework by drawing attention to the particular geographies of anti-racist practice as they were mobilised by organisations in a particular spatial and temporal setting, foregrounding the ways in which anti-racism was practised in order to ask what this can tell us about the combined functioning of the politics of race and of empire in 1930s and 1940s London.

Bonnett makes a powerful case for the close relationship between anti-racism and various forms of imperial critique, arguing that 'anti-colonialism and anti-racism are intimately related political projects precisely because the principal impact of racism on the world has been within colonial and neo-colonial contexts.'¹³⁶ This does not mean that anti-racism and imperial criticism are contiguous. There are many examples of imperial critics drawing on racist and racialised arguments.¹³⁷ However, it does usefully highlight the close relationship between the politics of race and the politics of empire,

¹³⁴ Bonnett, *Anti-racism*: 85.

¹³⁵ Bonnett, *Anti-racism*: 85, 114-115.

¹³⁶ Bonnett, *Anti-racism*: 24.

¹³⁷ Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*; Owen, *The British Left and India*.

which have often been articulated and criticised together.¹³⁸ By mobilising the concept of ‘modes of political practice,’ and seeking to trace the diverse spatialities through which the politics of race, empire and imperial scepticism were articulated in 1930s and 1940s London, this thesis seeks to contribute to a wider turn towards appreciating the importance of spaces, places and networks to political activism. It does so through a focus on a diverse body of West Indian activists in Britain, and thus before continuing it is important to discuss how the particular approach taken here relates to the previous historiography on West Indians in Britain.

Black West Indians in Britain: Historiographical Trends

Work on the black West Indian presence in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century has taken a variety of forms.¹³⁹ This section will chart these various historiographical trends, and in doing so illustrate the contribution made by the present thesis to further developing and extending this historiography.

The earliest scholarship on black West Indians in twentieth century Britain tended to begin from a sociological standpoint. In most instances, this early body of work was concerned primarily with race relations in post-World War Two Britain. In order to interrogate this subject fully some of the most prominent works were based, at least in part, on an analysis of the early twentieth century period. Foremost amongst such work was Kenneth Little’s 1948 book *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial*

¹³⁸ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.

¹³⁹ A. S. Rush (2007), ‘Reshaping British history: The historiography of West Indians in Britain in the twentieth century,’ *History Compass* 5:2: 463-484.

Relations in English Society.¹⁴⁰ Primarily, Little's focus was on the Welsh city of Cardiff. However, the second half of his book was given over to a discussion of 'the historical and cultural context of racial relations in Britain.'¹⁴¹ Little aimed to analyse race relations in Cardiff 'as part of the surrounding matrix of the larger British society,'¹⁴² and in doing so he devoted several sections of his book specifically to considerations of the black West Indian community in Britain. Distinguishing between the categories of the 'West African' and the 'West Indian' was important for Little because, as he put it, the West Indies were more 'Europeanized, or rather "anglicised" than African colonies. In terms of educational systems, language, and social structures Little depicted the West Indies as being closer to Britain than were African colonies, even going so far as to argue that 'present and preceding generations of coloured West Indians have never known any recognized culture other than an English one.'¹⁴³ For this reason, Little insisted that 'the background of race relations and racial consciousness [in the West Indian] is vastly and subtly different from that of the West African.'¹⁴⁴

Given Little's own background, it is unsurprising that he would give such prominence to the pre-war history of British race relations, nor that he should focus on differentiating between West Africans and West Indians. During the early 1940s, he had been an active member of the League of Coloured Peoples, producing a report for them on racism and education,¹⁴⁵ and the League's founder, Dr Harold Moody, is thanked in

¹⁴⁰ K. Little (1972 [1948]), *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

¹⁴¹ Little, *Negroes in Britain*: 187-292.

¹⁴² Little, *Negroes in Britain*: 48.

¹⁴³ Little, *Negroes in Britain*: 272.

¹⁴⁴ Little, *Negroes in Britain*: 273, 274-277.

¹⁴⁵ League of Coloured Peoples (1944), *Race Relations and the Schools* London: LCP.

Little's acknowledgements to *Negroes in Britain* for 'affording me access to the files and publications of the League.'¹⁴⁶ Throughout his account, Little draws on LCP material to advance his arguments, and at one point even quotes in full a poem written by Una Marson and originally published in *The Keys*, the LCP's periodical during the 1930s.¹⁴⁷ The League itself had long indicated that a division existed within the black community in Britain between West Indians and West Africans, and calls for racial unity persist throughout *The Keys*. Of course, the historical record shows many instances of solidarity between African and West Indian activists in this period which should not be ignored, but the general point that there were at times differences between African and West Indian activists brought about by the different conditions in which these two groups were brought up has been emphasised in several accounts, both those written by contemporaries and by later historians.¹⁴⁸

In the wake of Little's account, several other studies of race relations in Britain emerged. In 1954, the black American scholar St Clair Drake submitted his PhD thesis to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago.¹⁴⁹ Whilst Drake's work remains unpublished, his thesis, entitled *Value Systems, Social Structure, and Race Relations in the British Isles*, remains an important document in the early historiography of black Britain. Drake adopted a similar method to that of Little, focusing primarily on one specific place and time, post-war Cardiff again, whilst also providing a wider contextual history of British race relations. Similarly to Little, Drake

¹⁴⁶ 'Acknowledgements', unnumbered page in Little, *Negroes in Britain*.

¹⁴⁷ Little, *Negroes in Britain*: 275-276.

¹⁴⁸ B. Schwarz (2003), 'George Padmore,' in B. Schwarz (ed.), *West Indians Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 147-148.

¹⁴⁹ S. C. Drake (1954), *Value Systems, Social Structure, and Race Relations in the British Isles*, Unpublished PhD, University of Chicago.

was able to make use of the files of the League of Coloured Peoples, and he used these to produce the first historical analysis of this organisation, as well as of many other black-led groups in 1930s Britain.¹⁵⁰ Drake also paralleled Little in that he similarly distinguished between ‘West Africans’ and ‘West Indians’.¹⁵¹ Drake drew on Little’s work explicitly in making this distinction, but tended to emphasise the divisions between Africans and West Indians to an even greater degree than his predecessor, primarily because of his perception that the African and West Indian communities largely operated separately at the time of his field work in Cardiff between 1947-8.¹⁵² Of the West Indian community in Cardiff, Drake wrote that it was ‘much more thoroughly assimilated to British cultural standards than ... African seamen,’ whilst noting also that ‘[i]n Cardiff as elsewhere, West Indians tend to combine a keen sense of “race consciousness” with a pride in being British in culture.’¹⁵³

In the same year as Drake submitted his thesis, Anthony Richmond published the first substantial work to focus primarily on West Indians in Britain as a distinct community.¹⁵⁴ In *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1941-1952*, Richmond primarily focused on ‘racial relations in Liverpool after the arrival of the first contingent of West Indian workers in February 1941.’¹⁵⁵ Whilst he did offer a brief discussion of ‘racial relations’ in Liverpool before World War Two, as well as a brief discussion of other areas including Manchester and Bolton,

¹⁵⁰ Drake, *Value Systems*: 84-111.

¹⁵¹ For the former, see Drake, *Value Systems*: 359-371; for the latter, see Drake, *Value Systems*: 372-392.

¹⁵² Drake, *Value Systems*: 356-359.

¹⁵³ Drake, *Value Systems*: 373.

¹⁵⁴ A. Richmond (1954), *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1941-1952* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

¹⁵⁵ Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain*: 19.

Richmond was less concerned with these wider aspects than either Little or Drake.¹⁵⁶ Richmond insisted that '[t]he West Indian Negro [sic] immigrant has ... an advantage over the African immigrant' because 'his [sic] own cultural background is much more europeanised and anglicized than is the case of the African colonies.'¹⁵⁷ Whilst Richmond followed Little and Drake in insisting that this meant that the 'Negro [sic] population in Britain is ... culturally heterogenous in character,' he also went further than either of the earlier two scholars in claiming that this British context differed from that of other areas with black minority populations, in particular the United States of America, in which Richmond averred that the black community 'form culturally a homogenous group.'¹⁵⁸

Throughout the 1960s, a number of further studies examined the black community in post-war Britain with a particular focus on West Indians.¹⁵⁹ Alongside these works, several broader studies of 'race relations' in Britain continued to incorporate black West Indians into their analysis.¹⁶⁰ Whilst many of these studies are now considered canonical publications for the development of a race relations school of British sociological study, this very fact meant that they often paid little attention to

¹⁵⁶ Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain*: 19-22; 50-52

¹⁵⁷ Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain*: 17.

¹⁵⁸ Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain*: 17-18.

¹⁵⁹ R. Glass (1960), *London's Newcomers: The West Indian Migrants* London: George Allen and Unwin; S. Patterson (1963), *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* Bloomington: Indiana University Press; C. Peach (1968), *West Indian Migration to Britain: A Social Geography* London: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁰ Banton, *White and Coloured*; V. Waughray (1961), *Race Relations in Great Britain* London: Peace News.

historical aspects or that, when they did, this was done primarily with a view to offering a general history on which to base studies of the contemporary period.

It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that more detailed histories of the black presence in Britain began to emerge which shed increased light on the earlier history of West Indians in Britain. In these decades, a number of important historical surveys were published offering overviews of the history of black people in Britain. Amongst the earliest such studies was Edward Scobie's book *Black Britannia*, in which the author offered a series of portraits of individual black lives in Britain from the 1500s through to the 1960s.¹⁶¹ By the early 1980s, enquiries into the history of black people in Britain began to be recognised within mainstream history publications, with the magazine *History Today* even devoting a special issue to the topic of 'Black British History' in 1981.¹⁶² Three years later, in 1984, Peter Fryer's monumental study *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* was published. Fryer's book remains a landmark in the study of black British history, offering a panoramic survey which began in the Roman period and ran through until the 1980s. Yet its very breadth meant that, whilst able to offer many insights into various eras of black British history, it often remained at a relatively general level, unable to devote too much space to detailed exploration and analysis.

The 1970s also saw the translation into English of Immanuel Geiss's book *Panafrikanismus*. Translated as *The Pan-African Movement*, Geiss took an international focus which included Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. During the course of his analysis, Geiss offered lengthy discussions of a number of black West Indian activists and organisations, including the League of Coloured Peoples and the

¹⁶¹ E. Scobie (1972), *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* Chicago: Johnson Publishing.

¹⁶² See the *History Today* issue for September 1981, edited by Paul Edwards.

International African Service Bureau.¹⁶³ Geiss's attempts to position black West Indians in Britain as part of a broader historical tradition of Pan-Africanism was replicated some years later by Cedric Robinson, who would also attempt to appropriate members of this grouping – especially C.L.R. James – into a particular tradition, this time that of 'black Marxism'.¹⁶⁴ Whereas previous works, especially Richmond's, had emphasised the distinct nature of African diasporic communities in Britain, both Geiss and Robinson, in their different ways, drew elements of black British history into wider dialogue with transnational movements such as Pan-Africanism and international Marxism, thus making a significant contribution towards understanding black British history within wider, transnational frames.

Works such as those by Geiss and Robinson indicate another historiographical trend into which black West Indians in Britain have been inserted. Scholars of the move towards colonial independence, and in particular the role of intellectuals within this movement, have often included in their analyses a discussion of people from particular colonies who travelled to Britain. In the Caribbean context, such work has been particularly significant. For example, Ivar Oxaal's 1968 work *Black Intellectuals Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, included a chapter which looked at the upbringing in Trinidad of C.L.R. James, George Padmore, and Eric Williams, and subsequently followed them to Britain and briefly examined their activities in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, though in somewhat more detail, John Gaffar La Guerre looked at both Padmore and James in their British context in his 1982

¹⁶³ Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*: esp. 340-356, 385-408.

¹⁶⁴ C. Robinson (2000 [1983]), *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* University of North Carolina Press: esp. 241-286.

¹⁶⁵ Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals Come to Power*: esp. 56-79.

study of *The Social and Political Thought of the Colonial Intelligentsia*.¹⁶⁶ Such work draws attention to the wider relationship between African diasporic communities in Britain and the global politics of empire.

Shortly after Fryer's work came Ron Ramdin's study of *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*.¹⁶⁷ Published in 1987, Ramdin's work sought to define the emergence of a black working class in Britain beginning in 1555, following its development through until the 1980s. In doing so, Ramdin sought to draw out the implications of this history for any understanding of the participation of black people in the social unrest and rioting which hit Britain in the early 1980s. Neither Ramdin nor Fryer made much of the distinction between African and West Indian communities that had been characteristic of the race relations scholarship of the 1960s, though they did devote considerable sections of their works to discussion of black West Indians in Britain.¹⁶⁸ Instead, their focus was on uncovering previously hidden histories of black people, and insisting that these histories were important to any understanding of how Britain had developed up until the 1980s. In doing so, and as Anne Spry Rush has noted, these scholars 'paid little, if any, attention to what could be vastly different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Instead, because they were not white, all people of colour in Britain were assumed to have shared a common 'black' experience.'¹⁶⁹

Another important strand of work in the 1980s focused on the contributions made by those black West Indians who came to Britain during the Second World War.

¹⁶⁶ J. G. La Guerre (1982), *The Social and Political Thought of the Colonial Intelligentsia* Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Mona: esp. 51-121.

¹⁶⁷ R. Ramdin (1987), *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* Aldershot: Gower.

¹⁶⁸ P. Fryer (1985), *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain* London: Pluto: 316-320, 326-351; Ramdin, *Making of the Black Working Class*: 100-148, 160-185.

¹⁶⁹ Rush, 'Reshaping British History': 465.

Thus, Marika Sherwood looked at the place of West Indian workers and service personnel in wartime Britain.¹⁷⁰ Ben Bousenquet and Colin Douglas combined oral history and archival research to examine the contribution of West Indian women to the war, in the course of which they included sections on West Indian women in Britain, such as the 100 volunteers who were stationed there as part of the women's Auxiliary Territorial Service.¹⁷¹

More recently, there has been a flowering of work on West Indians in Britain which has given particular attention to the 1930s and 1940s. However, within this work there has been a notable trend towards biographical studies of particular individuals. A number of recent biographical studies of various important figures attest to this fact. Indeed, in the most substantial recent study of West Indians in Britain, Bill Schwarz's edited collection on *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, by far the bulk of the chapters focus on the lives of particular individuals. Whilst such approaches have led to important work being done, they can also serve to occlude broader elements of this history. For example, whilst we now have several studies of the individual lives of leading members of the League of Coloured Peoples and the Pan-African Federation, we still know relatively little about the relationship between these two groups. By focusing on organisations rather than individuals, this thesis hopes to build upon these biographical studies by analysing the ways in which the lives of multiple black West Indians in Britain both intersected with and diverged from one another, as well as from other individuals, organisations and trends in British society. Such an approach, it will

¹⁷⁰ M. Sherwood (1985), *Many Struggles: West Indian Workers and Service Personnel in Britain (1939-45)* London: Karia Press.

¹⁷¹ B. Bousenquet and C. Douglas (1991), *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

be argued, offers an enhanced perspective on black West Indians in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s, and brings to light aspects of the histories of these individuals which have previously not been so apparent.

From the above survey, we can highlight certain trends within the historiography of black West Indians in Britain. Apparent particularly within some of the earliest such studies was a focus on situating West Indians within a broader narrative relating to race relations in Britain. Such work often privileged the British context at the expense of broader diasporic relationships. When it did consider the world beyond Britain, it tended to stress the particular Anglicised nature of the Caribbean often in a way that implied that West Indians themselves were effectively English in all but name. Such an approach often led to a deterministic division between West Indians and Africans in Britain being drawn.

More recently, there has been a turn towards diverse ways of understanding black British communities, and consequently black West Indians in Britain, as part of wider transnational trends and movements, either based on the connections forged within the African diaspora or through the global politics of empire. Whilst such work has on occasion essentialised the subjects of study, presuming that transnational connections were an obvious and natural occurrence for African diasporic activists, it has nevertheless helped to draw attention beyond the narrow confines of 'race relations' in Britain, enabling the study of black West Indians in Britain to draw on wider, transnational modes of history.

We can also pinpoint amongst later works a primary focus on the biographical approach, centred on the lives of individual figures. Whilst such work was necessary for the task of drawing attention to important and previously under-acknowledged individuals, it has often left gaps in explaining the relationship between these

individuals, and the broader networks of which they were a part during their time in London. By focusing on political organisations established by black West Indians in Britain, this thesis hopes to move beyond the restrictions imposed by this approach. However, before moving to an empirical study of such organisations, it is important to set out further the context within which such groups were set. Doing so requires a discussion of the particularities of London in the 1930s and 1940s, and the relationship of that city both to the British Empire and, more particularly, to the Caribbean.

Chapter Two

‘London is ... the nucleus of a great branch of western civilization ... I was not impressed’: Geographies of black West Indian activism in imperial London

Introduction

Shortly after arriving in London in 1932, C. L. R. James wrote a series of articles setting out his initial experiences of London life, published in the Trinidadian newspaper the *Port of Spain Gazette*. In the penultimate article in the series, published on the 28 August and entitled ‘The nucleus of a great civilization,’ James assessed his experiences of London since his arrival in March 1932. He wrote of how he had found ‘[t]he streets of London, the food the people eat, their way of dress, their manners ... endlessly interesting.’ For James, the description of London as the ‘nucleus of a great civilisation’ was fitting given that it was the ‘capital city of a country which has played a great part in the history of the world during the last few centuries.’ And yet, James’s summary assessment of the impact of London on him was to write that ‘to be frank, on the whole I was not impressed.’¹

¹ C. L. R. James, ‘The nucleus of a great civilisation,’ *Port of Spain Gazette*, 28th August 1932, republished in N. Laughlin (ed.) (2003), *C. L. R. James: Letters from London* Port of Spain: Prospect Press: 111.

Several things are striking about James's early account of on London, foremost amongst which is the fact that despite being unimpressed with London itself, James nevertheless begins by depicting it as the 'nucleus of a great civilization.' There is a tension here between admiration for the culture and history which London represents, and the disappointment of the lived experience of the city. This tension in parts has its roots in the Anglicising experience of West Indian life during the first two decades of the twentieth century, something of which, as the previous chapter demonstrated, James was acutely aware.² And yet, whilst this early experience was clearly important for James, it is the active experience of living in London itself which provides the basis for his subsequent disappointment.

In many ways, James was an exceptional West Indian. However, his experiences of London – couched somewhere between respect for the image of what London represented and disappointment with the reality of the city – can be seen as being more broadly shared by black West Indian activists in London. Whilst they may not all have expressed their sentiments in the precise terms deployed by James, and nor did they share the same likes and dislikes of London as James did, nevertheless there is pronounced evidence of an ambivalent relationship between black West Indians in London and the city they inhabited during the 1930s and 1940s.

This chapter situates James's insight that the lived experience of London had a profound, though sometimes disillusioning, impact upon black West Indians within a broader context. To begin with, the chapter positions London within the context of an historical relationship with the West Indies, arguing that London can be thought of as part of an 'expanded Caribbean.' Following this, the chapter develops the idea of London as a 'colonial city.' This framework is then extended to suggest that it is useful

² James, 'The nucleus of a great civilisation': 115.

to think of London as a city engaged in a long history of creolisation. Here, the argument is that creolisation, as a complex process of cultural exchange and contestation, has taken place gradually in London, impacting on particular aspects of London life in a variety of ways. In this regard, it is therefore useful to think of London as a networked city, and the chapter thus elaborates an understanding of London as a city whose coloniality was constituted through a vast array of trajectories that infiltrated diverse aspects of the city. In particular, the chapter outlines some of the particular aspects of London that were most closely connected to the British Empire and that also impinged upon the experiences of black West Indian activists in the city. Finally, the chapter discusses some of the implications, primarily methodological, of a geographical approach to the question of black West Indian activists in Britain.

London and the expanded Caribbean

One of the primary historical points of connection between London and the Caribbean arises from the positioning of each within the so-called ‘circum-Atlantic world,’ driven by cycles of trade and commerce, centred on the Atlantic Ocean, and hinging on the enslavement and transportation of Africans to the Caribbean and the Americas.³ As James Rawley has demonstrated, London was the leading English slaving port until at least the late 1720s, at which point it was overtaken by Bristol. By the 1760s, London again returned to prominence, perhaps even surpassing Bristol to once again be

³ J. Roach (1996), *Cities of the Dead: Circum Atlantic Performance* New York: Columbia University Press; I. Baucom (2005), *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* London: Duke University Press.

England's primary slaving port in the 1770s.⁴ Whilst much of Rawley's work has focused on the sheer numerical and financial significance of slaving to the port of London, he has also highlighted the significant roles played by prominent Londoners in the trade, such as Humphry Morice, who between 1718-1732 dispatched 53 voyages to Africa, many of which transported enslaved people to Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean. Morice, described by Rawley as perhaps 'England's foremost slave merchant in the 1720s,' also served as a Member of Parliament from 1713-1731, and was for a time the Governor of the Bank of England.⁵ Morice was not alone amongst prominent London figures with an involvement in the slave trade. As Nick Draper has shown, the trade had wider ramifications throughout British society, including amongst banking and trading firms based in London during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ Ian Baucom has argued that the trade in enslaved peoples played a crucial role in the development of finance capital in Britain, and Draper has also shown that over one third of the original investors in the London Docks and the West India Docks, also in London, in the late eighteenth century were involved in one way or another with slavery and the trade in enslaved peoples.⁷ Even after emancipation in 1833, slavery continued to play a role in London as several high profile figures linked to important organisations filed claims for, and in some instances received, compensation from the

⁴ J. Rawley (2003), *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade* Columbia: University of Missouri Press: 18-39.

⁵ Rawley, *London, Metropolis of the Slave Trade*: 40-56 .

⁶ N. Draper (2010), *The Price of Emancipation: Slave Ownership, Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic*; N. Draper (2008), 'The City of London and slavery: evidence from the first dock companies, 1795-1800,' *Economic History Review*, **61: 2**: 432-466.

Commissioners of Slave Compensation, set up to compensate the former owners of enslaved people for their losses due to the ending of enslavement.⁸

Beyond slavery, trade with the Caribbean and wider Americas played an important role in London's early commercial development. Robert Brenner has demonstrated some of the ways in which London-based merchants and traders 'got involved in colonial trade as an extension of their domestic operations' in the late seventeenth century.⁹ Brenner argues that the relationship between colonial traders and the wider commercial and trading sectors based around the City of London was crucial to the development of a 'new merchant' class, which in turn played a crucial role in the development of British capitalism, and of London society itself, in the seventeenth century.¹⁰ More recently, Nuala Zahedieh has illustrated in great detail some of the many ways in which London occupied a 'pivotal place in seventeenth-century England's expanding network of imperial exchange.'¹¹ Individual Londoners played important roles in the promotion of a variety of British imperial projects in these years, and the profits derived from the ensuing trades were crucial to London's own development.¹²

⁸ Draper, *The Price of Emancipation*; also Draper (2007), "'Possessing slaves': Ownership, compensation and metropolitan society in Britain at the time of emancipation, 1834-40,' *History Workshop Journal* **64**: 1: 74-102.

⁹ R. Brenner (2003), *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1663* London: Verso: 114.

¹⁰ Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*: 113-197; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*: 410-412.

¹¹ N. Zahedieh (2010), *The Capital and the Colonies: London and the Atlantic, 1660-1700* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 17.

¹² Zahedieh, *The Capital and the Colonies*: 28.

Given that the Caribbean has historically occupied ‘a special place’ in Europe because of its central role in what Peter Hulme has called ‘the encounter between Europe and America, civilization and savagery,’¹³ tracking the connections between London and the Caribbean involves also going beyond the evident material connections signified by trading and shipping figures, and requires engaging with the discursive representation of the Caribbean within the intellectual history of London. Anthony Trollope, for example, whose 1859 book *The West Indies in the Spanish Main* occupies a central place in the history of the engagement of British intellectuals with the Caribbean, was born and brought up in London, and worked there as a Post Office clerk.¹⁴ Other important British thinkers involved with the Caribbean, such as James Anthony Froude, author of *The English in the West Indies* (1888), and Sydney Olivier, former Governor of Jamaica and author of *Jamaica, the Blessed Island* (1936), lived in London, whilst important West Indian intellectuals like John Jacob Thomas and Henry Sylvester Williams also spent time in the city in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ More broadly, Hall has argued that ‘It was through the lens of the Caribbean ... that the English first

¹³ P. Hulme (1986), *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* London: Methuen: 3.

¹⁴ On the importance of London for Trollope’s wider life and writings, see P. Collins (1989), ‘Trollope and London,’ *Trollopiana* 4; On the writing and reception of *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*, see C. Hall (2002), *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* Cambridge: Polity: 209-229.

¹⁵ M. Olivier (ed.) (1948), *Sydney Olivier, Letters and Selected Writings* London: Allen and Unwin: 59-71; F. Smith (2002), *Creole Recitations: John Jacob Thomas and Colonial Formation in the Late Nineteenth Century Caribbean* London: University of Virginia Press; M. Sherwood (2011), *Origins of Pan-Africanism: Henry Sylvester Williams, Africa and the African Diaspora* Abingdon: Routledge.

debated “the African,” slavery and anti-slavery, emancipation and the meanings of freedom.’¹⁶

The broad outline sketched above suggests that the Caribbean was linked in a broad variety of ways to the political, intellectual, and economic life of London. Indeed, the relationship between London and the Caribbean is such that it can be useful to conceptualise London itself as forming part of what Hulme has termed the ‘expanded Caribbean.’¹⁷ Hulme’s own work draws on a longer tradition of thinking the Caribbean region as being in certain ways inseparable from other areas. Such work has included that of Charles Wagley, who attempted to position the Caribbean within a wider ‘cultural sphere’ which he termed ‘plantation America.’ For Wagley, plantation America ‘extends spatially from about midway up the coast of Brazil into the Guianas, along the Caribbean coast, throughout the Caribbean itself, and into the United States.’ Wagley terms plantation America a ‘spatial region,’ one which ‘is represented by a type of society.’ He acknowledged that plantation America differed from place to place dependent upon social, political and environmental context, but also emphasised that ‘where the plantation system and slavery were fundamental institutions, a way of life took form which resulted in many common problems and many similar contemporary culture traits throughout the region.’¹⁸

Hulme’s notion of the ‘expanded Caribbean’ is indebted to Wagley’s plantation America, as well as to other related concepts such as Edouard Glissant’s description of

¹⁶ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*: 11.

¹⁷ P. Hulme (2009), ‘Expanding the Caribbean,’ in M. Niblett and K. Oloff (eds.), *Perspectives on the ‘Other America’: Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture* New York: Rodopi: 45; Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*: 4.

¹⁸ C. Wagley (1960), ‘Plantation America: A culture sphere,’ in V. Rubin (ed.), *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium* Seattle: University of Washington Press: 5-6.

the Caribbean as the ‘Other America.’ For Hulme, the idea of the ‘expanded Caribbean’ allows for a kind of ‘imaginative mass trespass’ over the boundaries of national literary cultures, linking traditions which have hitherto been kept artificially separate.¹⁹ Maintaining a connection to the regions original Carib inhabitants, the concept of the expanded Caribbean nevertheless allows Hulme to construct a vision of the region which does not overly concern itself with ‘propriety,’ or with myths of cultural origin. Instead, it attempts to be faithful to the ‘dubious origin’ of Caribbean peoples, histories and cultures, positioning the region at the heart of the modern world whilst at the same time showing that this is so because of the importance which the Caribbean has taken on far beyond its traditionally construed geographical boundaries.²⁰

Hulme’s work has focused primarily on the ways in which the expanded Caribbean relates to the wider Americas. It has also been predominantly concerned with literary histories rather than other approaches. This has meant that the question of Europe’s relationship to the expanded Caribbean has yet to be fully approached.²¹ That said, there are hints within Hulme’s framework of how Europe, and Britain more specifically, might fit within the scope of the expanded Caribbean. For example, Hulme emphasises that an expanded Caribbean approach to the region’s literary cultures would ‘lead to more attention to writing *about* the Caribbean.’²² In particular, Hulme notes that the writings of British historians and philanthropists such as James Anthony Froude, James Philippo or Alec Waugh would need to be integrated within any account of expanded Caribbean literary history and culture.

¹⁹ Hulme, ‘Expanding the Caribbean’.

²⁰ Hulme, ‘Expanding the Caribbean’: 42-44.

²¹ Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* is exemplary in this regard.

²² Hulme, ‘Expanding the Caribbean’: 44.

This thesis argues that London's historical relationship with the West Indies, and in particular the connections between the two regions in the 1930s and 1940s, position London as being a part of the expanded Caribbean. The concept of the expanded Caribbean works best when understood not in a narrowly topographic sense, whereby the surface of the earth is understood 'as a holistic, bounded area ... *in which* connections are made,' but instead in a topological sense whereby geographical space is understood relationally, not as the flattened space of cartography but of a world developed and weaved together through 'topological connections ... that are not geometric or linear.' From such a perspective, as John Wylie has argued, it is possible to appreciate that 'given the volume and density of connections,' London might in some ways be considered to be 'closer, topologically, to New York than to other towns and cities in the UK.'²³ Such an approach draws attention to the networks and webs through which London came to constitute, in some very specific and particular ways, a part of the expanded Caribbean, and vice-versa. Such a conceptualisation draws attention to what Colin Brock has called 'the West Indian dimension' of Western Europe, and of Britain in particular.²⁴

Examining the Caribbean diaspora offers a particularly useful way of exploring the connections which sustained London's place within the expanded Caribbean, and it is here that this thesis seeks to make its contribution. In the first half of the twentieth century, Caribbean peoples left the region in large numbers. As Winston James has shown, during the period of the construction of the Panama Canal this was a primary destination for Caribbean migrants. The USA, also, was an important destination for

²³ J. Wylie (2007), *Landscape* Abingdon: Routledge: 204.

²⁴ C. Brock (1986), 'The West Indian dimension of western Europe,' in C. Brock (ed.), *The Caribbean in Europe: Aspects of the West Indian Experience in Britain* London: Frank Cass and Co.: 3-14.

Caribbean migrants. Indeed, a growing literature is now devoted to exploring this Caribbean community in the USA, particularly through a focus on its political activities.²⁵ However, a small number of people from the Caribbean also migrated to Britain. Using figures from a 1963 Home Office report, which in turn drew on figures from the 1931 census, James Walvin has suggested that in 1931 there were 8,585 people from the West Indies in Britain, a slight drop from the 9,054 registered by the 1921 census.²⁶ There is no way of knowing the breakdown of these figures in terms of race, gender or island of origin, nor are there details of exactly where many of these migrants were living once they arrived in Britain. Yet what these figures do show is that a small number of Caribbean migrants had made their way to Britain by the 1930s. These Caribbean migrants were part of a wider colonial population in Britain, and in London in particular, who in their own ways contributed to making that city itself colonial.

Geographies of Colonial London

London in the first half of the twentieth century can be thought of as an ‘imperial city,’ perhaps even ‘the greatest imperial metropolis of modern times.’²⁷ The idea of the imperial city has been developed by scholars working across a range of disciplines, but

²⁵ W. James (1998), *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* London: Verso; J. M. Turner (2005), *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

²⁶ J. Walvin (1984), *Passage to Britain: Immigration in British History and Politics* London: Penguin.

²⁷ F. Driver and D. Gilbert (2003), ‘Imperial cities: overlapping territories, intertwined histories,’ in F. Driver and D. Gilbert (eds.) *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1-21; J. Schneer (1999), *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* London: Yale University Press: 12.

the work of geographers David Gilbert and Felix Driver has been particularly significant. In a series of essays, Gilbert and Driver have interrogated the complex ways in which imperialism and modern London have intertwined, demonstrating that the British Empire has helped to shape many different parts of London, from central areas to the suburbs, in a variety of ways.²⁸ Driver and Gilbert's analysis of London as an imperial city has enabled deeper understanding of how 'the form, use and representation of modern European cities have been shaped by the global histories of imperialism.'²⁹

Apart from focusing on the ways in which the built environment of imperial cities had been shaped by the various processes of modern imperialism, Driver and Gilbert's work also drew attention to the multiple ways in which imperial metropolises such as London became positioned within diverse networks which ensured that these cities became intimately connected with places well beyond their traditionally understood boundaries. Influenced by Edward Said's inquiries in *Culture and Imperialism*, Driver and Gilbert raised questions about how 'the global processes of imperialism [have been] absorbed and represented in an urban context.'³⁰ As well as Said, this work was also marked by the influence of Doreen Massey's notion of a 'politics of place beyond place,' a concept which Driver and Gilbert used to explore the ways in which imperial cities had both been influenced by people and places far beyond their conventionally construed boundaries, and had in turn had their own particular influences on other places.³¹

²⁸ F. Driver and D. Gilbert (1998), 'Heart of empire? Landscape, space and performance in imperial London,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **16: 8**: 11-28; D. Gilbert and F. Driver (2000), 'Capital and empire: Geographies of Imperial London,' *Geoforum* **51:1/2**:23-32.

²⁹ Driver and Gilbert, 'Imperial cities': 3.

³⁰ Driver and Gilbert, 'Imperial cities': 6.

³¹ See D. Massey (2007), *World City* Cambridge: Polity.

Much of the work on imperial cities has, however, tended to focus more on the ways in which imperialism impacted on metropolitan inhabitants, and shaped metropolitan urban environments, rather than on the ways in which colonial migrants themselves negotiated metropolitan cities.³² Indeed, the framing of these cities as ‘imperial’ can, in this sense, be problematic. Robert Young argues that the term imperialism should be used to capture ‘an empire that was bureaucratically controlled by a government from the centre, and which was developed for ideological as well as financial reasons.’³³ In this sense, imperialism can be conceived at what Young calls a ‘conceptual’ level. Young argues that whilst it is possible to generalise about the nature of imperialism, and to examine a set of related ideas operating throughout its history, if the focus is on its particular incarnations then the concept of colonialism should instead be used. As a practical process, Young writes that, ‘colonialism involved an extraordinary range of different forms and practices carried out with respect to radically different cultures, over many centuries.’³⁴ Following Young’s distinction between imperialism as a conceptual framework for the governing of empires, and colonialism as the practical expression of imperial processes enables London to emerge as both an imperial city and, at the same time, a colonial one, a space in which particular practices derived from particular conceptualisations of imperialism were manifested and contested.

Writing of post-war Britain, Bill Schwarz has argued that ‘the domestic culture of the metropolis ... can be understood to be (in some way) colonial.’ He rejects claims that this application stretches the concept of the colonial too far, arguing instead that

³² There are notable exceptions to this tendency, Schneer’s *London 1900* being perhaps the most obvious.

³³ R. Young (2003), *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* Oxford: Blackwell: 16.

³⁴ Young, *Postcolonialism*: 17.

‘the conception of civilization which Britain embodied was cast not only in the metropole but in the colonies and overseas empire.’ Colonial peoples, argues Schwarz, ‘were not just adjuncts to an already-given idea of Britain.’³⁵ The relationship between Britishness and the Caribbean has been particularly strong. As Schwarz puts it, ‘of all Britain’s non-white colonies, in terms of formal, official cultures the West Indian nations were closest to the mother country: in language, religion, schooling, literature, sport.’³⁶ Such a perspective emphasises colonies themselves as formative sites for the formation and contestation of Britishness. Consequently, examining the ways in which colonial migrants engaged with London offers one important way of examining London as colonial city, by enabling inquiry into the ways in which conceptions of Britishness forged in the crucible of the colonies played out in the imperial metropolis. Similarly, and as Laura Tabili has argued, historical research on colonial peoples in late imperial Britain can help to demonstrate some of the ways in which ‘colonial levels of exploitation and control’ attempted to ‘recolonize’ colonial migrants in Britain.³⁷

The interpretation of the modern European metropolis as colonial has been developed in greatest detail by Jennifer Boittin, in her work on Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. Boittin’s work begins from a ‘desire to come to terms with the city as a locale

³⁵ B. Schwarz (2003), ‘“Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*’: Reflections on the emergence of post-colonial Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, **14:3**:272-3; also B. Schwarz (1999), ‘Reveries of race: The closing of the imperial moment,’ in B. Conekin, F. Mort, and C. Waters, (eds.), *Moments of Modernity? Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* London: Rivers Oram Press.

³⁶ Schwarz, ‘Claudia Jones’: 273.

³⁷ L. Tabili (1994), *“We Ask for British Justice”: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* New York: Cornell University Press: 3.

for colonial interactions, and with the implications of colonialism more generally.’³⁸ She argues that, in the French context, ‘colonialism needs to be understood as part of what defines the nation, not something accidental, exceptional, or external to it.’ By extension, she asserts that ‘interwar Paris was a colonial space, meaning a space in which the specter of empire guided the self-identification of its residents as well as their social and political interactions.’ Interwar Paris served as a ‘point of transit for colonial populations,’ and within the city ‘empire took shape in the colonial migrants’ presence on its streets, in the white men and women who had traveled to the colonies but were based in the city, and in the many images and representations of empire.’ From this, Boittin argues that interwar Paris was a colonial metropolis because ‘the term colonial, as opposed to imperial, reveals the agency, or autonomy, embedded in the act of occupying and utilizing city spaces ... colonial migrants all found their own ways to ‘colonize’ Paris.’³⁹

Boittin positions Paris as a city at the heart of diverse imperial social networks. In doing so, her work draws attention to what Mrinalini Sinha has called the wider dynamics of the ‘imperial social formation.’⁴⁰ As Sinha argues, thinking in terms of the imperial social formation enables us to engage with ‘the flow of historical forces above, below, and between nations and states,’ whilst simultaneously remaining alert to ‘the imperial ordering of modern society.’ In doing so, this way of thinking highlights ‘the

³⁸ J. Boittin (2010), *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* London: University of Nebraska Press: 3.

³⁹ Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*: xiv-xvii; G. Wilder (2005), *The French Imperial Nation State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* London: University of Chicago Press: esp. 28.

⁴⁰ M. Sinha (1995), *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2-10; M. Sinha (2006), *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* London: Duke University Press: esp. 16-19.

historical role of imperialism in assembling different societies into a system of interdependencies and interconnections,⁴¹ and also facilitates efforts to interpret certain sites and events within particular places as part of a broader social formation in which empire played a prominent role.

By thinking of London in terms of the expanded Caribbean, this thesis positions the city within the broader imperial social formation. However, it is essential to acknowledge that London was positioned within the imperial social formation in a broad variety of ways. Thinking in these terms enables us to conceive of the colonial aspects of London as constituting, in John McLeod's words, 'a vexed space of intercultural exchange.'⁴² McLeod insists on the need to conceptualise London, in both its colonial and postcolonial formations, as 'a much more complex and conflicted location than that implied by the totalizing and abstract concept of the undifferentiated centre.'⁴³ Instead, McLeod situates London as a city placed in 'an interesting and productively conflicted position.' As he puts it,

On the one hand, London is the location where the British Government and so many state agencies have their national headquarters ... On the other hand, as a specifically urban location which has welcomed for centuries people from overseas, London's transcultural facticity has made possible new communities and forms of culture ... In this conception, London can

⁴¹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 17.

⁴² J. McLeod (2004), *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* Abingdon: Routledge: 12.

⁴³ McLeod, *Postcolonial London*: 6.

be considered a profoundly disruptive location, incubating new social relations and cultural forms.⁴⁴

Coming to terms with the multiple ways in which London's role as a colonial city was played out requires an acknowledgement that, as Angela Woollacott argues, the city 'occupied multiple positions and relationships simultaneously.'⁴⁵ As well as being the location of the imperial government, London in the first half of the twentieth century was also 'pullulating with secularist, anarchist, socialist, avant-garde, and freethinking circles' and also 'formed an important meeting ground for Indian, Irish, African and Caribbean freedom movements.'⁴⁶

Thinking of London as a colonial city can be useful in helping interpret the lived experiences of colonial peoples in the city. Introducing an idea from the colonial West Indian context can be helpful here. Bill Schwarz has written of how 'West Indians in Britain were positioned such that – simply in going about their daily lives, navigating their way through the lore of the metropolis – they discovered themselves having to interrogate the lived culture of the colonizers.'⁴⁷ Understanding the colonial metropolis as in part shaped by 'the lived relations the West Indians brought with them' focuses attention on what Schwarz calls 'the incipient creolization of aspects of the metropolitan culture.'⁴⁸ Schwarz suggests that 'the gradual, uneven creolization of the metropolis'

⁴⁴ Mcleod, *Postcolonial London*: 18.

⁴⁵ A. Woollacott (2001), *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 61.

⁴⁶ E. Boehmer (2002), *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920: Resistance in Interaction* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 20; also Young, *Postcolonialism*: 225.

⁴⁷ Schwarz, 'Claudia Jones': 267.

⁴⁸ Schwarz, 'Claudia Jones': 268.

has been ‘occurring as long as colonialism,’ and uses the term to describe the ways in which ‘the cultural forms of the periphery moved to, and subsequently transformed, the centre.’⁴⁹ In doing so, he is drawing on a wider understanding of the Caribbean itself as a creolised space. Such an approach is particularly linked to the Caribbean given the history of that region, briefly summarised by George Lamming in the following terms:

‘The indigenous Carib and Arawak Indians, living by their own lights long before the European adventure, gradually disappear in a blind, wild forest of blood. This mischievous gift, the sugar cane, is introduced, and a fantastic human migration moves to the New World of the Caribbean; deported crooks and criminals, defeated soldiers and Royalist gentlemen fleeing from Europe, slaves from the West coast of Africa, East Indians, Chinese, Corsicans and Portuguese. The list is always incomplete, but they all move and meet on unfamiliar soil, in a violent rhythm of race and religion.’⁵⁰

It is this sense of a variety of people coming from differing historical and geographical backgrounds all meeting ‘on unfamiliar soil,’ and doing so in often violent ways, that is captured by Schwarz’s interpretation of London as a city undergoing creolisation.

Deploying the concept of creolisation in this way, however, requires care. Recent years have seen an explosion in work on creolisation, and much of this deploys the term as a metaphor for understanding the cultural forms supposedly initiated through modern processes of globalisation. The most prominent example of this

⁴⁹ Schwarz, ‘Claudia Jones’: 272.

⁵⁰ G. Lamming (2005 [1960]), *The Pleasures of Exile* London: Pluto: 17.

approach has been in the work of Ulf Hannerz. For Hannerz, the concept of creolisation is helpful in understanding the ‘interplay between imported and indigenous cultures.’⁵¹ Such an approach ‘identifies diversity itself as a source of cultural vitality,’ and as such Hannerz argues that it is open to deployment in any cultural context.⁵² However, in arguing for such an open understanding of the concept of creolisation, Hannerz seems to downplay the violent process of engagement foregrounded by Lamming above. As Charles Stewart writes, the concept of creolisation can sometimes seem ‘to have flattened out into an expressive buzzword used in concatenation with ‘syncretism,’ ‘hybridity,’ or ‘mixture.’” In this way, creolisation becomes ‘more of an epigrammatic than an analytic concept.’⁵³ As well as flattening out the violence inherent in the process of creolisation, such metaphorical usages often run the risk of neglecting the historically oppositional roots of the idea of the creole. Stewart emphasises that in its earliest history, the term creole designated somebody born in the Americas, thus distinguishing them from Africans, Europeans and other peoples who gradually came to inhabit the region.⁵⁴ Consequently, Stewart stresses the fact that ‘historical contingencies have fractured and inflected the meanings of ‘creole’ so that it denotes different things in different places.’⁵⁵

Mimi Sheller concurs with Stewart on this point, arguing that the concept of creolisation as it has been taken up within the social sciences is often borrowed from the

⁵¹ U. Hannerz (1987), ‘The world in creolisation,’ *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, **57:4**:546.

⁵² Hannerz, ‘The world in creolisation’: 556-557.

⁵³ C. Stewart (2007), ‘Creolization: history, ethnography, theory,’ in C. Stewart (ed.), *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory* Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press: 6.

⁵⁴ Stewart, ‘Creolization’: 7.

⁵⁵ Stewart, ‘Creolization’: 8.

work of scholars of the Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora. One result of this ‘travelling theory,’ from Sheller’s perspective, is that the Caribbean itself becomes somewhat metaphorical – ‘We are all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagos,’ as James Clifford once described this approach.⁵⁶ Clifford himself was more attuned than other theorists to the importance of locating theory, and Sheller extends his arguments to emphasise that it is ‘the concrete histories of Caribbean theorizations of creolization that need to be foregrounded.’⁵⁷ As a result, her interest is in ‘what gets lost (and what gets taken) when Caribbean theories ... migrate to new homes.’⁵⁸ For Sheller, as for other theorists such as Bolland, creolisation is not just about mobility and cultural mixing, but also about ‘conflict, trauma, rupture and the violence of uprooting.’⁵⁹ Bolland himself suggests that creolisation might best be understood not as ‘a homogenizing process, but rather [as] a process of contention between peoples ... in which their own ethnicity is continually re-examined and redefined in terms of the relevant oppositions between different social formations at various historical

⁵⁶ J. Clifford (1988), *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature and Art* Harvard University Press: 173. The idea of ‘traveling theory’ comes from E. Said (1983), *The World, the Text, and the Critic* Harvard University Press: 226-247.

⁵⁷ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*: 184-5. M. Sheller (2003), ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture,’ in S. Ahmed, C. Castaneda, A-M. Foster, and M. Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* Oxford: Berg: 286. For a related discussion, see J. Michael Dash (2003), ‘Anxious insularity: Identity politics and creolization in the Caribbean,’ in G. Collier and U. Fleischmann (eds.), *A Pepper Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean* London: Rodopi: 287-300.

⁵⁸ Sheller, ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture’: 272.

⁵⁹ Sheller, ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture’: 286.

moments.’⁶⁰ Sheller is not arguing that creolisation cannot be extended to other contexts. She notes that ‘Different dwelling places have called for different theoretical articulations of the term,’ but insists that in these instances it remains essential to recall ‘the memory of the roots of the concept in the conditions created by transatlantic slavery’ in order to remain attendant to ‘the politics of theory.’⁶¹

Amongst the earliest and most important Caribbean thinkers to have engaged with the concept of creolisation was Edward Kamau Brathwaite. For Brathwaite, creolisation was ‘the single most important factor in the development of Jamaican society’ between 1770-1820. He defined creolisation as ‘a cultural action – material, psychological, and spiritual – based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their environment and – as white/black, culturally discrete groups – to each other.’ However, Brathwaite emphasised the importance of the particular power relations structuring a colonial plantation society when he wrote that creolisation established ‘a ‘new’ construct, made up of newcomers to the landscape and cultural strangers each to the other; one group dominant, the other legally and subordinately slaves.’⁶² Brathwaite emphasises that the process of creolisation for newly arrived African slaves was initiated under a structure of violence whereby ‘the slave would learn the rudiments of his new language and be initiated into the work routines that

⁶⁰ O. N. Bolland (2002), ‘Creolization and creole societies: a cultural nationalist view of Caribbean social history,’ in V. Shepherd and G. Richards (eds.), *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* Kingston: Ian Randle: 15-46.

⁶¹ Sheller, ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture’: 286.

⁶² E. K. Brathwaite (2005 [1978]), *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* Kingston: Ian Randle: 296.

awaited him.’⁶³ Yet it was not just the enslaved that underwent creolisation. As Brathwaite puts it, ‘it was a two-way process.’⁶⁴

The work of Brathwaite and others has been described by Sheller as an ‘important decolonising gesture,’ enabling a nationalist historiography freed from the constraints of Eurocentric modes of thought to emerge in the Caribbean.⁶⁵ More recently, intellectuals working within the Caribbean diaspora, in particular such British-based figures as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer, have drawn the concept of creolisation into what Sheller calls an ‘anti-nationalist project,’ based instead on such more-than-national spatial frames as Gilroy’s Black Atlantic.⁶⁶ Whilst this represents the first stage in what Sheller sees as the negative impact of ‘globalising’ creolisation theories, Hall, Gilroy and Mercer each remain sufficiently attuned to Brathwaite’s insistence on the importance of the violence of early-colonial Caribbean and Atlantic history to prevent them from loosening the concept entirely from its intellectual roots.

This thesis mobilises a conceptualisation of creolisation as a process of relevance to London through its positioning within the expanded Caribbean, and aims to trace some of the geographical networks, ‘contact zones,’ spaces and places through which the process of creolisation occurred in 1930s and 1940s London.⁶⁷ In doing so, it returns to Brathwaite’s early statement on the nature of creolisation and re-interprets it to fit this expanded spatial scale. Brathwaite described creolisation as

⁶³ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*: 298.

⁶⁴ Brathwaite *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*: 300.

⁶⁵ Sheller, ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture’: 281.

⁶⁶ Sheller, ‘Creolization in discourses of global culture’: 282-283.

⁶⁷ Mary Louise Pratt uses the term contact zone to define ‘the space of imperial encounters.’ See M. L. Pratt (2008), *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* Abingdon: Routledge: 8.

*the result of a complex situation where a colonial polity reacts, as a whole, to external metropolitan pressures, and at the same time to internal adjustments made necessary by the juxtaposition of master and slave, elite and labourer, in a culturally heterogenous relationship.*⁶⁸

Figuring London in the 1930s and 1940s as a colonial city enables us to re-frame Brathwaite's suggested structuring of the creolisation process. In this sense, the creolisation of London might be suggested to be *the result of a complex situation where a metropolitan polity reacts, as a whole, to internal and external colonial pressures*. Such an approach builds upon Michaeline Crichlow's recent call for scholars to develop ways in which they might 'displace the notion of creolization outside its original setting' whilst simultaneously holding onto 'the idea of creolizations *rhizomic rootings* in the Caribbean.'⁶⁹ Crichlow's approach involves thinking the construction of the Caribbean relationally, displacing the impositions of geographical location and replacing it with an attentiveness to 'articulations of spaces and peoples, whose places of enunciation and sociocultural practices have been sited within a global frame.'⁷⁰ It thus corresponds to David Lambert's interpretation of creolisation as 'a spatially articulated process of transculturation that occurred through material and discursive networks linking Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe.'⁷¹

⁶⁸ Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*: xvi, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ M. Crichlow (2009), *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination: Notes on Fleeing the Plantation* London: Duke University Press: ix.

⁷⁰ Crichlow, *Globalization and the Post-Creole Imagination*: ix-x.

⁷¹ D. Lambert (2005), 'The counter-revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian petitions and proslavery networks,' *Social and Cultural Geography* **6: 3**: 406.

As shall be seen throughout this thesis, black West Indian activists were deeply engaged with British imperial culture and society, re-interpreting and re-deploying its ideas, ideologies and technologies whilst in London in ways that sought alternatively to transform or disrupt the operation of this society. However, 1930s London was itself a diverse city consisting of a broad range of social movements, institutions, and governmental organs, and whilst London's position within the empire was an important aspect of the city, the implications of this can only be grasped through consideration of it in relation to the other, diverse threads which have constituted modern London.⁷² Doing so enables appreciation of just how diverse London's coloniality was, and how it helped to constitute the city.

Capital London

London's status as the capital city of both England and of the empire is central to any understanding of the relationship which colonial subjects had to the city. This sense of London's pre-eminence, it bears remembering, was not particular to West Indians. In 1934, for example, one Australian journalist described London as 'the greatest City in the civilized world, the centre not only of the British Empire, but the strongest magnet to all the peoples of the earth.'⁷³ It is because of London's status as capital city that C. L. R. James would make his claim for it sitting at the heart of a great civilisation, with which this chapter opened.

⁷² R. Dennis (2000), 'Modern London', in M. Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III, 1840-1950* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 95-131.

⁷³ Cited in Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*: 4.

In particular, London's status as capital revolved around the governmental and administrative institutions which operated from within the city, centred primarily on Whitehall and surrounding areas. In many ways these particular areas were the political and administrative centre of both Britain and the British Empire. As Schneer puts it,

the guiding impulse behind the agents sent to oversee four hundred million people originated in Whitehall, a district in central London immediately south and west of Trafalgar Square. Here were the offices of ultimate authority, the rooms, halls, and debating chambers in which were taken the decisions governing the nation and empire alike.⁷⁴

Many of the government buildings in Whitehall itself had imperial connections, and the desire for proximity to the apparatus of colonial rule influenced the decisions of several British colonies and dominions during the first half of the twentieth century to locate their High Commission buildings within the vicinity of Trafalgar Square – Australia House (1914), India House (1924), Canada House (1925), Africa House (1928), and South Africa House (1933). As Michael Port has emphasised, the rebuilding of the Whitehall area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was guided to a large extent by the belief in British imperial supremacy, and a consequent desire to reflect this in the grandeur of its architecture.⁷⁵ Likewise, Schneer argues that the 'public art and architecture of London' at the turn of the twentieth century 'reflected and reinforced an impression, an atmosphere, celebrating British heroism on the battlefield, British

⁷⁴ Schneer, *London 1900*: 8.

⁷⁵ M. Port (1995), *Imperial London: Civil Government Building in London, 1851-1915* London: Yale University Press; Dennis, 'Modern London': esp. 126-127; Driver and Gilbert, 'Heart of empire?'

sovereignty over foreign lands, British wealth and power, in short, British imperialism.⁷⁶

However, Capital London also operated in other, less overt ways. Of significance in this regard are the various emergent security services which endeavoured to ensure that British imperial rule possessed the requisite knowledge and force to carry out its policies. A complex network of policing connected surveillance operatives in London to those in the colonies, and the head offices of Britain's major surveillance institutions were based in London. Yet it was never simply the case that London dictated the forms of policing for the colonies. As Michael Brogden has suggested, forms of policing originally instituted in the colonies in turn came to be deployed in Britain itself.⁷⁷ Not only did this colonial connection impact upon particular policing practices; it also shaped the very institutions of policing in London. The Metropolitan Police Special Branch, for example, was first established in 1883 in order to combat Irish nationalists then active in London.⁷⁸ Similarly, in 1909 the India Office established the Indian Political Intelligence Office, known simply as Indian Political Intelligence

⁷⁶ Schneer, *London 1900*: 19.

⁷⁷ M. Brogden (1987), 'The emergence of the police: The colonial dimension,' *British Journal of Criminology* 27: 4-14; also, D. Killingray and D. Anderson (1991), 'Consent, coercion and colonial control: Policing the empire, 1830-1940,' in D. Anderson and D. Killingray (eds.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1-17.

⁷⁸ R. Allason (1983), *The Branch: History of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch* London: Secker and Warburg.

from 1921, in London in order to monitor and, where possible, disrupt the activities of Indian nationalists in London and throughout Britain.⁷⁹

Imperial London

As an imperial city, London also played host to, and was in turn shaped by, a diverse array of institutions and organisations which displayed a particular interest in empire, and often in particular aspects of imperialism itself. London in the 1930s played host to a number of such imperial interest groups.⁸⁰ Some of these aimed to appeal to people with an interest in the British Empire as a totality. One such establishment was the Imperial Institute, opened in the 1880s but only becoming a body with ‘public influence’ in the late 1920s.⁸¹ Similarly, the Royal Empire Society, launched in 1928 as a re-branding of the Royal Colonial Institute, itself founded in London in 1869, had similar pretensions towards pan-imperial coverage, though it also operated an ‘African Circle’ during the 1930s which hosted meetings and discussions with a particular focus on Africa and the empire.⁸² In 1901 the Victoria League was founded in London, primarily for women with an interest in imperialism. The organisation soon established

⁷⁹ R. Popplewell (1995), *Intelligence and Imperial Defense: British Intelligence and the Defence of the Indian Empire, 1904-1924* London: Frank Cass: 125-146; K. O'Malley (2010), *Ireland India, and Empire: Indo-Irish Radical Connections, 1919-64* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁸⁰ Royal Empire Society (1949), *Commonwealth Handbook: A Guide to Departments, Organisations & Societies in the United Kingdom Concerned with the British Empire* London: Royal Empire Society.

⁸¹ J. Mackenzie (1984), *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 122-146.

⁸² Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*: 148. On the ‘Africa Circle,’ see B. Bush (1999), *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* London: Routledge: 252.

branches across the Empire.⁸³ In 1914, the Overseas Club, soon to be renamed the Overseas League, opened, and boasted a membership of twenty-six thousand by 1922, many of whom lived in the British dominions.⁸⁴ The headquarters of these organisations served as meeting places and sites of discussion about the empire and imperial issues. Colonial peoples were welcome to engage with them, and indeed often did so. Some of these organisations, particularly the Victoria League, also worked to offer hostel accommodation for people from the colonies.⁸⁵

Other groups in London were established with an interest in specific parts of the empire. One such was the London Group on African Affairs (LGAA). The roots of this body lie in the meetings of a group of broadly liberal-minded intellectuals in Britain, including the writer Winifred Holtby, who would gather to discuss ‘the position of Africans resident in London and the accompanying problems of social alienation and racism.’⁸⁶ These gatherings formalised into the launch of the LGAA in 1934. The group attracted a number of significant imperial critics into its midst, including Leonard Barnes, Charles Roden Buxton, Arthur Creech Jones, and Harold Moody, amongst

⁸³ E. Riedi (2002), ‘Women, gender and the promotion of empire: the Victoria League 1901-1914’, *Historical Journal*, **45:3**:569–599; and E. Riedi (1997) *Imperialist Women in Edwardian Britain: The Victoria League, 1899-1914*, Unpublished PhD, University of St Andrews.

⁸⁴ Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*: 109.

⁸⁵ Riedi, *Imperialist Women*: 112-132; Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*: 97 Some of the League’s activities for colonial peoples in Britain were organised in coordination with branches established in the colonies. See K. Pickles (2005), ‘A link in ‘the great chain of Empire friendship’: The Victoria League in New Zealand,’ *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* **33:1**:29-50.

⁸⁶ P. Rich (1984), *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-60* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 37. On Holtby’s interest in Africa and empire see Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 234-235.

others.⁸⁷ The group met regularly, and has been described as ‘the leading pressure group in Britain on African affairs’ during the 1930s.⁸⁸

Another important body based in London, and with a significant interest in the Atlantic world, was the West India Committee. Originally founded in the eighteenth century as a grouping of London merchants engaged in trade with and to the West Indies, the group slowly expanded its purview to become a lobby group for the combined interests of these merchants and West Indian planters. By the twentieth century, the Committee focused on promoting West Indian trade, and still included members based both in Britain and the Caribbean.⁸⁹ Through the 1930s and 1940s, the Committee published a periodical named the *West India Committee Circular*, which reported on political and economic issues of relevance to the West Indies. It also reported on certain happenings in Britain pertaining to the Caribbean, and to this end it occasionally included reports of events held by the League of Coloured Peoples.

A host of other organisations could be added to this list – the Royal African Society, the Friends of Africa, as well as the many diverse organisations with particular interests in wider parts of the British Empire, such as India or Australia.⁹⁰ For black

⁸⁷ A longer list of members is included in Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 319 n. 21.

⁸⁸ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 187.

⁸⁹ D. Hall (1971), *A Brief History of the West India Committee* London: Caribbean University Press. In the Marxist analysis of Ken Post, the West India Committee represented one of the ‘class organs’ of the West Indian ruling class, serving to ‘help disperse and refract the contradictions within the capitalist class’ and to ‘concentrat[e] their consciousness and action.’ See K. Post (1978), *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* Amsterdam: Nijhoff: 91.

⁹⁰ On the Friends of Africa see Bush *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 194-195, 197, 252. On some of the India interest groups in 1930s Britain, and mainly London, see Owen, *The British Left and India*: 197-270. For Australian interest groups, see Woollacott *To Try Her Fortune*: esp. 73-104.

West Indian activists in Britain, the level of engagement with such organisations varied. However, there was a more consistent involvement with broadly Africa-focused organisations than with any others, and these groups played an important part in constituting the strands of imperial London within which the organisations at the heart of this thesis were implicated. Barbara Bush has written of how, '[b]y the mid-1930s, Africanist networks had expanded and good cross-links were established with the Royal Geographical Society, the Royal African Society, and 'progressive' liberal imperialists.'⁹¹

Such organisational interests are not the only ways in which to understand imperial London, however. Driver and Gilbert have drawn our attention to the ways in which the British Empire took place in areas as diverse as the City of London and the outer suburbs, though it did so in a variety of different ways.⁹² London itself in the 1930s was part of what Schneer has called the 'nexus of empire,' connected to diverse parts of the empire through transactions of material goods, the written word, the movement of people and the circulation of ideas.⁹³ In 1931, the Census recorded that there were 225,684 colonial people in Britain, many of these in London.⁹⁴ As well as people, the London docklands saw produce from around the empire flowing into London.⁹⁵ Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, London also served as the site for exhibitions which directly focused on the empire. In 1911, for example, the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1911 aimed to 'demonstrate ... the real significance of our

⁹¹ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 252.

⁹² Driver and Gilbert, 'Heart of empire?'; Gilbert and Driver, 'Capital and Empire.'

⁹³ Schneer, *London 1900*: 37-63.

⁹⁴ B. Porter (2004), *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 258.

⁹⁵ Schneer, *London 1900*: 37-63.

great self-serving Dominions.’⁹⁶ In 1924 and 1925 Wembley hosted the ‘greatest of all the imperial exhibitions.’⁹⁷ Such exhibitions, designed to demonstrate the great importance of the empire to Britain, also served to antagonise some colonial peoples in Britain. For example, the Union of Students of African Descent complained publicly about the treatment and representation of Africans at the ‘Africa Village’ in the Wembley Exhibition. Meanwhile, when the International African Service Bureau joined a campaign against the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938, they displayed their own anti-imperial exhibition, known popularly as the ‘Worker’s Exhibition,’ in Glasgow, but then transferred it to London’s Friends House for 8 days early in 1939.⁹⁸ Colonial migrants were thus part of a complex and diverse imperial city.

⁹⁶ Cited in Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*: 106.

⁹⁷ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*: 108.

⁹⁸ S. Britton (2010), “‘Come and see the empire by the all red route!’: Anti-imperialism and exhibitions in inter-war Britain,” *History Workshop Journal* **69**:1:68-89. Brittan does not mention that the ‘Workers Exhibition’ moved to London in 1939, being exhibited at Friends House on Euston Road. See *New Leader*, 13 January 1939: 2.

Internationalist London

Twentieth-century London also contained within it a broad array of internationally-focused reformist campaign and propaganda societies, whose internationalist pretensions were closely linked to the interests of British imperialism.⁹⁹ One such group was the twentieth century anti-slavery activists. In 1909, the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society merged with the Aborigines Protection Society to form the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS). The combined society had ‘only a few hundred members,’ most of who were ‘predominantly middle class.’ However, the organisation was fortunate to include within its leading members a number of influential publicists and activists who were able to give it ‘a broader mandate and enhanced its influence.’¹⁰⁰ Foremost amongst these were the organisations’ secretary, John Hobbis Harris, and Lady Kathleen Simon.¹⁰¹ Both Harris and Simon published popular books on the history and present condition of slavery in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰² They also went on speaking tours around the country and wrote regularly in the British press, as well as being leading figures in advocating the abolition of ‘slavery in all its forms’ at

⁹⁹ M. Mazower (2009), *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the International Origins of the United Nations* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰⁰ S. Miers (2003), *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* Oxford: AltaMira: 63.

¹⁰¹ According to Susan Pennybacker, Simon’s book ‘was a publishing triumph that established her as an instant world authority, affording her carte blanche in many settings.’ S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: 109.

¹⁰² K. Simon (1929), *Slavery* London: Hodder and Stoughton; J. Harris (1933), *A Century of Emancipation* London: J. M. Dent.

the League of Nations.¹⁰³ As Pennybacker has written, the ASAPS in the 1930s ‘forced a relentless gaze upon many parts of the globe, in the hope of eradicating the evil of slavery as a basis for trusteeship and the enlightened preservation of empire.’¹⁰⁴ Africa was a particular interest for the ASAPS, and during the 1930s they became involved in controversial campaigns to abolish slavery in countries such as Liberia and Abyssinia.

Amongst the ASAPS closest links during the 1930s were to the League of Nations, and to the British propaganda society the League of Nations Union (LONU). John Harris was amongst those to best explain how the ASAPS envisioned the League as part of a longer tradition of anti-slavery activism when he wrote that ‘Abolition in 1807, led to Emancipation in 1833 ... Finally, in our own day, the League of Nations has taken in hand “the abolition of slavery in all its forms,” and put into words the great principle of Trusteeship.’¹⁰⁵ Founded in 1919, the LONU became a prominent campaigning organisation in Britain, with a membership by 1933 of over one million, organised into 3000 local branches.¹⁰⁶ Given its nature, the LONU inevitably gave considerable focus to international affairs. It also engaged in a highly active campaigning and propaganda initiative, involving in particular the use of public lectures and meetings.¹⁰⁷ As such, it provided opportunities for some interested West Indian activists to utilise the platform provided. However, despite its large membership the

¹⁰³ Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century*: esp. 152-173.

¹⁰⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 103.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *A Century of Emancipation*: 26.

¹⁰⁶ D. Birn (1981), *The League of Nations Union, 1918-1945* Oxford: Clarendon Press; R. Overy (2009), *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* London: Penguin. Whilst the League listed its membership as being over one million, in 1933 only 388,255 subscriptions were actually received.

¹⁰⁷ J. A. Thompson (1972), ‘The League of Nations Union and promotion of the League idea in Great Britain,’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History* **18:1**: 52-61.

1930s can reasonably be described as ‘something of a crisis point’ for the organisation, given the widespread criticism which followed its failure to intervene adequately to prevent Japanese aggression in Manchuria in 1931.¹⁰⁸ Despite its troubles, the LONU remained an important body in the 1930s.

Another group of internationally-minded humanitarians again closely linked to the anti-slavery activists were certain branches of Britain’s Christian community. For some black West Indian activists, Christianity had become an important part of their world view prior to departing from the Caribbean. The religious make-up of the Caribbean was complex, with one historian writing that ‘by the end of the nineteenth century, the surviving elements of African culture [in the Caribbean] had become embodied in a great variety of African-creole religions, some opposed to Christianity ... others blending African worldviews with Christian interpretations.’ Others still followed ‘genuinely Christian creations,’ joining such non-conformist groups as the Baptists.¹⁰⁹ As Catherine Hall points out, ‘in mission stations across the globe, colonizers and colonized struggled to gain mastery over the terms of the encounter.’¹¹⁰ For colonial subjects, engaging with Christianity did not simply involve the narrow imposition of Eurocentric notions of Christian faith, but instead offered a way to interpret and understand their own position in the world.¹¹¹ For several of the figures in this thesis Christian faith was important, and this faith had been developed during their

¹⁰⁸ Overy, *A Morbid Age*: 228.

¹⁰⁹ R. Gerloff (2006), ‘The African diaspora in the Caribbean and Europe from pre-emancipation to the present day,’ in H. McLeod (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 9: World Christianities c. 1914-2000* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 230.

¹¹⁰ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*: 142.

¹¹¹ R. Stewart (1992), *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press: esp. 190-198.

time in the Caribbean. The St Lucian W. Arthur Lewis, for example, ‘imbibed a rigorous Church of England training’ from his devout Anglican parents.¹¹² For the Jamaican Harold Moody, who converted to Christianity in his teenage years during the late 1890s, ‘Bible, prayer and practice of a Christian life underpinned his life.’¹¹³ In particular, Moody was drawn to Congregationalism and the Christian Endeavour Society whilst in Kingston, Jamaica.¹¹⁴

When such people moved to Britain, their religious faith played an important part in their actions. Moody, Lewis and other members of the LCP, for example, placed a strong Christian culture at the heart of the LCP, and links to Christian humanitarian organisations of an internationalist bent in Britain – the Quakers, Congregationalists, Christian Endeavour Society, and London Missionary Society, for example – could also offer important practical opportunities. Including platforms from which some black West Indian activists could speak, outlets for their writings, and critical intellectual engagement. The relationship between such Christian humanitarian organisations and some black West Indian activists in Britain – particularly those associated with the LCP – was so strong that Harold Moody would go on to become the first black chairman of the London Missionary Society in 1943.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*: 8.

¹¹³ D. Killingray (2004), ‘“To do something for the race”: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,’ in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 55.

¹¹⁴ Killingray, ‘“To do something for the race”’: 55.

¹¹⁵ Killingray, ‘“To do something for the race”’: 55.

Radical London

Politically, London has long had a radical presence, though its size, scope and influence has been variable.¹¹⁶ There is also a long tradition of West Indian engagement with this radicalism, stretching at least as far back as Robert Wedderburn's involvement with Millenarian Spenceans in the early nineteenth century, and continuing through Claude McKay's links to radical socialists in London between 1919-1921.¹¹⁷

By the 1930s, London played host to a diverse array of radical political groups. As in the earlier twentieth century, 'the socialist intelligentsia found the capital a desirable headquarters,'¹¹⁸ and consequently leading left wing intellectuals, especially those centred around the Fabian Society, cultivated a strong relationship with the city, in particular with the intellectual milieu centred on Bloomsbury and with academic institutions such as the London School of Economics.¹¹⁹ However, London in the 1930s

¹¹⁶ G. S. Jones (1971), *Outcast London* London: Penguin; I. McCalman (1988), *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers, 1795-1840* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; P. Ackroyd (2001), *London: The Biography* London: Vintage: 461-474; J. Davis (1989), 'Radical clubs and London politics, 1870-1900,' in D. Feldman and G. S. Jones (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* London: Routledge: 103-128.

¹¹⁷ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*: 50-72; W. James (2003), 'A race outcast from an outcast class: Claude McKay's experience and analysis of Britain,' in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 71-92.

¹¹⁸ S. Pennybacker (1989), "'The millennium by return of post': Reconsidering London Progressivism, 1889-1907,' in David Feldman and G. S. Jones (eds.), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations since 1800* London: Routledge: 129.

¹¹⁹ A. Trexler (2007), 'Economic Ideas and British Literature, 1900-1930: The Fabian Society, Bloomsbury, and *The New Age*,' *Literature Compass* 4:3: 862-887. Eric Hobsbawm has recalled that the London School of Economics in the 1930s, as well as having a strong contingent of left-of-centre

also played host to more popular forms of radical politics which reached beyond the intellectuals. The economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s brought people out onto the streets, and throughout the 1930s a number of ‘hunger marches’ set out from various parts of Britain, often culminating in meetings in London’s Hyde Park.¹²⁰ In much of London itself, however, there was not a highly trade unionised population.¹²¹ Large outbreaks of labour protest were minimal until the later 1930s, when the four week busmen’s strike of 1937, which saw 26,000 London busmen walk out in dispute with London’s transport authorities, was only one of the largest and most prominent such actions.¹²²

The Labour Party itself had grown in strength in London from 1914, when it ‘held a tiny number of seats at local and County level in Greater London,’ and 1934, when the party ‘dominated the metropolis.’¹²³ However, James Jupp has written that within London itself ‘there was no single dominant union,’ and nor did one particular political party hold sway over left-minded people. As a result ‘[p]olitical factions flourished in London’ in the 1930s.¹²⁴ Nearly half of the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPBG) lived in London, and Jupp suggests also that the Independent Labour Party (ILP) were ‘centred on London’, and that Stafford Cripps’s

intellectuals, ‘was full of central Europeans and colonials.’ See E. Hobsbawm (2002), *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life* London: Penguin: 121.

¹²⁰ J. Gardiner (2010), *The Thirties: An Intimate History* London: Harper Collins: 149-150, 448-453.

¹²¹ D. Weinbren (2005), ‘Sociable capital: London’s Labour Parties, 1918-1945,’ in Matthew Worley (ed.), *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities and Experiences of Local* Aldershot: Ashgate: 194.

¹²² Gardiner, *The Thirties*: 480-481.

¹²³ Weinbren, ‘Sociable capital’: 194.

¹²⁴ J. Jupp (1982), *The Radical Left in Britain, 1931-41* London: Frank Cass: 181.

Socialist League, founded in 1931, was well supported in London's suburbs.¹²⁵ Within the ILP itself, an organised grouping known as the Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC), formed in 1930 and based predominantly in London, succeeded in campaigning for the ILP to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in 1932, an event which Gidon Cohen has described as 'the most important Left wing split in the history of the Labour party.'¹²⁶ The overall aim of the RPC was to ensure that the ILP 'moved further away from the Labour Party and closer to the CPGB.'¹²⁷ However, other factions within the ILP, equally keen to see the Party move away from the main Labour Party, were concerned about efforts to bring them into proximity with the CPGB. The 1930s saw the birth of British Trotskyism, and London was an important centre for its emergence, a fact which testifies to the interest taken by radical Londoners in events in Russia, and thus highlights the internationalist bent of many leftists. Reginald Groves, a founding member of British Trotskyism, in his own partisan account of these years, has shown how Balham, and London more broadly, played host to an emergent faction within the CPGB which became increasingly critical of Stalin's rule, and adopted the ideas of Leon Trotsky.¹²⁸ This grouping established what became known as the Communist League, initially within the CPGB but expelled in 1932. Of the 50 members in the Communist League by 1934, 11 had decided that it would be politically more useful for them to follow Trotsky's own advice for revolutionary socialists to enter and subvert

¹²⁵ Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*: 181. Gidon Cohen has shown that many areas outside London were more important to the ILP in the 1930s than Jupp gives them credit for. See G. Cohen (2006), *The Failure of a Dream: The Independent Labour Party From Disaffiliation to World War II* London: IB Tauris.

¹²⁶ Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*: 15.

¹²⁷ P. Corthorn (2006), *In the Shadow of the Dictators: The British Left in the 1930s* London: IB Tauris: 17-18.

¹²⁸ R. Groves (1974), *The Balham Group: How British Trotskyism Began* London: Pluto Press.

‘social democratic’ parties. They thus joined the Independent Labour Party in 1934, with the Trinidadian C. L. R. James amongst them.¹²⁹ At a meeting in London in November 1934 this group, which had quickly grown to number over 60, formed themselves into the Marxist Group, and committed themselves to transforming the ILP into a revolutionary party.¹³⁰ As Hallas has written, at this time ‘British Trotskyists were confined to London, largely South West London, with a little group developing in East London.’¹³¹

Radical London was constituted not only through these organisations themselves, but through the spaces and networks in and through which they were developed. Important in this regard are political periodicals such as the ILP’s weekly newspaper the *New Leader*, edited by Fenner Brockway.¹³² Other equally important spaces for debate were the monthly periodicals set up by the ILP, including *Left* and *Controversy*, as well as Trotskyist periodicals such as that edited by C. L. R. James, entitled *Fight*. Such outlets created spaces in which radical London could be articulated, and enabled black West Indian activists both to engage with their ideas and to contribute to this milieu.

Aside from periodicals, particular sites within the city were also associated with radical London in one form or another. Trafalgar Square, for example, had long been an

¹²⁹ S. Bornstein and A. Richardson (1986), *Against the Stream: A history of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain* London: Socialist Platform: 121, 137, 143, 150; Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain*: 53.

¹³⁰ Bornstein and Richardson, *Against the Stream*: 167-68; Cohen, *The Failure of a Dream*: 102-109.

¹³¹ D. Hallas (1982), ‘Revolutionaries and the Labour Party’, *International Socialism*, **16**: 1-35.

¹³² H. Kent (2010), ‘“A paper not so much for the armchair but for the factory and the street”: Fenner Brockway and the Independent Labour Party’s *New Leader*, 1926-1946,’ *Labour History Review* **75:2**: 208-226.

important meeting space for all manner of radical political organisations.¹³³ Likewise, Speakers Corner in Hyde Park was another site within London which was renowned for its links to radical political proselytising during the 1930s.¹³⁴ Radical London was practised in such spaces as these, as well as a myriad other meeting places, bookshops, street-corner platforms, and they were thus central to the multiple ways in which it came to be constituted.

Fascist and anti-fascist London

There can be little doubt that the politics of fascism and anti-fascism have come to be seen as one of the defining preoccupations of the 1930s. Particularly following Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship in Germany in 1933, concern over fascism and totalitarian rule became a significant part of British public discourse. As Richard Overy has argued, despite the fact that no fascist party was elected to Parliament and nor was there a successful mass fascist party in Britain during these years, 'the public arena ... was swamped during the 1930s with a remarkable level of engagement' with fascism, attested to by the fact that by the end of 1938 nearly 90,000 copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* had sold in Britain, and a Penguin Special entitled *What Hitler Wants* had sold around 150,000 copies.¹³⁵

Of course, the fact that no fascist party rose to the status of a mass political presence in Britain does not mean that efforts in this direction were not being made. The

¹³³ R. Mace (1976), *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

¹³⁴ J. Roberts (2000), 'The enigma of free speech: Speakers' Corner, the geography of governance and a crisis of rationality,' *Social Legal Studies* **9:2**: 271-292.

¹³⁵ Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 268-270.

most widely known is Oswald Mosley's founding of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) – known popularly as 'the Blackshirts', on account of their official uniform of black shirts which fastened at the side – in October 1932, four months prior to Hitler's rise to power in Germany. From a founding membership of 32, by 1934 BUF membership had risen significantly to somewhere between 30-50,000, and the movement had gained support from the *Daily Mail*, which ran with 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!' on one infamous front cover.¹³⁶ London was an important site for British fascism in the 1930s. Mosley's BUF was founded there, and held some of their most important rallies in the city. For example, on 7 June 1934, the BUF held a large rally at London's Olympia, to which readers of the *Daily Mail* had received free tickets. From the platform, Mosley launched what has been described as an 'anti-semitic diatribe' which horrified the more respectable members of the audience who had been drawn to the BUF because of its purported solutions to the economic crisis in Britain. Violence erupted, and when Mosley refused to apologise in the aftermath of the meeting the reputation of the BUF was in tatters.¹³⁷

The BUF membership collapsed in the years immediately after the Olympia meeting to somewhere around the 5,000 mark. By the end of the 1930s, it had risen again to around 22,000, though only around 8,000 of these were active members.¹³⁸ Despite these fairly low membership figures, the BUF and other smaller fascist groups

¹³⁶ Gardiner, *The Thirties*: 433-438; Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 267-268.

¹³⁷ Gardiner writes that the Olympia violence 'sounded the death knell for the BUF's support among respectable political opinion,' and notes that the *Daily Mail* withdrew its support because of this.

Gardiner, *The Thirties*: 435-436; R. Benewick (1972), *The Fascist Movement in Britain* London: Allen Lane: 169-192.

¹³⁸ Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 267.

continued to hold meetings and marches, many of which took place in London.¹³⁹ Although fascism in Britain remained insignificant electorally, it maintained an active presence in British politics and political discourse throughout the 1930s, driven primarily by concern over the development of fascism in European countries such as Germany, Italy and Spain.

The importance of the global aspects of fascism was also the significant driving force behind the widespread anti-fascist movement in Britain. With the rise of Hitler to the Chancellorship in 1933, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia begun in 1935, the Spanish Civil War shortly afterwards, and finally the Munich Crisis and the descent into war in the late 1930s, opposition to fascism became widespread in Britain. Overy has suggested that the term fascism ‘was increasingly used in a general sense to describe all political and social tendencies which threatened to undermine political liberty and human rights, either abroad or at home’ in these years.¹⁴⁰ This expansive conception of fascism led many to be as wary of Communism as of fascism, and often to view these as two sides of the same extremist coin. For example, many within the labour movement, and especially within the leadership of the Labour Party itself, saw Communism and fascism as parallel evils during the thirties.¹⁴¹ Many anti-fascists often had, at the very least, a ‘deep distrust of Communism,’ though the CPGB itself attempted to carry out anti-fascist work during the 1930s under the banner of a ‘United Front’ with other

¹³⁹ T. Linehan (2000), *British Fascism, 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹⁴⁰ Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 300. On anti-fascism in 1930s Britain, see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*.

¹⁴¹ M. Newman (1978), ‘Democracy versus dictatorship: Labour’s role in the struggle against British fascism, 1933-1936,’ *History Workshop Journal* **5**:1:67-88.

groups.¹⁴² The second half of the 1930s represent what Pennybacker has termed a ‘new era of antifascist politics,’ with the CPGB attempting to involve itself in broad-based unity campaigns whilst still often being opposed by many anti-fascists who maintained their concern about Communism’s own totalitarianisms. However, outside of the CPGB there remained a significant body of leftists who campaigned against fascism whilst also being at odds with the Labour Party’s more moderate stance. As Paul Corthorn has shown, these wider left groups, including the ILP and the Socialist League, ‘offered a series of radical responses’ to the ‘rise of fascist dictators.’¹⁴³ Though these alternatives largely ended in failure, they played an important role in the politics of the 1930s. Similarly, anti-fascism also had a difficult relationship with the politics of anti-imperialism, given that many anti-fascist often saw the British Empire as the most important bulwark against the global spread of fascism, and therefore often argued strongly for the positive role of imperialism against fascism.¹⁴⁴ As Pennybacker puts it, ‘The most ardent defenders of empire after Hitler’s assumption of power were often Nazism’s bitter enemies.’¹⁴⁵

Anti-imperial London

Whilst London in the 1930s was an imperial city, it continued to be an important place for the development of anti-imperial criticism. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Britain has long been home to anti-imperial critics, or what historian Gregory Claeys

¹⁴² Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 300.

¹⁴³ Corthorn, *In the Shadow of the Dictators*: 1.

¹⁴⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 214.

¹⁴⁵ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 243.

has termed ‘imperial sceptics.’ Claeys draws attention to the fact that criticism of certain aspects of imperialism can be found in the work of such thinkers as John Stuart Mill, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, and the ‘Manchester School’ economists grouped around Richard Cobden and John Bright during the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁶ He also provides a detailed discussion of the role of imperial scepticism in the political work of the British Positivists, followers of Augustus Comte, as well as within the British socialist and labour movement during the same period.¹⁴⁷ Such movements, in Claeys’s account, form precursors to perhaps the most well-known imperial sceptic of the early twentieth century, J.A. Hobson, whose 1902 book *Imperialism* ‘is often taken as a starting point of anti-imperialist thought in Britain.’¹⁴⁸ Of course, as Bernard Porter has argued, imperial sceptics at the start of the twentieth century could not all ‘be dubbed anti-imperialists,’ though they were all ‘deeply critical of the way the Empire was being run.’¹⁴⁹ This is a point which Stephen Howe has argued can be extended later into the twentieth century also, when a range of imperial critics continued to denounce particularly aspects of imperialism without necessarily demanding an end to it altogether.¹⁵⁰

By the 1930s, this remained very much the situation. London played host to a diverse array of ‘imperial sceptics,’ including some of the organisations and individuals already mentioned above, who were critical of aspects of the imperial system without

¹⁴⁶ G. Claeys (2010), *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 21-46.

¹⁴⁷ Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*: 47-123, 124-234.

¹⁴⁸ Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*: 235.

¹⁴⁹ Porter (2008 [1968]), *Critics of Empire: British Radicals and the Imperial Challenge* London: I.B. Tauris: 2.

¹⁵⁰ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*.

arguing necessarily for the end of empire. Within the CPGB, a general commitment to anti-imperialism existed, but in reality – and especially during the 1940s – the Party often did little anti-imperialist work, and grew steadily more reformist on the issue.¹⁵¹ Even during its period of increased activity on imperial issues during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Nicholas Owen has argued that the CPGB ‘proved much better at destroying existing organisations than at building up its own campaigns.’¹⁵² Despite this, the CPGB were centrally involved in the development of one of the most important anti-imperialist groups in Britain. Formed in 1927 at an international conference in Brussels, the League Against Imperialism has been described as ‘the most significant attempt to establish an international anticolonial body between the wars.’¹⁵³ At the Brussels conference, a broad delegation of British leftists, made up of Communists and non-Communists alike, took part. Reginald Bridgeman, a Communist who never actually joined the CPGB, was the central figure in the British delegation, and would play a leading role in developing and maintaining the British section in the coming years.¹⁵⁴ Leading figures from the ILP, including Fenner Brockway, were also involved. However, despite the encouraging start made at this early conference the British section of the LAI soon found itself in trouble, with many leading non-Communists withdrawing their membership. In 1929, the Labour Party declared the LAI an ‘organisation subsidiary to the Communist Party,’ thus barring their members from joint membership. By 1931, Howe has written that ‘the League was an almost entirely

¹⁵¹ N. Redfern (2005), *Class or Nation: Communists, Imperialists and Two World Wars* London: I.B.

Tauris.

¹⁵² Owen, *The British Left and India*: 215.

¹⁵³ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*: 71.

¹⁵⁴ J. Saville (1993), ‘The League Against Imperialism, 1927-1937,’ in *Dictionary of Labour Biography* vol. 7: 40-50.

Communist body.’ By 1933, the LAI transferred its International Secretariat to Bridgeman and other activists in Britain, including the Indian Communist Shapurji Saklatvala. The organisation itself was in a poor state as this time, though Bridgeman succeeded in rallying it into something which has at least been described as ‘not a negligible force.’¹⁵⁵ The LAI held conferences and lectures at which a broad spectrum of imperial sceptics were in attendance, and also managed to publish literature on certain important issues during the 1930s.¹⁵⁶ It also organised the Negro Welfare Association, in which leading black West Indian activists such as Peter Blackman and Arnold Ward found a home during the late 1930s.¹⁵⁷ However, overall the British section of the LAI has been described as ‘an elite organization *par excellence*,’ dominated by leading Communist functionaries and with ‘no factory-level presence at all ... and very little support outside of London.’¹⁵⁸

Beyond the LAI, anti-imperial thought and practice also found a home within the ILP. In 1925, the ILP established an Empire Policy Committee which urged Britain to reform its empire towards a Socialist Commonwealth. This Committee also had links to the Labour Party’s own Advisory Committee. However, by the later 1920s the ILP became increasingly critical of Labour Party policy on the Empire, and developed a ‘more militant anticolonial policy.’¹⁵⁹ When the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932, its colonial policy moved rapidly towards a more revolutionary position, aided

¹⁵⁵ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*: 75.

¹⁵⁶ For example, League Against Imperialism (1935), *Abyssinia* London: International Secretariat for the LAI.

¹⁵⁷ H. Adi (2010), ‘The Comintern and black workers in Britain and France, 1919-1937,’ *Immigrants and Minorities* **28:2**: 224-245.

¹⁵⁸ Owen, *The British Left and India*: 216.

¹⁵⁹ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*: 70.

by the contribution of colonial Marxists such as George Padmore and C. L. R. James to party debates. By 1935-6, Howe has argued that ‘the ILP position on colonialism had become unequivocally revolutionary in its language – far more so, indeed, than that of the CPGB now was.’¹⁶⁰

The Labour Party could also boast its share of imperial sceptics, particularly some of the members of their Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions such as Leonard Woolf. Within the Labour Party itself a broad range of views on empire existed. However, Howe has argued that during the 1930s, Labour’s predominant ‘gradualist view of anticolonialism was coming under increasing challenge’ from the Marxist revolutionary narrative, and that this subsequently weakened Labour’s ‘thrust to reform imperial policy.’¹⁶¹ However, particular MP’s, such as Arthur Creech Jones, continued to take a significant interest in empire, and to view it critically, throughout the 1930s, though it would be difficult to describe many of these figures as outright anti-imperialists, especially Creech Jones, who would go on to become Colonial Secretary in the post-war government.¹⁶²

Of course, amongst the most important imperial sceptics residing in 1930s London were colonial subjects themselves. Again, their commitment to a thoroughgoing anti-imperialism varied, but a range of organisations grew up in these years which developed critical perspectives on empire, or aspects of it. Foremost amongst these were Indian-led organisations, such as the Indian National Congress and Swaraj House, which built links with the broader anti-imperial movement in Britain and, through

¹⁶⁰ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*: 71.

¹⁶¹ Howe, *Anticolonialism in British Politics*: 51.

¹⁶² P. Gupta (2002), *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* London: Sage.

leading figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru or Krishna Menon, played important roles within the broader anti-imperial movement in London.¹⁶³

Black London

1930s London was a multi-racial city, and had been so for many years. In 1764, the *Gentleman's Magazine* had reported that there were at least 20,000 'Negroe [sic] servants' in London.¹⁶⁴ By the 1930s, it has been estimated that there were around 10,000 black people in Britain, though this figure is notoriously hard to verify on account of the fact that defining who to include in the term 'black' has varied, and also race was not a category measured by the British census in these years.¹⁶⁵ Estimating the precise population of black London in the 1930s and 1940s is a near-impossibility.

1930s London saw the emergence of a number of important black-led campaigning organisations. Aside from the LCP and the IAFA/IASB, the other organisation of central significance was the West African Students Union (WASU), founded in the late 1920s. During the 1930s, WASU became steadily more political, often taking an anti-colonial stance by the mid to late 1930s and having developed links to both the League Against Imperialism and radical black activists such as George

¹⁶³ Owen, *The British Left and India*: esp. 197-270.

¹⁶⁴ P. Edwards (1981), 'The history of black people in Britain,' *History Today*, 31 August 1981; K. Chater (2009), *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales During the Period of the British Slave Trade, 1660-1807* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹⁶⁵ W. James (2006), 'The black experience in twentieth century Britain,' in P. Morgan and S. Hawkins (eds.) *Black Experience and the Empire* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 347-386; C. Bressey (2007), 'The black presence in England and Wales after the Abolition Act, 1807-1930,' *Parliamentary History*, **26**: 224-237.

Padmore.¹⁶⁶ Aside from WASU, black activists also played an important role in the Negro Welfare Association (NWA), an organisation founded by the League Against Imperialism. Marcus Garvey was also living in Britain during the 1930s, publishing an occasional periodical entitled the *Black Man* and occasionally addressing crowds from Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park.¹⁶⁷ Another important organisation established in the 1930s was the Colonial Seamen's Union (CSU), sometimes also known as the Coloured Colonial Seamen's Union. The Union had branches in London and Cardiff as well as other major port cities, and counted amongst its leading lights Chris Braithwaite, alias Chris Jones, who joined the IASB. Alongside Braithwaite, the Indian activist Surat Alley was also amongst the leading figures of the CSU, and Arnold Ward of the NWA was associated with it. These organisations organised opposition to legislation which, in Laura Tabili's words, 'effectively recolonized Black seamen in Britain through withholding economic, political, and social rights other British subjects enjoyed.'¹⁶⁸ In 1936, the CSU held its First Annual Convention, attended by a range of organisations, including the NWA, LAI, and LCP.¹⁶⁹

The CSU was an important organisation primarily because its scope stretched beyond the confines of the students and middle-class figures who dominated organisations like the WASU and the LCP in an attempt to engage with the black working class. In Cardiff, the CSU for a time drew a considerable membership amongst

¹⁶⁶ H. Adi (1998), *West Africans in Britain 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* London: Lawrence and Wishart.

¹⁶⁷ C. Grant (2009), *Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* London: Vintage: 436-450.

¹⁶⁸ Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*: 58.

¹⁶⁹ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 222; Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*: 158-159.

working class seamen.¹⁷⁰ Leading figures in the CSU, such as Alley and Braithwaite, lived in East London working class areas like Poplar and Stepney. Little is known about the precise extent of CSU links to working class populations in London, black or otherwise, though Laura Tabili pinpoints the organisation as one amongst a number of groups which helped forge ‘a multicultural Black political identity ... among working men in interwar Britain.’¹⁷¹

Many, though not all, of those who joined the campaigning organisations focused on here were intellectuals, students, or employees in better-paid professions such as the medical services. Many members of London’s black population simply were not members of such organisations. Some worked as entertainers, often in the music and theatrical trades. Others, and by far the majority, were employed in traditionally more working-class trades, including working on the London docks and aboard ships.¹⁷² Black West Indian activists in 1930s London were therefore part of a broader, diverse, minority community of black people seeking to make a life for themselves in London. Racism was a factor in driving black Londoners to self-identify as black, as was racialised labour legislation, but Tabili also makes the important point that ‘Black people in interwar Britain enjoyed a measure of integration into or at least mutual toleration with the white working people among whom they lived, worked and married.’¹⁷³ Tony Kushner has argued that although racialised discourses played a

¹⁷⁰ N. Evans (1985), ‘Regulating the reserve army: Arabs, blacks and the local state in Cardiff, 1919-1945,’ in K. Lunn (ed.) *Race and Labour in Twentieth-century Britain* London: Frank Cass: 68-115.

¹⁷¹ Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*: 159.

¹⁷² S. Bourne (2005), *Black in the British Frame: The Black Experience in British Film and Television* London: Continuum; S. Bourne (2010), *Mother Country: Britain’s Black Community on the Home Front, 1939-1945* Stroud: The History Press.

¹⁷³ Tabili, *We Ask for British Justice*: 159.

prominent role in interwar and wartime Britain, some people were predisposed to anti-racist standpoints, and, amongst those who were not, everyday contact with black people on the streets of Britain could ‘undermine the impact of negative images and associations.’¹⁷⁴ Racism was certainly an important feature of black life in London, but it was not all-encompassing, and numerous examples of interracial solidarity and cooperation were evident.

These are just some of the complex threads which weaved together to establish, maintain and contest London’s role as an imperial city in the 1930s and 1940s. As such, they represent earlier examples of the ‘constellation of trajectories’ that Doreen Massey sees as establishing London as a world city, both internally heterogeneous and simultaneously entangled in a relationship of ‘constitutive interdependence’ with other places across the globe.¹⁷⁵ This thesis tracks the ways in which such threads intersected through detailed historical research focused on organisations run by groups of West Indian activists and others. In doing so, it both develops research on aspects of London’s history which have been neglected, including the role of black West Indian activists within the city, but also explores the ways in which London was tied into a web of relationships with the world beyond, particularly the Caribbean. However, untangling and tracing these threads, many of which were international in both scope and extent, has implications for the ways in which historical research is carried out, and it is with reflection on these that this chapter closes.

¹⁷⁴ T. Kushner (2004), *We Europeans? Mass-Observation, ‘Race’ and British Identity in the Twentieth Century* Aldershot: Ashgate: 252.

¹⁷⁵ Massey, *World City*: 4, 21.

Researching black West Indians in London

Researching the spatial practices through which black West Indians in London engaged with the politics of race and empire requires this thesis to attend to the various forms through which the African diaspora, and the politics of race and of empire, have been articulated and disarticulated. This has meant studying what Brent Edwards calls the ‘great variety of texts: fiction, poetry, journalism, criticism, position papers, circulars, manifestoes, anthologies, correspondence, surveillance reports’ which came together in these formations.¹⁷⁶ However, it has also required going beyond Edwards’s framework, examining not only textual forms but also the particular spaces and non-textual practices through which the organisations at the heart of this thesis engaged with the world.

Attending to political practices articulated through diverse spaces and networks has particular methodological implications. Edwards’s work on black internationalism suggests that the transnational imaginations of African diasporic activists such as those at the heart of this thesis were not always unified, and that they did not always form a coherent community. Consequently, any exploration of the modes of political practice deployed by these activists must understand the spaces that such practices were articulated within as what Paul Routledge terms ‘convergence spaces,’¹⁷⁷ in which diverse perspectives are brought together in order to initiate dialogue on particular matters and, where possible, establish a degree of unity. Studying the spatialities of the

¹⁷⁶ B. Edwards (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* London: Harvard University Press: 7.

¹⁷⁷ P. Routledge (2003), ‘Convergence space: Process geographies of grassroots globalization networks,’ *Transactions of the Insititute of British Geographers* **28:3**:333-349.

modes of political practice deployed by activist groups does not simply mean mapping the spaces and places that they functioned through. It also means exploring the ways in which such spaces, and the networks within which they were positioned, worked to facilitate solidarities between diverse groups and individuals, or played a role in undermining solidarities and enabled the expression of disagreements.

Such an approach, when based primarily on historical research the primary sources of which are texts, necessarily requires an understanding of the relationship between the textual world and that beyond it. If, as Laura Chrisman argues, the imperial metropolis was ‘a heterogeneous site of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic institutions, movements and subjectivities,’¹⁷⁸ then it is clear that such diversity was apparent not only in textual forms such as newspapers, periodicals or books, but that these forms of text, as well as manuscript archival sources, remain the primary way through which to access the practices through which activism was performed. One way of working through such methodological issues is to deploy what Dave Featherstone has termed ‘networked archival research practices.’ As Featherstone explains, such practices entail situating texts as both ‘part of networked social relations and as constitutive of world-building activities, and not just representing such activities’. Inevitably, such an approach requires ‘triangulating between different sources’ in order to examine the networked connections forged between the various individuals and organisations involved.¹⁷⁹ In Susan Pennybacker’s terms, it often requires that ‘sources not usually linked are brought to bear upon one another.’¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ L. Chrisman (2003), *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 68.

¹⁷⁹ D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space, and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell: 63.

¹⁸⁰ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 279.

Acknowledging and taking seriously such complexity has implications for the place of the archive within historical research. It suggests that historical documentation ought to be treated both as a discursive representation, and as a way of relating details about the historical world outside of the text. Such an approach has recently been developed by several scholars working within the broad field of ‘critical imperial studies.’¹⁸¹ For example, Gary Wilder, in his work on the relationship between the inter-war French state and its empire, identifies his approach as one which attends to the ‘worldliness’ of texts, but which simultaneously avoids either fetishising them – ‘reading them only in relation to themselves or to other texts’ – or sociologising them – ‘reading them reductively as effects of their conditions of production’. Such an approach implies that ‘archival research does not simply lead us from abstractions to the so-called real world. Rather, it reveals that the seemingly abstract categories that we consign to political philosophy are often precisely what are at stake in everyday policies and ordinary public debates.’¹⁸² Antoinette Burton frames this slightly differently, but her insistence that the realms of ‘discourse’ and ‘reality’ must be understood ‘not as opposing domains but as a vast, interdependent archive’ expresses similar methodological concerns to those emphasised by Wilder, whereby texts of various sorts are understood both as discursive statements effected by their conditions of production, and as mediated points of access to the everyday worlds of the past.¹⁸³

Perhaps the most detailed deployment of such approaches to historical research has been Ann Laura Stoler’s research into the nineteenth century Dutch empire.

¹⁸¹ K. Wilson (2006), ‘Old imperialisms and new imperial histories: Rethinking the history of the present,’ *Radical History Review* **95**: 212.

¹⁸² Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*: 21-22.

¹⁸³ A. Burton (2003), *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 5.

Drawing on the tradition of ‘historical ethnography’, Stoler argues that there is no single way to practise ethnography in the archives. In the context of her own work on specifically colonial archives, she writes that ethnography ‘attends to processes of production, relations of power in which archives are created, sequestered, and rearranged’, and that the documents contained therein ought to be considered as ‘sites of contested cultural knowledge.’¹⁸⁴ Given her focus on colonial archives, Stoler dwells extensively on undermining the view of colonial control and governmentality as hegemonic, pre-planned and rational. Yet, despite its differences in source material, this approach can reveal new ways of engaging with archives which were not constructed by state or imperial powers. Stoler calls for historical researchers to move beyond a vision of the archive as particular site, and instead to construct archival resources from a diverse range of sources, both published and otherwise. Such an approach replaces a focus on ‘archives-as-things’ with one of ‘archiving-as-process,’ with the researcher themselves crucially involved in shaping this process through selection of documentation chosen to constitute a particular archive.¹⁸⁵ Stoler seeks to treat ‘colonial archival documents ... less as stories for a colonial history than as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own.’¹⁸⁶ Translated into a methodological approach for the present project, this accords with Edwards’s call to attend to the particular form of each type of document, but emphasises the need to consider the particular histories of each document, and to engage with them as circulating tools which helped forge the ‘geographies of connection’ about which

¹⁸⁴ A. L. Stoler (2009), *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: 32.

¹⁸⁵ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*: 20.

¹⁸⁶ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*: 1.

Featherstone writes.¹⁸⁷ This means attending to the relationship between textual accounts of the world, the physical acts which take place beyond the text, and the spaces in which such acts are performed.¹⁸⁸ Such emergent ethnographic approaches to the archive call on researchers to engage directly with questions of context, and to situate both the production and the circulation of historical documents itself as central to the historical record.

Attending to questions of circulation means that ‘historians must be as concerned with space as they are with time.’¹⁸⁹ It also means that attention must be given as much to what is not contained within documentary sources as to what is. Thinking ethnographically about archival material enables them to be treated less as ready-made evidence and more as artefacts assembled under particular social contexts. Burton argues that treating archives ethnographically involves thinking of their contents as ‘cultural artefacts with systems of logic and representation.’¹⁹⁰ Or, as Tony Ballantyne has written, it can lead to the re-thinking of archives as ‘the product of the constant circulation of information.’¹⁹¹ Ballantyne’s approach leads him to call for ‘A critical rereading of the archive that is sensitive to the mobility of ideas, traces the dissemination of information and ideologies across time and space, and highlights the

¹⁸⁷ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*: 7; Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*.

¹⁸⁸ M. Ogborn (2011), ‘A war of words: Speech, script and print in the Maroon wars of 1795-6,’ *Journal of Historical Geography* **37:2**: 203-215.

¹⁸⁹ Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*: 143.

¹⁹⁰ Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*: 27.

¹⁹¹ T. Ballantyne (2003), ‘Rereading the archive and opening up the nation-state: Colonial knowledge in South Asia (and beyond),’ in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* London: Duke University Press: 113.

intertextuality of knowledge.’¹⁹² As Stoler writes, this suggests ‘an emergent methodological shift: to move away from treating the archives as an *extractive* exercise to an ethnographic one.’¹⁹³ Such an approach, as marshalled by Stoler, undermines ‘the certainty that archives are stable ‘things’ with ready-made and neatly drawn boundaries.’¹⁹⁴ ‘Archival’ and ‘non-archival’ documentation are thus brought into closer dialogue both with one-another, and with the world beyond texts, allowing the interruption of ‘the binary logic ... that segregates primary from secondary sources and privileges the archive as some originary – and therefore somehow pure – site of historical knowledge or evidence.’¹⁹⁵

By its very nature, the present project cannot avoid an engagement with such approaches. None of the organisations on which this thesis focuses left institutional archives in their wake, or at least if they did, these have not yet been recovered or have been lost. Nor did many of the individuals concerned leave behind them a coherent archival presence, from which their histories and geographies might be pieced together. Pennybacker has written of how the biographies of many of the figures in this thesis ‘are incomplete in archival terms.’¹⁹⁶ Instead, such histories have to be reconstructed from fragments, located in diverse archival repositories. Yet some of the people concerned did leave behind published traces of themselves, in the form of monographs, journals, newspaper articles and other written pieces. However, even these can be difficult to trace. George Padmore, for example, published articles in places as far apart as Britain, the West Indies, North America, Africa, and Asia. Locating such pieces, and

¹⁹² Ballantyne, ‘Rereading the archive’: 116.

¹⁹³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*: 47.

¹⁹⁴ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*: 50.

¹⁹⁵ Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*: 26.

¹⁹⁶ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 279.

putting them into dialogue with existing archival traces, requires ‘networked archival research strategies’ from the start. It also requires treating archival and non-archival documentation in similar ways, attending to the relevant contextual issues of production, circulation and reception wherever possible. Recent innovations in the digitisation of materials, in particular newspapers and periodicals, are of great help to the scholar seeking to draw on an international selection of published material. For this thesis, I have used in detail the online archive of the Jamaican newspaper *The Daily Gleaner*, as well as the ‘ProQuest Historical Newspapers – Black Newspapers’ database, which includes digitised copies of American newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, *New York Amsterdam News*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*. British newspapers such as *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* have also been consulted in digitised formats. However, it has also been necessary to consult several such sources in their original form. From the USA, *The Crisis* stands out from these periodicals, whilst the Jamaican periodical *Public Opinion* was likewise consulted in non-digital form. Several British newspapers, both local and national, have also been consulted, often at the British Library Newspaper Reading Room at Colindale, North London, or in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics.

Where archival material does exist, attention often has to be given to the nature of the archival collections in which material on the various individuals concerned is held. For example, Padmore, James, Peter Blackman and others have material held on them in the papers of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch. Whilst useful as a resource for unearthing details of the political activity of these individuals, such material must also be treated with a degree of caution. The uncertainty of the Special Branch officers about the ‘targets’ they are following is demonstrated from their repeated miss-spellings of names of individuals and organisations in these files, and

their accounts ought not merely be read as factual statements. The context in which such police reports were published, that of trying to unearth ‘suspicious’ political activities amongst the relevant individuals and groups – directly relates to the nature of the material contained within such documents. It goes without saying that these documents are not neutral representations of the past, positioned as they are within specific historical and geographical configurations of power. Treated with due caution, however, they can offer details not only about the lives and political activities of black West Indians in Britain, but about the responses to such people from official sources within government and the police.

Chapter Three

“We do not take coloured people”: Contesting the Racialisation of Space in 1930s and 1940s London

For the generation of migrants coming to Britain from the Caribbean following the Second World War, finding a place for themselves – both metaphorically, within British society, and physically, in terms of the pressing need to find accommodation – was an important and difficult process. Much of the fictional literature to have emerged from the literary members of this group reflects this. In particular, Sam Selvon, George Lamming and V.S. Naipaul all, in different ways, reflect on the dilemma’s faced by Caribbean migrants in finding lodgings, particularly though not only in London, in the face of Britain’s informal ‘colour bar.’ On a deeper level, their works – perhaps most especially Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, Lamming’s *The Emigrants*, and Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men*¹ – seek in various ways to ‘make sense of the dislocations’ experienced on arrival in Britain.² In doing so, this literature often resorts to meditations on the Caribbean immigrant’s experience of place – be that place Britain, London, or the more specific streets, dance halls, or lodgings through which the fictional characters of these

¹ S. Selvon (2006 [1956]), *The Lonely Londoners* London: Penguin; G. Lamming (1994), *The Emigrants* Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press; V. S. Naipaul (1967), *The Mimic Men* London: Andre Deutsch.

² B. Schwarz (2003), ‘Introduction: Crossing the seas,’ in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 9.

novels lived their lives.³ Nor were these place-based reflections specific to literature. They are paralleled by the musical renderings of those Trinidadian Calypsonians such as Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts), whose songs including ‘London is the place for me,’ and ‘My Landlady,’ offer alternative examples of post-war Caribbean reflections upon the spaces and places of Britain.⁴

These post-war reconfigurations of metropolitan space through the idioms of the Caribbean migrant’s experience have garnered considerable scholarly attention. Yet these were not the first occasions on which migrants from the Caribbean in particular had engaged with the locations of Britain and Britishness, and attempted both to find a place for themselves and, in the process, to suitably refigure British spaces. In the 1930s and 1940s a number of black West Indians and Africans had offered their own – arguably more direct – engagements with British spaces. This chapter is concerned to uncover these previously little-acknowledged engagements by black West Indians with metropolitan space.

Racism and the negotiation of racialised identities was an important, though often unacknowledged, aspect of 1930s London.⁵ Whilst many cases went unreported, a number of prominent incidents highlighted the practice of barring people from particular places based on the colour of their skin. In 1929, African-American actor and

³ J. Macleod (2004), *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* Abingdon: Routledge; I. Baucom (1999), *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* Princeton: Princeton University Press: esp. 3-40, 176-218.

⁴ *London is the Place For Me: Trinidadian Calypso in London, 1950-1956* Media CD (2003). London: Honest Jons Records.

⁵ S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

musician Paul Robeson was refused service at the Savoy Grill in London,⁶ and in 1931 West African law graduate O. A. Alakija was turned away from a London hotel on account of being a ‘man of colour.’ Alakija sued, and was awarded £55 in damages.⁷ The black Trinidadian George Padmore wrote of the process of arriving in Britain that ‘[f]ew Negroes in England, I imagine, have not passed through the bitter experience of looking for apartments and being told constantly: “We do not take coloured people.”’⁸

This chapter focuses primarily on the activities of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP) in order to explore the multiple ways in which black activists contested the racialisation of British urban space in the 1930s and 1940s, and in doing so helped to creolise the city. Such a focus illustrates the diverse ways in which black West Indian activists were drawn into contact with wider groups and individuals through their engagement with the racialisation of space in London. The chapter begins by developing the theoretical basis on which its analysis relies, drawing in particular on recent geographical work on the relationships between race, space, and politics. Next, discussion turns to the place of 1930s London within the wider context of a global colour bar which had begun to emerge in the late nineteenth century. Following this, the chapter centres on three initiatives launched by the LCP which were explicitly, though differently, linked to the project of contesting the racialisation of urban space in Britain. These include a joint project with the Colonial Office to open a hostel in London for students of African descent, known as Aggrey House; the League’s own efforts to establish headquarters for itself; and their attempt to create a cultural centre for colonial

⁶ ‘Hotel colour bar?’, *The Daily Mirror*, 23 October 1929: 2.

⁷ ‘Law report: A West African student and a London hotel,’ *West Africa*, 3 March 1932: 209; and ‘The latest London colour case,’ *West Africa*, 5 March 1932. L. Constantine (1954), *Colour Bar* London: Stanley Paul and Co.: 135-138.

⁸ G. Padmore, ‘A Negro looks at British imperialism,’ *The Crisis* (USA), December 1938: 397.

peoples in London. Each of these projects was situated in London, and it is the argument of this chapter that if we are to understand how the process of creolisation has operated in London, then we must attend to the diverse ways in which black West Indian activists have engaged with the racialisation of urban space within the city.

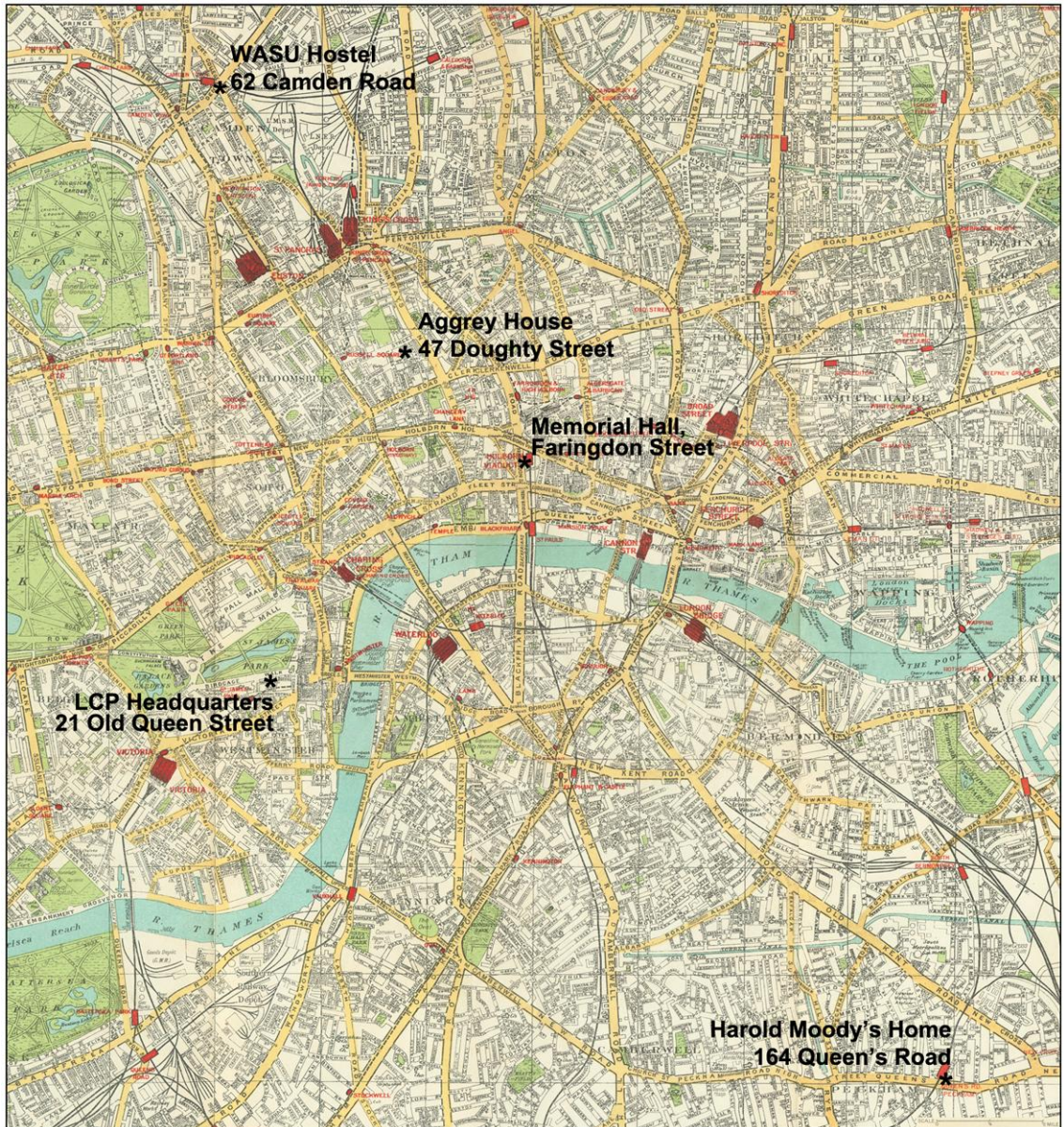


Fig. 3.1 - London map, showing key places involved in the LCP's contestation of the racialisation of space.

Race and the spaces of politics

Since at least the 1980s, geographers have engaged with what has come to be called critical race theory, arguing that if race is to be conceptualised as socially constructed, rather than as a static and existing ‘thing’, then we must attend to how this occurs differently across different times and in different places.⁹ Such work has often begun by conceiving of race as a ‘political category’ which emerges through a range of geographically and historically specific processes.¹⁰ This has enabled research into the varying ways in which, as Audrey Kobayashi puts it, ‘the ideological project of racialization is equally a project of spatialization.’¹¹

Such a perspective has enabled scholars to ‘apprehend “race” as a process of relation ... rather than some badge worn on or lodged deep inside the body.’¹² However, this focus on relationality requires that geographical theorising be taken seriously since, as Doreen Massey writes, ‘[t]he very acknowledgement of our constitutive interrelatedness implies a spatiality; and that in turn implies that the nature of that spatiality should be a crucial avenue of inquiry.’¹³ Geographers have recently come to

⁹ P. Jackson (ed.) (1987), *Race and Racism: Essays in Social Geography* London: Allen and Unwin; C. Dwyer and C. Bressey (eds.) (2008), *Geographies of Race and Racism* Aldershot: Ashgate.

¹⁰ P. Gilroy (1992 [1987]), *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* London: Routledge: 15; A. Bonnett (2000), *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* Harlow: Prentice Hall.

¹¹ A. Kobayashi (2003), ‘The construction of geographical knowledge: Racialization, spatialization,’ in K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile, and N. Thrift (eds.) *Handbook of Cultural Geography* London: Sage: 552.

¹² P. Gilroy (2004), *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Abingdon: Routledge: 163.

¹³ D. Massey (2005), *For Space* London: Sage: 189.

think of space as ‘an effect of practices of representation, valorisation, and articulation’ and to recognise that it is ‘fabricated through and in these processes.’¹⁴ From such a perspective, space itself emerges from a diverse range of practices and representations, rather than being a pre-existing blank canvas.

This has important implications for the way we understand the notion of place, which can in turn have direct consequences for our understandings of place-based political activities such as those being discussed in this chapter. The argument that places are political, and that politics in turn occurs within the context of diverse places, has existed for some time.¹⁵ However, work on the networked spatial practices through which both places and the political come to be constituted has given renewed force to this argument. As set out by Massey, this conception takes places to be ‘collections of ... stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space.’ She situates places not as static and stable entities, but rather as being made up of ‘a constellation of processes.’¹⁶ Place is no more natural a concept than ‘race’, but is rather the point at which diverse, contested and competing sets of networks meet and intersect.¹⁷ Places are therefore both temporally and spatially specific, and do not pre-exist the relations through which they are constituted.¹⁸ More than this, the coalescence of these relations

¹⁴ D. Gregory (2004), *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* Oxford: Blackwell: 19.

¹⁵ M. Keith and S. Pile (1993), ‘Introduction part 1: The politics of place...’ and ‘Introduction part 2: The place of politics...’, in M. Keith and S. Pile (eds.), *Place and the Politics of Identity* London: Routledge: 1-21, 22-40.

¹⁶ Massey, *For Space*: 130, 141.

¹⁷ D. Lambert and A. Lester (2006), ‘Introduction: Imperial Spaces, Imperial Subjects,’ in Lambert, D. and Lester, A. (eds.) *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1-31.

¹⁸ D. Massey (1995), ‘Places and their pasts,’ *History Workshop Journal* **39**: 182-192.

requires that, as Cresswell puts it, ‘places ... are produced through the reiteration of practices.’¹⁹ More recently, Featherstone has extended this theorisation to examine how ‘place-based political activity can be constituted through engagement with the connections beyond and between places.’²⁰ From such a perspective, place-based political activity, far from being localised and narrowly confined, can instead be spatially stretched and connected to wider movements.

This emphasis on space as practised and on place-based political activity as connected to wider struggles fits well with recent work on the politics of black internationalism. Brent Edwards, for example, has placed considerable emphasis on practices as being essential to the formation of black internationalist political cultures. Whilst Edwards’s focus on Paris as a ‘special place for black transnational interaction’ is important, however, his work is relatively unconcerned with exploring how the global networks which he traces intersected with particular sites within that city.²¹

Recent work on black British history has hinted at the possibilities of examining particular places and their connections to broader political networks. Alison Donnell, for example, explains that the telling of the Jamaican Una Marson’s life-story necessarily involves examining ‘the smaller but significant places of exchange and encounter between West Indians, Africans and Indians in Britain.’²² However,

¹⁹ T. Cresswell (2004), *Place: A Short Introduction* Oxford: Blackwell: 82.

²⁰ D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-global Networks* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell: 31.

²¹ B. Edwards (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* London: Harvard University Press: 5; K. McKittrick and C. Woods (2007) (eds.), *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* New York: South End Press.

²² A. Donnell (2004), ‘Una Marson: feminism, anti-colonialism and a forgotten fight for freedom,’ in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 116.

Donnell's own account gives these places only cursory attention. Similarly, John McLeod, examining Ras Makonnen's important Manchester restaurant 'The Cosmopolitan,' describes it as 'one of several similar venues in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s where members of the Pan-African intelligentsia encountered each other,' and proceeds to describe such establishments as 'unique, fascinating locations which give some indication of the larger transnational overlappings and tensions that distinguish their historical and geographical place.'²³ Yet his subsequent discussion, whilst providing illuminating detail on The Cosmopolitan itself, makes few connections between this restaurant and other spaces of black politics in Britain and beyond.

Such ideas can be productively mobilised to work through the various dialogues and contestations which underlay the formation of hospitable places for black people in 1930s and 1940s Britain. The sites under consideration here all proclaimed to offer hospitality to black subjects in Britain. However, as Mustafa Dikeç has written, proclamations of hospitality are 'not always liberating or emancipatory,' and hospitality itself can be understood in a variety of ways. It is therefore important to critically interrogate the forms of hospitality on offer within these institutions.²⁴

In the remainder of this chapter, I will mobilise the theoretical framework outlined above to work through several instances in which black subjects in Britain contested the 'colour bar' in ways which explicitly built upon transnational connections. The places to which I now turn were all intended in various ways as hospitable spaces in which black subjects could forge a life in London. However, set against the wider

²³ J. McLeod (2002), "'A night at the Cosmopolitan": Axes of transnational encounter in the 1930s and 1940s,' *Interventions: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* **4:1**: 55.

²⁴ M. Dikeç (2002), 'Pera, Peras, Poros: Longings for spaces of hospitality,' *Theory, Culture and Society* **19**: 228; also M. Dikeç, N. Clark and C. Barnett (2009), 'Extending hospitality: Giving space, taking time,' *Paragraph* **32**: 1-14.

context of an urban environment in which space had become explicitly racialised and in which the hegemonic status of whiteness had come to be normalised, the opening of such places was not straightforward. The chapter thus traces the ways in which these places came into being, and in doing so suggests that the process of creolisation in 1930s and 1940s London was centred around a challenge to the ways in which space had come to be racialised.

London and the geographies of the ‘colour bar’

It was in London at the 1900 Pan-African Conference, organised by the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, that W.E.B. Du Bois made his now-famous proclamation that ‘The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line.’²⁵ As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have recently demonstrated, the late nineteenth century was a period in which ‘racial identifications’ were ‘central to the constitution of modern political subjectivities and ways of being in the world.’²⁶ It is in this period that Lake and Reynolds see the emergence of the idea of ‘white men’s countries’ and the wider privileging of the hegemonic status of both whiteness and masculinity around the globe. London was a central location in the formation of this global privileging of whiteness.²⁷ In this context, the Pan-African conference at which Du Bois made his remarks served as a ‘response to the racial hostilities that now gripped and divided the

²⁵ Cited in M. Lake and H. Reynolds (2008), *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 246.

²⁶ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*: 5.

²⁷ J. Schneer (1999), *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* London: Yale University Press: 12.

modern world, and [as] an answer to the emergence of the global politics of whiteness.’²⁸

Whilst associations between whiteness and superiority spread globally, they also had implications for the urban geography of London itself, in which racial prejudice became an important feature beyond the early years of the twentieth century. That the inter-war experience of black West Indians in London was studded with the effects of racism is attested to by Claude McKay’s experiences between December 1919 and January 1921. Denied long-term lodgings in London on account of his colour, McKay only rented property from foreign landladies during his stay. In his memoirs, he describes London’s 1917 Club and International Socialist Club as being the two places in which he felt most at home, but outside of these establishments he gives evidence of a profound malcontent, summing up his time by explaining that ‘my experience of the English convinced me that prejudice against Negroes had become congenital amongst them.’²⁹ Having experienced both verbal and physical abuse McKay, as Winston James puts it, ‘often felt like a man under siege’ in London.³⁰

However, during the first half of the twentieth century, despite the continuing informal colour bar a number of places more hospitable to non-white people began to emerge. Colonial clubs, such as the Overseas League and Royal Empire Society, were open to colonial peoples,³¹ though such establishments were better known as sites of

²⁸ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*: 245.

²⁹ C. McKay (1969 [1937]), *A Long Way From Home* New York: Arno Press: 76.

³⁰ W. James (2003), ‘A race outcast from an outcast class: Claude McKay’s experience and analysis of Britain,’ B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 75.

³¹ Royal Empire Society (1949), *Commonwealth Handbook: A Guide to Departments, Organisations & Societies in the United Kingdom Concerned with the British Empire* London: Royal Empire Society.

‘white colonial men’s networking.’³² One exception was the Victoria League, founded primarily by women, which organised social events and eventually founded a hostel in London for colonial peoples.³³ However, the hostel initially opened only for those from Malaya and Hong Kong, with which the organisation had especially strong connections.³⁴ By the late 1930s, and after some debate, it was opened to Africans and West Indians.³⁵ Aside from these colonial clubs, several hostels had also opened to cater for the increasing numbers of Indian students in Britain.³⁶ For example, a private and unofficial hostel opened in 1910 at 21 Cromwell Road, West London, offering temporary beds to newly-arrived students until May 1936, and in 1920 an Indian Students’ Union and Hostel opened on Keppel Street, later moving to Gower Street, also in London. There was also an Indian women’s hostel in Highbury from 1920.³⁷

In 1912, the Egyptian Duse Mohammed Ali’s London-based newspaper *The African Times and Orient Review* had called for a Universal Races Club to be established in London, ‘free from domination by any kind of clique, official or otherwise, where students of all races may meet for social intercourse and for free discussion, and where Europeans who are willing to associate on equal terms may freely

³² A. Woollacott (2001), *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 105.

³³ E. Riedi, ‘Women, gender and the promotion of empire: the Victoria League 1901-1914’, *Historical Journal*, **45:3**: 569-599.

³⁴ J. Lee (2006), ‘Commonwealth students in the United Kingdom, 1940-1960: student welfare and world status,’ *Minerva* **44**: 1-24.

³⁵ See the correspondence in TNA CO 323/1531/4.

³⁶ By 1931 there were 1,800 Indian students in Britain, making them the largest proportion of overseas students in the country. See R. Visram (1986), *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* London: Pluto Press: 178.

³⁷ Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*: 178.

do so.³⁸ This call was taken up by the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS), but their subsequent London University Club was criticised by the newspaper as ‘something in the nature of a “rounding-up” place for West Africans.’³⁹ In subsequent years, other initiatives followed – including a non-racial international student hostel founded by the Student Christian Movement at 32 Russell Square, London, and a failed proposal in 1919 by John Harris of the ASAPS for an establishment catering for African students, again in London.⁴⁰ As Rich explains, however, whilst these initiatives represented innovative attempts at fostering international friendship, they remained rooted within a benevolent paternalistic framework.⁴¹ One of the earliest challenges to these paternalistic efforts by metropolitan Britons was the Coloured Men’s Institute, set up in London’s Canning Town in 1926 by the Ceylonese Muslim of Malay origin, Kamal Chunchie.⁴²

By the 1930s and 1940s, a number of establishments owned and run by black people had opened in London. For example, Ernest Marke, from Sierra Leone, opened numerous night clubs in London’s West End.⁴³ The South African Peter Abrahams, who came to London in 1940, tells of a Soho club he remembers only as ‘Bah’s Club,’

³⁸ W. H. Seed, ‘The need for inter-racial unity,’ *The African Times and Orient Review*, November 1912, cited in P. Rich (1984), *Prospero’s Return? Historical Essays on Race, Culture and British Society* London: Hansib: 134.

³⁹ *The African Times and Orient Review*, 21 April 1914, cited in Rich, *Prospero’s Return?*: 136.

⁴⁰ Rich, *Prospero’s Return?*: 134-140.

⁴¹ Rich, *Prospero’s Return?*: 135-136.

⁴² R. Visram (1999), ‘Kamal A. Chunchie of the Coloured Men’s Institute: The man and the legend,’ *Immigrants and Minorities* **18**: 29-48. Chunchie was vice-president of the LCP throughout 1935-6, and treasurer in early 1937.

⁴³ S. Bourne (2010), *Mother Country: Britain’s Black Community on the Home Front, 1939-45* Stroud: The History Press: 31; E. Marke (1975), *Old Man Trouble* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

owned by a West African, which he describes as ‘a hot little club, crammed with pretty girls and more black men than I had seen in London up to then.’⁴⁴ Abrahams also recalls how Amy Ashwood Garvey, the Jamaican and first wife of Marcus Garvey, ‘had turned a rented London suburban house into one of the most popular eating places’ for blacks in London. The ‘suburban’ house referred to by Abrahams could be Ashwood Garvey’s International Afro Restaurant at 62 New Oxford Street, or it could be the Florence Mills Social Club, opened by Ashwood Garvey on London’s Carnaby Street in 1936.⁴⁵ The Florence Mills Club became a centre-point of black artistic expression in 1930s London, hosting musical performances from, amongst others, the Trinidadian Sam Manning, and Rudolph Dunbar, London correspondent of the Associated Negro Press of the USA and a renowned musician.⁴⁶ Ras Makonnen, from British Guiana, later recalled of the Club that ‘you could go there ... and get a lovely meal, dance and enjoy yourself.’⁴⁷ Such places offered hospitable spaces in which black subjects in Britain could dine, dance and debate, and demonstrate that although racism structured urban life in 1930s and 1940s Britain it did not determine it.

The fact that by the 1930s social spaces were occasionally owned and run by black people themselves is a significant point. The ownership of space has historically

⁴⁴ P. Abrahams (2000), *The Coyaba Chronicles: Reflections on the Black Experience in the Twentieth Century* Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle: 31-32.

⁴⁵ Abrahams, *Coyaba Chronicles*: 36. T. Martin (2007), *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist and Mrs Marcus Garvey No. 1. Or, A Tale of Two Amies* Dover, MA: Majority Press: 138-141.

⁴⁶ ‘Dunbar acts as host,’ *Melody Maker*, 20 June 1936: 9; ‘Dunbar and Manning start new London club,’ *Melody Maker*, 4 July 1936: 10. Also, J. Cowley (1985), ‘Cultural ‘fusions’: Aspects of British West Indian music in the USA and Britain 1918-51,’ *Popular Music* 5: esp. 84-85.

⁴⁷ R. Makonnen (1973), *Pan-Africanism From Within*, ed. King, K. London: Oxford University Press: 130.

been important in enabling anti-racist campaigners to challenge prevailing systems of racialisation. The geographer James Tyner has demonstrated that ownership of space was a crucial aspect of the anti-racist vision offered by Malcolm X in the USA. In Tyner's account, Malcolm X saw that 'a remaking of American space was to be a necessary component of the search for social justice and self-determination'.⁴⁸ Malcolm X therefore advocated a 'separatist movement,' whereby he encouraged black Americans to take up ownership of places in order to challenge the conventional racialisation of space through which whiteness had become the normalised category for societal inclusion.⁴⁹ Whilst most black people in 1930s Britain did not make openly separatist arguments, the attempts recounted in this chapter to own and take control of particular places in order to render cities like London more hospitable for multiracial communities in some ways pre-figure the kinds of initiatives which Tyner sees Malcolm X pursuing.

These places offered a broad challenge to the prevalence of racism within Britain and the empire. The LCP themselves played a key role in formulating this opposition to racism and the colour bar in British and imperial society. In the opening editorial of their journal *The Keys*, the League noted that 'our brothers and sisters are daily meeting with racial discrimination in their search for work' in London, Liverpool and Cardiff especially, and that students and nurses also 'have felt the spiked heel of race prejudice.' They linked such practices to the spatial politics of racism in Britain, noting that 'Hotels, restaurants, and lodging houses refuse us with impunity,' and that

⁴⁸ J. Tyner (2009), *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of American Space* Abingdon: Routledge: 83.

⁴⁹ Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X*: 61-84.

such incidents will undoubtedly have ‘a detrimental effect on peace, order and good government within the British Empire.’⁵⁰

The emotional pain and distress caused by the racialisation of space in British cities was captured well by the Jamaican Una Marson, in her powerful poem ‘Nigger’ published in *The Keys* in July 1933.⁵¹ In the final stanza of that piece, Marson wrote

God keep my soul from hating such mean souls,
God keep my soul from hating
Those who preach the Christ
And say with churlish smile
‘This place is not for ‘Niggers’’
God save their souls from this great sin
Of hurting human hearts that live
And think and feel in unison
With all humanity.⁵²

Marson’s poem not only captures the utter offence and revulsion felt by black people upon being subjected to the N word, but connects its use to the practice of barring people from particular places on account of skin colour. Whilst, as Caroline Bressey

⁵⁰ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 2.

⁵¹ On Marson, see D. Jarrett-Macaulay (1998), *The Life of Una Marson, 1906-1965* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁵² U. Marson, ‘Nigger,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 9.

notes, ‘the colour bar that operated in [1930s] Britain was not explicit,’ this did not limit the hurt and distress which was occasioned upon its appearance.⁵³

The LCP’s primary focus was on racial politics within the British Empire. In 1933, they stated that ‘[o]ur task lies mainly in stating the cause of our brothers and sisters within the British Empire,’ although they stressed that they would not ignore ‘the claims of the people of colour who owe allegiance to a flag other than our own.’⁵⁴ This demonstrates that the League conceptualised the colour bar as a broader part of the imperial social formation – that is, as an intrinsic element of social relations within the British Empire, rather than something limited to Britain’s shores.⁵⁵ Whilst demonstrating their commitment to a multiracial empire, however, it also exemplifies the League’s broader approach, especially in its early years – that of loyalty to the empire. In writing about non-British coloured peoples, the League laid claim to ‘our’ flag, thus positioning black subjects within the category of ‘Britishness.’ This focus of the League on a British identity which was open to colonial subjects as well as metropolitan Britons has recently been termed ‘imperial Britishness.’⁵⁶

⁵³ C. Bressey (2008), ‘It’s only political correctness: Race and racism in British history,’ in C. Dwyer and C. Bressey (eds.), *New Geographies of Race and Racism* London: Ashgate: 31.

⁵⁴ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 1.

⁵⁵ D. Killingray (2008), ‘“A good West Indian, a good African, and, in short, a good Britisher”’: Black and British in a colour-conscious Empire, 1760-1950,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* **36:3**: 363-381; J. Flint (1983), ‘Scandal at the Bristol Hotel: Some thoughts on racial discrimination in Britain and West Africa and its relationship to the planning of decolonisation, 1939-47,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, **12:1**: 74-93.

⁵⁶ A. S. Rush (2002), ‘Imperial identity in colonial minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples, 1931-50,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, **13**: 356-383.

In their efforts to oppose the colour bar, the LCP carried out a wide variety of work. For example, when concerns were raised about racial prejudice within the shipping industry, particularly focussed on the multi-racial community of seafarers living in Cardiff, the LCP commissioned a report on the problems in Cardiff and worked with the locally-based Coloured Colonial Seamen's Union.⁵⁷ In London, the LCP often sought to assist non-white nurses in their efforts to find employment in hospitals, and the League also helped to organise events such as Christmas parties and day trips for 'coloured children' around London.⁵⁸

At times, the LCP grounded their critique of the colour bar in arguments which positioned it as a central element of the imperial economic system.⁵⁹ In this regard, they paralleled the writings of supposedly more radical black West Indians in Britain such as George Padmore.⁶⁰ However, this element of their critique never predominated. Instead, the bulk of the LCP's critical work on the colour bar was grounded in a humanism which conceived of the world as a unified whole. Moody argued that there was no scientific basis for racial discrimination, and that 'the world is a corporate whole' which contained the entire 'human family.'⁶¹ For Moody especially, this humanism was grounded in a Christian humanitarianism which emphasised that 'God hath made of one

⁵⁷ N. Sharpe, 'Cardiff's coloured population,' *The Keys* January 1934: 44-45, 61; P. Lewis and G. Brown, 'We too were in Cardiff,' *The Keys* July-September 1935: 4; 'Cardiff Report,' *The Keys* October 1935: 16-24; N. Evans (1985), 'Regulating the reserve army: Arabs, blacks and the local state in Cardiff, 1919-45,' *Immigrants and Minorities*, **4:2**: 68-115.

⁵⁸ For example, 'The second mile-stone,' *The Keys* July 1933: 15-17; 'The colour bar in England,' *The Keys* July 1934: 17.

⁵⁹ 'Current Comment,' *The Keys* January-March 1936: 30.

⁶⁰ G. Padmore, 'West Africans watch your land,' *International African Opinion* September 1938: 11, 16.

⁶¹ H. Moody (1934), *Youth and Race* London: British Christian Endeavour Union: 5, 17.

blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth.’⁶² Thus, the League more often constructed the colour bar as having emerged primarily from ignorance, rather than from deliberate policy. As Moody wrote, ‘the Colour Bar may be said to have come about by the natural unwillingness of the English to think out any problem until it faces them in some major form.’⁶³ It was this belief, in a colour bar emerging through ignorance rather than through active discrimination, which allowed Moody and the LCP to challenge the racialised nature of the British imperial social formation whilst at the same time advocating loyalty to the British Empire.

The predominant League view was therefore of an ‘idealized version of the British character,’⁶⁴ focusing in particular on what the League took to be ‘British conceptions of justice and fair play.’⁶⁵ From this perspective, incidents of racial discrimination and the enactment of the colour bar were often perceived as being ‘un-British’.⁶⁶ Despite their repeated criticisms of the colour bar and racism, the League were never consistently anti-imperial, choosing more often than not to address the ‘tremendous loyalty of the Colonial peoples to the Mother Country’ and the empire.⁶⁷ As Moody put it, although ‘the Colour Bar does exist in Britain’, ‘its existence is

⁶² H. Moody (1943), *Christianity and Race Relations* London: Fellowship of Reconciliation: 17. On the importance of Christianity to Moody and the LCP, see D. Killingray (2004), ‘“To do something for the race”: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,’ in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* ed. Schwarz, B. Manchester: Manchester University Press: 51-70, esp. 55-58.

⁶³ H. Moody (1944), *The Colour Bar* London: St Luke’s College: 5.

⁶⁴ Rush, ‘Imperial Identity’: 371.

⁶⁵ D. Tucker, ‘Bermuda,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 55.

⁶⁶ See ‘Colour bar memorandum,’ and ‘Sierra Leone memorandum,’ *LCP News Notes* December 1939, unnumbered pages; ‘The colour bar: Reactions,’ *LCP News Letter* April 1940: 14; Moody to MacDonald, Sec. of State for the Colonies, 11 November 1939, CO 323/1692/4.

⁶⁷ H. Moody, ‘West Indians desire for active service,’ *LCP News Letter* July 1940: 58.

contrary to the best traditions of the British people.’⁶⁸ By grounding their approach in beliefs about the ‘best traditions of the British people,’ Moody and the LCP often encouraged black subjects to adopt modes of behaviour which they deemed to be both ‘responsible’ and ‘respectable’. As Anne Rush has written, this meant that the League continued to uphold ‘traditional ... ideas of class and gender structure,’ and despite their efforts in support of working class black communities in Cardiff and London the LCP’s ideology ‘was far from egalitarian.’⁶⁹

This focus on an idealised ‘Britishness’ which would be broadly beneficial to black British subjects coursed through the workings of the LCP. It was also one of the primary reasons that they envisaged the solution to the colour bar lying in education, aimed at all races. Discussion of education for colonial peoples was a key theme running throughout the LCP’s annual conference in 1933,⁷⁰ and would remain so throughout their existence.⁷¹ Moody in particular emphasised the need to use education as a weapon to combat racism. In his writings, Moody adopted a broad understanding of education. He argued for the need to improve the way in which children of all races in Britain and the empire were taught, challenging the notion that ‘England and the English could do no wrong.’ For Moody, instead, it was important that children be taught to ‘disclose the fact that the evil [of racism] is there, and look it squarely in the

⁶⁸ Moody, *The Colour Bar*: 4.

⁶⁹ Rush, ‘Imperial identity’: 361, 367-8.

⁷⁰ ‘Conference report,’ *The Keys* January 1933: 3-8.

⁷¹ For example, in 1940 a League member stated that the problem of the colour bar ‘comes down to one of education’ for all races, and proceeded to set out possible solutions based on this. See ‘A short lecture on the colour bar, delivered at our ninth Annual General Meeting by Dr H. J. A. Dingwall,’ *LCP News Letter* May 1940: 24-30.

face.⁷² However, Moody also conjoined this focus on the education of the young with a desire to improve the knowledge of those who were no longer attending school. As he argued, ‘We must continue to educate those who have passed the years of childhood, and seek to remove from ordinary conversation anything derogatory of other peoples.’⁷³ To this end, he often urged that films in particular needed to be more careful about the ways in which they portrayed racial differences.⁷⁴

Whilst urging that the white community ought to be better educated to appreciate the value of black people,⁷⁵ the focus on education also formed part of the League’s broader insistence on the need for black Africans and people of African descent themselves to aspire to higher social status.⁷⁶ The LCP repeatedly focussed on the successes of colonial students in Britain, and Moody keenly emphasised what he saw as a pantheon of ‘really great Africans and persons of African descent.’⁷⁷ For the League, education was a political tool which could both challenge racial attitudes amongst the white community, and enable black people to better position themselves within British society.⁷⁸ By focusing on education as an important method of uplifting black subjects, the League implicitly accepted the class structure of British society, urging black people to rise through it, rather than challenge its fundamental

⁷² Moody, *Youth and Race*: 18-19.

⁷³ Moody, *Youth and Race*: 20.

⁷⁴ Moody, *Youth and Race*: 19; Moody, *The Colour Bar*: 8.

⁷⁵ ‘Education for better understanding,’ *The Keys* January-March 1935: 57, 64.

⁷⁶ ‘Standards for blacks,’ *LCP News Notes* December 1939: 3.

⁷⁷ ‘African Prince awarded Ph.D (Oxon),’ *LCP News Letter* May 1940; ‘Dr W. Arthur Lewis,’ *LCP News Letter* October 1940: 3-4; Moody, *Youth and Race*: 7-12.

⁷⁸ A. Stockwell (2008), ‘Leaders, dissidents and the disappointed: Colonial students in Britain as Empire ended,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, **36:3**: 487-507.

presumptions. This approach to education in part explains why the League, and Moody in particular, were so keen to involve themselves in Colonial Office plans for the establishment of a student hostel.

The ideology of the LCP was therefore divided. Whilst on the one hand it issued a radical challenge to racism and the colour bar in Britain, the empire, and beyond, on the other hand the League operated predominantly from a socially conservative perspective which situated themselves in the vanguard position of being responsible for the ‘uplift’ of their race.⁷⁹ This notion of racial uplift was capable of masking the perpetuation of class and gender discrimination whilst focusing primarily on racial prejudice.

The League of Coloured Peoples and the contest over Aggrey House

In the 1930s, Harold Moody and the LCP worked closely with the Colonial Office on the establishment of Aggrey House in central London.⁸⁰ Aggrey House was a hostel for Africans and West Indians opened at 47 Doughty Street in Bloomsbury, on whose Board of Trustees Harold Moody sat. Funded by contributions from colonial governments and metropolitan philanthropists, the project relied on the input of a diverse range of actors, but the LCP ensured that they were heavily implicated in the initiative.

⁷⁹ K. Gaines (1996), *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

⁸⁰ For a more detailed treatment of the LCP’s involvement in Aggrey House, see D. Whittall (2011), ‘Creating black places in imperial London: The League of Coloured Peoples in Aggrey House,’ *London Journal* **36:3**: 225-246.

However, previous scholarship on Aggrey House has often implied that Moody merely filled the role of Colonial Office ‘stooge.’ Adi, for example, writes that the Colonial Office ‘recognised that Moody would be a great asset for their scheme’ and therefore ‘co-opted Moody onto their committee.’⁸¹ Similarly, Rich writes of Moody’s involvement that ‘[t]he Colonial Office had been successful in gaining the cooperation of ... Harold Moody’s League of Coloured Peoples, since the early 1930s.’⁸² Both of these accounts elide the agency of Moody and the LCP in engaging with the Colonial Office and involving themselves with the project for their own ends. The involvement of the LCP and Moody in Aggrey House must be read as part of their overall political strategy, not portrayed simply as them being ‘co-opted’ by government.⁸³

In fact, Moody worked hard to ensure that he had a role in the opening of Aggrey House. In February of 1932 he wrote to the Home Office, having been ‘instructed by the Executive Committee of the League of Coloured Peoples’ to inform the government that ‘there still exists [sic] in London in particular and in England in general removable conditions which are inimical to the best interests of the Empire.’⁸⁴ Moody proceeded to catalogue a range of instances of a ‘colour bar’ being enacted in England, pointing out to the government ‘the advisability of giving instructions to managers of public hotels and meeting places that they should be careful not to affront

⁸¹ H. Adi (1998), *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* London: Lawrence and Wishart: 57.

⁸² P. Rich (1990), *Race and Empire in British Politics* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 155.

⁸³ Killingray, “‘To do something for the race’”: 52.

⁸⁴ Moody to H. Samuel, Secretary of State for the Home Department, 20 February 1932, CO 323/1199/6. Moody publicised this correspondence. ‘League of Coloured Peoples’ in *West Africa*, 26 March 1932: 274, 277.

visitors from the British Colonies and other countries on account of their colour,' since 'such unpleasantness is likely to lead to bad feeling and unfriendly foreign relations.'⁸⁵

To these complaints, Moody received a blunt response from the Home Office, explaining that 'the Secretary of State ... regrets that he is unable to assist you.'⁸⁶ Despite this rebuttal, Moody persisted, contacting the Colonial Office instead. In a letter to Colonial Secretary Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Moody forwarded copies of his correspondence with the Home Office. He noted that 'this question is of some concern to the future of the Empire five out of seven of whose members are coloured,' before turning to the question of affronts caused by the colour bar to colonial students in Britain. It should be the responsibility of government, Moody argued, to 'encourage these students to come to the heart of the Empire,' and also to ensure that they can return with favourable impressions of the metropolis. Moody pointed out the need for student accommodation to be open to all races, and closed by exploiting the opportunity provided by the Home Office's failure to show any interest in the subject, asserting that

the League has no hesitation in saying that a blank refusal on the part of His Majesty's Government to take any action on a matter which concerns them so intimately ... is likely to lead to severe disappointment and to strike deeply at the roots of their loyalty and affection for the Home Country.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Moody to H. Samuel, 20 February 1932 CO 323/1199/6.

⁸⁶ E.N. Cooper to Moody, 29 February 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

⁸⁷ All quotes from Moody to Cunliffe-Lister, 31 March 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

Moody's correspondence initially caused the Colonial Office difficulties. Whilst recognising that the LCP had raised 'a very delicate matter,'⁸⁸ officials were unwilling to make any instruction to hoteliers advising them against a colour bar.⁸⁹ However, Hanns Vischer, an educationalist with a particular interest in colonial matters, especially the question of colonial peoples in Britain, prompted the department to take Moody more seriously.⁹⁰ Although Vischer prefaced his response with the dismissive assertion that 'the average African coming to this country to study has got a bad reputation which I am sorry to say is not unmerited,' he was nonetheless alert to the fact that 'the coloured people will [not] be satisfied with the explanation that the British Government can take no action.' Vischer also recognised that any racism directed at colonial students meant that 'the people who suffer most and feel that they are being dealt with unjustly are those who through their higher training are bound to take leading positions and influence public opinion on their return to the Colonies.'⁹¹ Echoing Moody's rhetoric, the Colonial Office began to acknowledge that metropolitan colour prejudice might have dangerous ramifications in the colonies, particularly if it was seen to impact upon black students, many of whom came from prominent wealthy families in their homelands. Vischer's intervention spurred the Colonial Office to recommend that the

⁸⁸ Memo by J. Smith of the Colonial Office, 4 April 1932, CO 323/1199/6; Memo by Mr Bigg of the Colonial Office, 13 March 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

⁸⁹ See memo by J. Smith, 4 April 1932, CO 323/1199/6; Memo by Sir C. Bottomley of the Colonial Office, 21 April 1932 CO 323/1199/6.

⁹⁰ Vischer served on a number of Advisory Committees for the Colonial Office. S. Parkinson (2003), 'Sir Hanns Vischer, champion of African cultures: A portrait of an advisor on colonial education,' in C. Whitehead (ed.) *Colonial Educators: The British Indian and Colonial Education Service, 1858-1983* London: I.B. Tauris: 106-148.

⁹¹ Memo by Vischer, 19 April 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister, meet with Moody, who they described as ‘a black Jamaican who is not an extremist.’⁹²

Following Moody’s lobbying, Cunliffe-Lister gave a speech at an African Society dinner in which he asserted that ‘the fellow-subjects of those countries who come here have not only the rights of British citizens but are entitled to a ready welcome’ and that ‘nothing could be more unfortunate than that such men ... should be refused admission in some restaurant or place of public resort in this country.’⁹³ He also met with Moody personally, during which he revealed to him that he ‘was interested in the establishment of an African Club or Hostel in London which might meet ... the difficulty ... experienced by a number of coloured people of finding lodgings.’⁹⁴

The Colonial Office had begun to consider a hostel for Africans in London at least as early as 1930, but plans for an ‘African Club in London’ in which ‘Africans will find a real home’ in the metropolis were rejected as financially unfeasible.⁹⁵ The Colonial Office was aware that the LCP ‘had themselves prepared a similar scheme for coloured people generally, including but not confined to Africans,’⁹⁶ and Moody claimed that the LCP had planned to open a ‘Hostel and Club for Coloured people’ in Notting Hill as early as November 1931, but were dissuaded from doing so by the

⁹² Memo by Vernon, 26 April 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

⁹³ ‘Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister on Africa. Secretary of State’s justifications of British rule. Speech at African society dinner,’ in *East Africa* 9 June 1932: 998.

⁹⁴ Memo by Vischer, 7 May 1932, CO 323/1199/6; Cunliffe-Lister to Moody, 13 May 1932, CO 323/1199/6.

⁹⁵ W. Bigg, ‘Memorandum,’ 22 February 1933; ‘African club in London’ poster, both in CO 323/1243/5.

⁹⁶ Memo by Bigg, 22 February 1933, CO 323/1243/5.

Colonial Office.⁹⁷ The influence of the LCP may have had some bearing on the opening-out of the project to include West Indians as well as Africans, given the League's persistent calls for unity and cooperation between Africans and West Indians in Britain.⁹⁸ For his own part, Moody had been contemplating the need for such a hostel since at least 1923, when he spoke at an Indian Hostel in London and called for the founding of similar establishments for African and African-descended peoples.⁹⁹

Whilst the Colonial Office claimed publicly that their desire to open a hostel was motivated by concern over the impact of racial prejudice on colonial students in Britain, they privately revealed alternate motivations. They hoped such a hostel would aid them in 'introducing the members of Aggrey House and their friends to the people and the social circles who really represent the Empire,' diverting Africans and West Indians away from political radicals and anticolonial activists in London.¹⁰⁰ Moody was certainly driven by the possibility of being involved in a well-resourced, government-supported hostel for colonial students in London. He pressed the Colonial Office to act swiftly on the project, and went over their heads by contacting colonial governors directly to seek their support and funding – earning a rebuke from the Colonial Office

⁹⁷ Moody to M. Lee, 15 November 1933, CO 323/1244/13; 'The League of Coloured Peoples: First annual meeting – good progress,' *West Africa* 19 March 1932: 270.

⁹⁸ The need for unity was picked up in the opening editorial of *The Keys*, and was returned to regularly. See 'Editorial,' *The Keys* July 1933: 2.

⁹⁹ 'Address by Dr H. Moody: At the opening of an Indian students' hostel by Baptists,' *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 13 September 1923: 10.

¹⁰⁰ See memos by Vischer, 9 December 1935 and 15 December 1935, in CO 323/1342/12.

for his troubles.¹⁰¹ Despite this, Moody was appointed as the only black member of Aggrey House's Board of Trustees.

Moody had good reason for seeking to speed up the Aggrey House project. In April 1933, the West African Students Union (WASU) opened a hostel of its own at 62 Camden Road in Camden Town, North London.¹⁰² The WASU establishment became a centre-point of black life in 1930s London. Ras Makonnen recalled of the hostel that 'WASU House was a homely place where you could always get your groundnut chop, and there would always be dances on Saturday night.'¹⁰³ Whilst Makonnen's recollections focus primarily on the sociality and hospitality of the WASU hostel, Nnamdi Azikiwe's memories focus more on its role as a site of congregation and education. As he recalls, it 'was the headquarters of most West African students in London, where we congregated and devoured West African newspapers. I also had the pleasure of giving a series of talks to the students there.'¹⁰⁴ Azikiwe focuses on the West African users of the hostel, but the fact that Makonnen, from British Guiana, also went there demonstrates that a broader population used it. Whilst their focus differs, both these accounts stress the importance of the WASU hostel as a comfortable space for black people in Britain to gather, meet and talk with one another, be it socially in Makonnen's case or intellectually and politically in the account of Azikiwe.

¹⁰¹ Moody to E. Denham, Governor of British Guiana, 23 December 1932. On Moody's correspondence with Governor Sir Ransford Slater of Jamaica, see letters by Slater to Beckett, 16 January 1933; and Beckett to Slater, 18 February 1933. For the rebuke, see Vischer to P. Nunn, 12 April 1933. All in CO 323/1243/5. Moody seems mainly to have contacted West Indian governors, since several African governors had already expressed interest in the project.

¹⁰² On WASU Hostel, see Adi, *West Africans*: 52-76.

¹⁰³ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism*, 127.

¹⁰⁴ N. Azikiwe (1970), *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* London: C.Hurst and Co.: 197.

Supporters of WASU Hostel, some of whom were within the LCP, actively opposed Aggrey House. An editorial in *The Keys* in January 1934 stated that the LCP ‘is now at a cross road of its existence. It must either get support or it must curtail its programme. A central meeting place for students in the various colleges of the University of London and the Inns of Court is urgently needed.’¹⁰⁵ A note in the periodical *West Africa* then appeared, reportedly based on a resolution passed by the LCP’s executive committee, denying that the LCP were involved with Aggrey House, and noting that Moody’s involvement was in ‘a purely private capacity.’¹⁰⁶ The article served as a forerunner to a broader debate in the pages of *West Africa* over the relative merits of Aggrey House and WASU Hostel.¹⁰⁷

The Colonial Office noted that the LCP ‘has amongst its members many wild lads apt to make wild statements’ about Aggrey House.¹⁰⁸ Almost certainly, C. L. R. James was one of these ‘wild lads’. At this point, James was an LCP member and occasional contributor to its journal, though he would found the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) in 1935. However, in 1934 he gathered with a group of notable left-leaning Britons, including Kingsley Martin, editor of *The New Statesman and Nation*, and Reginald Bridgeman of the League Against Imperialism, as well as members of WASU, to form the African Hostel Defence Association. James proposed a

¹⁰⁵ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 41.

¹⁰⁶ ‘The League of Coloured Peoples,’ *West Africa* 29 April 1933: 414. However, this was never mentioned in the LCP’s own published material.

¹⁰⁷ See the following articles in *West Africa*: ‘Aggrey House,’ 20 January 1934: 48-49; ‘The new hostel: Mysteries lurking behind Aggrey House – O! Africans, ‘Beware of the Greeks even when they offer gifts,’ 3 February 1934: 109-110; ‘Mysteries lurking behind Aggrey House,’ 17 February 1934: 168; ‘Aggrey House: Words and deeds,’ 31 March 1934: 338-339.

¹⁰⁸ Memo by Vischer, 23 June 1933, CO 323/1244/13.

boycott of Aggrey House,¹⁰⁹ and this grouping also published a pamphlet in March 1934 entitled *The Truth About Aggrey House: An Exposure of the Government Plan for the Control of African Students in Great Britain*, in which they personally attacked Moody for his role in the affair, and depicted Aggrey House as an imperialist tool. An article also appeared in the international Communist journal the *Negro Worker* which denounced Moody as an ‘Uncle Tom’ for his role in the scheme.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *West Africa*, 5 May 1934: 473.

¹¹⁰ WASU (1934), *The Truth About Aggrey House: An Exposure of the Government Plan for the Control of African Students in Great Britain* London: WASU; “‘Uncle Tom’ Moody,’ *Negro Worker* August-September, 1933: 17.



Fig. 3.2 - WASU Hostel. Photograph from *Wasu*, January 1933. Caption reads ‘A view of the south and north-western sides of the African Student’s Hostel in London, under the auspices of the [WASU], at 62, Camden Road, London, NW1, in the Borough of St Pancras.’

Moody vigorously defended Aggrey House against its detractors, asserting that ‘this house will yet play a great part in the future of our race.’¹¹¹ He also wrote to the Colonial Office suggesting that one alternative to the unrest would be to allow the LCP

¹¹¹ ‘The President’s message,’ *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 2 (n.d. but 1935): 22.

to take control of Aggrey House altogether and use it as its headquarters.¹¹² A number of WASU members split from that organisation and sided with Moody, and the Colonial Office reported that Jomo Kenyatta regularly frequented Aggrey House.¹¹³ The controversy took almost 12 months to resolve, but by March 1935, after several meetings between all parties, WASU ended its opposition.¹¹⁴ Aggrey House was now being put to full use. Early in 1935 it apparently had around 50 members, with most of the available bedrooms having been filled. By 1937 membership had risen to 236, coming from across Africa and the West Indies, with a small number from Britain and the United States of America.¹¹⁵ It had become a transnational place in which Africans, West Indians, Britons and others were able to engage and interact with one another. Fostering these transnational linkages were the wide variety of texts available in the hostel's library, including books such as Nancy Cunard's monumental *Negro: An Anthology*, and periodicals such as the *Gold Coast Independent*, *British Guiana*, and the American-based black publication *Opportunity*.¹¹⁶ The house also hosted regular speakers, including the West Indian LCP member Dr Cecil Belfield Clarke, the Irish

¹¹² Moody to Lee, 2 November 1933, CO 323/1244/13. For the Colonial Office response, see memos by Bigg, 7 November 1933 and 17 November 1933; Memo by Vischer, 8 November 1933, all in CO 323/1244/13.

¹¹³ Adi, *West Africans*: 58, 65.

¹¹⁴ Memo by Vischer, 4 February 1935, in CO 323/1342/11.

¹¹⁵ Members were required to pay a small fee to join. Reports of the accounts of Aggrey House suggest that some 'members' failed to pay their fees. A limited amount of accommodation was available at Aggrey House for an extra fee. See memo by Vischer, 25 January 1935, in CO 323/1342/11. In 1936 the average number of weekly occupants for these bedrooms was 6. See 'Draft report for annual general meeting – Aggrey House Club,' 12 November 1936, CO 323/1398/8.

¹¹⁶ On Cunard's book as a transnational text, see L. Winkiel (2008), *Modernism, Race and Manifestos* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 157-190.

humanitarian Lady Kathleen Simon, George Padmore, Moody and many others. Student members established ‘a study group ... doing good work in the study of African culture,’ as well as a debating society.¹¹⁷ Aggrey House thus functioned as an intellectual site through which black students and others could engage with ideas and current affairs relating to a broad range of international and imperial contexts, with a primary focus on Africa and the African diaspora.

However, such resources could also enable students to develop political attitudes which neither the Colonial Office nor Moody hoped to promote. As early as 1936, the Aggrey House treasurer had noted that certain members were not behaving in the manner expected of them by the Trustees and the Colonial Office.¹¹⁸ By 1940, the unrest came to a head. The Trustees closed down the institution on the 3rd May on account of what the *Evening Standard* reported as a ‘moral issue.’¹¹⁹ The Trustees, including Moody, had planned to exclude a West Indian member, Mr Wilkins, on the grounds of ‘immoral conduct,’ only for the House Committee to oppose the move.¹²⁰ Wilkins had been accused of introducing a ‘prostitute’¹²¹ into the House, and hence

¹¹⁷ Details on the library, talks and study group all come from ‘Draft report for annual general meeting – Aggrey House Club,’ 12 November 1936, CO 323/1398/8.

¹¹⁸ ‘To the Management Committee and Members of Aggrey House Club: Treasurer’s Report,’ 11 November 1936, CO 323/1398/8.

¹¹⁹ ‘Moral issue closes club,’ *Evening Standard* 4 May 1940. See also Cummings to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 July 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹²⁰ J. L. Keith, ‘Note of an interview with Mr Fletcher,’ 27 April 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹²¹ Originally, the word ‘woman’ had been used, only to be scored out and replaced by ‘prostitute.’ This uncertainty over the nature of the woman’s relationship to Mr Wilkins may reflect opinions on women who spent the night with black men. On interracial sex as a boundary of ‘respectability’ in twentieth century Britain, see L. Bland (2005), ‘White women and men of colour: Miscegenation fears in Britain after the Great War,’ *Gender and History* 17:1: 29-61.

bringing the institution into disrepute.¹²² However, alongside this ‘moral’ justification for closure ran another, ‘political’ one. Primarily, blame was laid at the feet of Peter Blackman and Desmond Buckle, from Barbados and the Gold Coast respectively, who were accused of being ‘disloyal’ and of ‘stirring up trouble among their fellow coloured people.’¹²³ Both were former LCP members, but were now accused of giving discussions at Aggrey House a ‘very communistic flair.’¹²⁴ In a letter to colonial governors explaining the situation, the Colonial Office noted the ‘undesirable political and social tone’ now present in Aggrey House as one reason for its closure.¹²⁵

Clearly, the ‘moral’ issue of Mr Wilkins’ transgression was being closely linked in the government rhetoric to the ‘political’ atmosphere in Aggrey House. The situation presented Moody with a choice between his two preferred ideological commitments – the rights of the black race to free expression, and a commitment to socially ‘respectable’ and ‘acceptable’ behaviour. Faced with this choice, Moody sided with the government, and in an interview with the Colonial Office he agreed that ‘the Club was being diverted from its proper purposes,’ indicating that ‘he viewed the political and other activities of certain members of the House Committee and of the Club with grave concern.’¹²⁶ In a memorandum to the Colonial Office and his fellow trustees he furthered this critique, arguing that ‘The present House Committee is not composed of

¹²² Colonial Office to Mr Hodson, Ministry of Information, 14 May 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹²³ J. L. Keith, ‘Note on Aggrey House,’ 26 June 1940, CO 859/21/1. On Buckle, see H. Adi (2006), ‘Forgotten comrade? Desmond Buckle: An African Communist in Britain,’ *Science and Society*, **70:1**: 22-45. On Blackman, see D. Killingray (2007), ‘Peter Blackman,’ in D. Dabydeen, J. Gilmore, and C. Jones (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹²⁴ Colonial Office to Mr Hodson, Ministry of Information, 14 May 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹²⁵ Colonial Office to Colonial Governors, 23 May 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹²⁶ J. L. Keith, ‘Minute of an interview with Dr Moody,’ 30 April 1940, CO 859/21/1.

bona fide students,' and that it was instead being made up of 'persons who are mostly occupied with political activities.'¹²⁷ Evidently Moody was upset that his respectable vision of Aggrey House as an establishment which would tend towards the cultural and educational advancement of Africans and West Indians was supposedly being undermined by 'political' activities.

In an attempt to resolve the situation, Moody returned to his earlier argument that the LCP should take over the running of Aggrey House. Doing so, he argued, would ensure that he was able to 'train' Africans and West Indians in an 'attitude for the future good of the British Commonwealth and humanity as a whole.'¹²⁸ In making these arguments, however, Moody legitimised his activities in racial terms. As he wrote, '[m]y desire is to give to my people a sense of pride in their own group and self respect and also independence of thought and action.'¹²⁹ Both Buckle and Blackman were members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Negro Welfare Association,¹³⁰ and to Moody's mind this apparently indicated that they had ceased to think independently and instead acted only on Party orders.

¹²⁷ 'Aggrey House: Memorandum by Harold A. Moody for consideration at trustees' meeting,' 3 May 1940: 1, CO 859/21/1.

¹²⁸ 'Aggrey House: Memorandum by Harold A. Moody for consideration at trustees' meeting,' 3 May 1940: 3, CO 859/21/1. Moody situated his Christian faith as central to his proposals for resolving the Aggrey House dispute. For Moody's wider reflections on Christianity and race, see H. Moody, 'Adventure,' *The Christian Endeavour Times* 27 June 1935: 43; and H. Moody, *Christianity and Race Relations*.

¹²⁹ 'Aggrey House: Memorandum by Harold A. Moody for Consideration at Trustees' Meeting,' 3 May 1940: 2, CO 859/21/1.

¹³⁰ The Negro Welfare Association was associated with the League Against Imperialism. H. Adi (2010) , 'The Comintern and Black workers in Britain and France, 1919-37,' *Immigrants and Minorities* **28:2**: 224-245.

If the LCP took over the running of Aggrey House, Moody insisted that they would reserve the right to criticise the government, but they ‘would not feel that Government and ourselves are opposing bodies.’ Instead, the League would prefer ‘co-operation and mutual understanding’ between these ‘equal partners.’¹³¹ As these remarks make clear, Moody’s upset over the activities taking place in Aggrey House was not occasioned by the fact that they were ‘political,’ but that they were not ‘political’ in the manner that he deemed either fit or respectable.

Aggrey House re-opened in September 1940 with a new constitution, having expelled all unwanted members.¹³² The institution remained in the hands of the Colonial Office, although they had clearly given Moody an important role in resolving the conflict, preferring his input to that of fellow Trustee John Fletcher, who was now deemed ‘very unreliable’ because ‘he encouraged political talk in the Club.’¹³³ In 1943, Aggrey House was forced to move premises, being renamed the Colonial Centre and taking up residence at 18 Russell Square, Bloomsbury.¹³⁴ This new establishment was given a revised remit to make its facilities open also to black soldiers and servicemen resident in Britain during the war.¹³⁵ Moody remained on the Board of Trustees for this institution, and spoke at the opening ceremony.¹³⁶ Having gained the trust of the Colonial Office, Moody was appointed to their Advisory Committee on the Welfare of

¹³¹ ‘Aggrey House: Memorandum by Harold A. Moody for consideration at trustees’ meeting,’ 3 May 1940: 2-3, CO 859/21/1.

¹³² Cummings to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 July 1940; memo by J.L. Keith, 16 October 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹³³ J. L. Keith, ‘Record of an interview with Maj. Vischer on 21/5/40,’ 21 May 1940, CO 859/21/1.

¹³⁴ Memo by Keith, 25 January 1943, CO 876/20.

¹³⁵ CO 876/20; CO 876/62.

¹³⁶ ‘Tenth ‘Colonial Centre’ opened by the Duchess of Gloucester,’ *LCP News Letter* April 1943: 7.

Colonial People in the United Kingdom, from which he was able to have a say in the establishment of colonial hostels around Britain, including in Liverpool and Cardiff.¹³⁷

The LCP headquarters campaigns

In October 1933, the LCP made the following statement:

One of its first objectives when the League was founded two years ago was the establishing of a suitable headquarters in London. Efforts have been made, but difficulties, mainly financial, have stayed its course. Now the League is determined to do its utmost to surmount all obstacles in its pathway towards this goal.¹³⁸

The LCP had long been eager to establish headquarters in London from which they could coordinate their activities. Unsurprisingly, the Colonial Office had rebuffed Moody's efforts to secure Aggrey House as the LCP headquarters. When the LCP was without official headquarters, the Moody family home, at 164 Queens Road, Peckham, was its main base.¹³⁹ The Moody's home also served as a lodging house for members of the black community in Britain and as the first port of call for a number of black people arriving in the country. Una Marson, for example, lodged there upon her arrival from Jamaica, working simultaneously as LCP secretary.¹⁴⁰ Christine Moody, Harold's

¹³⁷ CO 876/17. Also R. Cole to Moody, 25 September 1942, and Moody to Cole, 29 September 1942, School of Oriental and African Studies Archives, Robert Wellesley Cole Papers, PP MS 35 Box 20 File 151; M. Sherwood (1985), *Many Struggles: West Indian Workers and Service Personnel in Britain (1939-45)* London: Karia Press: 63-66.

¹³⁸ 'Play at YWCA,' *The Keys* October 1933: 39.

¹³⁹ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* January 1934: 41.

¹⁴⁰ Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson*: 46-47.

daughter, later noted that the number of lodgers in their home regularly fluctuated, and that as far as her mother Olive Moody was concerned, ‘extra numbers did not worry her, if my father walked in and said so and so is staying for a month, she’d just get on with it.’¹⁴¹

In July 1933, the LCP noted that headquarters were needed if ‘the League is neither to lose in efficiency nor to let slip the valuable opportunities for service which come along its way.’ This rhetoric of service recurred throughout the League’s writings, and the proposal to establish headquarters was promoted as an opportunity to give spatial form to the League’s claim to be serving the race. An organisational headquarters would allow them ‘to build up in London an organisation really worthy of the race.’¹⁴² The League’s strongest arguments justifying its need for headquarters explicitly emphasised the spatial aspects. An editorial on the subject in *The Keys* argued that ‘[s]egregation in Church and State with its baneful effects, must be fought wherever it may happen to rise like a hydra-headed monster.’ Having emphasised the negative effects of the colour bar, the editorial called for black people to ‘show that we are ready for our place in the sun after a century of freedom.’ The way to do this, it stressed, was to establish a central base in the imperial metropolis. Thus, ‘[a] well-equipped headquarters for the League in London would be a sign to the ruling race that we are earnest and no longer intend to be relegated to inferior places.’¹⁴³

In this line of argument, London became increasingly important to the LCP. A 1934 editorial in *The Keys*, for example, stressed that ‘[t]he thinking Negro is seeking to

¹⁴¹ Jarrett-Macauley interview with Christine Moody, 1989, cited in Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson*: 46.

¹⁴² ‘The Keys disclose’, *The Keys* July 1933: 10-11.

¹⁴³ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 41-42.

make a place for himself in the world of to-day.’ In this endeavour, it was important that ‘those who are privileged enough to come to the world’s metropolis and travel even further afield’ ought to establish a base because ‘[i]t is here we can learn from the failings of the world’s most advanced peoples, what is best for our own people.’¹⁴⁴

In 1937, the LCP finally secured permanent headquarters and offices in the Memorial Hall, on Farringdon Street in the Holborn area of London. It was clear, however, that the move had not been an altogether unproblematic one, requiring a change in the League’s routine which had caused disagreements amongst the executive and even resignations from officer’s posts.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, details of these disagreements are unknown, though it is possible that some members felt the taking of headquarters to be over-stretching the LCP’s limited resources. The offices were officially opened by Olive Moody on 25 June 1937, timed to coincide with the LCP’s fifth Annual General Meeting.¹⁴⁶ The League’s annual report at the end of that year stressed that possessing headquarters had led to them ‘becoming the centre of requests for information of all sorts concerning coloured people both of this country and overseas, chiefly of the British empire.’¹⁴⁷ However, the LCP struggled to find the money to maintain its headquarters. By 1939, £297 in debt, they gave up their headquarters and returned to working voluntarily from the Moody’s home.¹⁴⁸ Despite

¹⁴⁴ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Hon. Secretary’s report,’ *The Keys* April-June 1937: 50. The LCP’s Executive Committee, listed at the front of *The Keys*, dropped from 23 to 9 around the time of the headquarters move. Compare *The Keys* January-March 1937, and April-June 1937.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Report of the Work of the League since the Annual General Meeting of the 12th March, 1937,’ *The Keys* April-June 1937: 57.

¹⁴⁷ *League of Coloured Peoples Seventh Annual Report, 1937-8*: 1.

¹⁴⁸ See *LCP Letter*, October 1939: 1-2.

this, the League remained committed to what they saw as the pressing need to ‘build up a great centre in London worthy of our group,’ a task which remained essential given ‘the wide dispersion of our people.’¹⁴⁹

In July 1943 Moody announced that the League would once more begin fundraising for the provision of an official headquarters.¹⁵⁰ Again, the campaign was articulated in the context of London’s broader significance to global politics, especially in the context of global war, with Moody asserting that headquarters would allow the League to ‘engage upon the serious business of hammering out, along with the colony-owning powers now domiciled in London, the future of our people.’¹⁵¹ Increasingly, Moody’s focus was drawn to the post-war futures of Africa and the West Indies. Emphasising the values of responsible and respectable action, Moody argued that ‘we can in a very real way both stimulate and help to crystallise their work [in the colonies] by wise and statesmanlike activities here at the centre.’ He stressed that ‘[t]here never were, at any previous time, so many intelligent West Indians and Africans in Britain as there are at this moment,’¹⁵² and sought to capitalise on this by emphasising the important work of the League in forging connections between metropole and colony,

¹⁴⁹ Harold Moody, ‘Preface,’ in *LCP News Letter* April 1940: 3.

¹⁵⁰ The LCP had by this time increased its membership, in part thanks to increased attention to racial issues provoked by German racial policies. See Sherwood, *Many Struggles*; S. Rose (2004), *Which People’s War? Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* Oxford: Oxford University Press: esp. 239-284.

¹⁵¹ *LCP News Letter* July 1943: 41-42. By ‘our people’, Moody meant the people of the African diaspora, though he and the LCP tended to prioritise the place of Africa in the post-war world. For example, ‘On Africa in the Post-War World, for presentation to the United Nations Conference, San Francisco, April, 1945,’ *LCP News Letter*, April 1945: 9-12.

¹⁵² *LCP News Letter* July 1943: 41-42.

stressing that the League performed ‘important work for the Country and Empire, and indeed for the World.’¹⁵³

In February 1944 Moody announced that the League had once again taken up offices, this time at 21 Old Queen Street, Westminster.¹⁵⁴ The LCP hoped that people would regularly ‘drop in’ and provide a ‘steady flow of all our friends to our new headquarters.’ Whilst on the one hand portraying the offices as a social site, centrally located and therefore easily accessible, the League also sought to constitute the new premises as a hub of information on colonial affairs in London. Moody asked members to provide books for the LCP to ‘build up a good reference library,’ and it was also noted that ‘we shall have daily newspapers and other literature from the Colonies for perusal.’¹⁵⁵ Collecting this material and advertising its availability became a priority, in keeping with Moody’s renewed assertion that what was going on in the colonies was of utmost importance, and that it was the LCP’s job to support the work of colonial activists whenever possible. Colonial periodicals were often quoted in the League’s own publications, consolidating important textual webs that sought to link colonial peoples across the divide between metropole and colony.¹⁵⁶

The offices were formally opened on Wednesday 15 April 1944. Viscountess Kathleen Simon, whose husband, Sir John Simon, was now Lord Chancellor, performed the official opening ceremony.¹⁵⁷ Taking up offices in London for a second

¹⁵³ LCP *News Letter* October 1943: 3.

¹⁵⁴ LCP *News Letter* February 1944: 70.

¹⁵⁵ LCP *News Letter* May 1944: 23; ‘Secretary’s notes,’ in LCP *News Letter* February 1944: 79.

¹⁵⁶ On textual webs and black British politics in this period, see C. Polsgrove (2009), *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹⁵⁷ ‘The report on the opening of our new office by Viscountess Simon,’ LCP *News Letter* May 1944: 25.

On Viscountess Simon, see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 103-145.

time was an important moment for the League. As Moody later noted, the ‘bold venture’ of establishing a base ‘in the heart of Westminster’ had allowed the League to ‘make contact with a large number of overseas members and friends who would not have reached us in the same manner had we still been housed in a private dwelling in the suburbs.’¹⁵⁸ The move also symbolised the League’s claim to equality and respectability by physically positioning them between Buckingham Palace and the House of Commons, within walking distance of the Colonial Office.

It was not long before the new headquarters began to function as a hub of activity. Within three months of taking up the offices, Moody noted, ‘it has been abundantly proved to us that we did the right thing at the right time.’ He stressed that having premises in the Westminster area of London had enabled the League to establish itself ‘more firmly than ever in the life of the community,’ noting that the League’s visitors had been ‘many and interesting’ and that as a direct result ‘our subscription list has grown considerably.’ The new premises, Moody concluded, set the League on its way to the goal of ‘establish[ing] in London an organisation in every way worthy of our people and second to none in its type.’¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ ‘President’s address delivered at the fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples Held at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, on Friday, March 16th, 1945,’ *LCP News Letter* April 1945: 3-4; See also *LCP News Letter* January 1945: 66.

¹⁵⁹ All quotes in this paragraph come from *LCP News Letter* June 1944: 34-36.

‘A little part of the West Indies transplanted in London’: The League of Coloured Peoples Cultural Centre

In 1945, Moody enthusiastically began a campaign to raise funds for the establishment of a cultural centre in which colonial cultures, and particularly those of Africa and the West Indies, would be able to flourish in London. Whilst this project would never come to fruition – Moody died in 1947, having made relatively little progress towards its accomplishment – the ideas underlying the proposed centre are significant.

It is possible that the roots of this project lie in a meeting between J. L. Keith of the Colonial Office and Una Marson in 1941. Marson requested that the Colonial Office ‘consider setting up a special centre for West Indians only, preferably managed by a West Indian.’ She asserted that ‘Aggrey House had a bad name with many West Indians,’ emphasising that ‘she did not think that the locality of Aggrey House is suitable.’ Suggesting that many West Indians had been put off Aggrey House by a small number of ‘undesirable people,’ Marson pushed instead for ‘a cultural centre which could show the people of this country that the West Indians had a culture of their own and could contribute to the intellectual and cultural activities of this country.’ Keith, however, responded dismissively to the idea of another centre detached from either Aggrey House or WASU.¹⁶⁰

There is no evidence of whether Moody knew of Marson’s discussions with the Colonial Office or not, but by 1945 he had begun planning a cultural centre with many resemblances to that which Marson had suggested. However, there was one primary difference between Moody’s proposals and those of Marson. Whereas Marson had intended the cultural centre to be for a geographically specific community – West

¹⁶⁰ ‘Interview with Una Marson,’ memo by J. L. Keith, 14 February 1941, CO 859/76/1.

Indians – Moody and the LCP broadened this out to address ‘the real need for the establishing [sic] of a Cultural Centre in London for persons of Negro descent.’¹⁶¹ The League intended to establish a place in London within which transnational black cultures, and not just those of one specific regional community within the African diaspora, might be cultivated and displayed, just as they had with Aggrey House. In a departure from their involvement in the earlier project, however, the LCP made the significant insistence that ‘*this Centre must be organised and run by our own group.*’¹⁶² They now mobilised for their own purposes the very argument which had been deployed against them and their involvement in Aggrey House in the early 1930s.

Writing in the LCP’s *News Letter*, Moody articulated a variety of aims for the centre, including ‘to acquaint interested people in this country of the existence of African Art and to stimulate Africans to take a greater pride in their own innate culture.’¹⁶³ He also argued that it would help accomplish the goals of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which had been launched in 1940 and had recently been strengthened with increased financial support in 1945.¹⁶⁴ Finally, Moody envisioned the Centre as a ‘training ground’ for colonial governors and officials, in which they could ‘serve a term of apprenticeship,’ meeting people from the areas to which they would be sent in order ‘to understand that they are not going out either to lord it over others or to pity the poor heathen, but to serve humanity.’¹⁶⁵ Moody pictured the centre as inter-

¹⁶¹ LCP *News Letter* March 1945: 106.

¹⁶² LCP *News Letter* April 1945: 2. Italics in original.

¹⁶³ Moody deployed the terms ‘of Negro descent’ and ‘African’ relatively interchangeably, in an attempt to emphasise the African origins of black diasporic actors.

¹⁶⁴ See S. Constantine (1984), *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914-1940* London: Frank Cass: 232-261.

¹⁶⁵ LCP *News Letter* April 1945: 5.

racial, as a space for engagement with and education about the strengths of African and African-derived cultures. On this reading, the centre was thus intended as a multifaceted node of connection between various communities in the metropolis, the colonies and the African diaspora beyond.

Samson Morris, the LCP's Secretary, noted that '[e]very member agrees with [Moody] ... and the Executive was encouraged to put the idea in practical form.'¹⁶⁶ In order to accomplish its goal, the League ambitiously planned to raise £50,000, with Viscountess Simon amongst the first to contribute. They wrote to 'several persons of influence' around the country and the empire, both to bring the project to their attention and to attempt to solicit funds.¹⁶⁷ However, by its 1946 AGM the League had made relatively little progress with the proposals, although Moody insisted that he and the other League officers remained in 'no doubt whatsoever of the real need for such a Centre.'¹⁶⁸

In the intervening period, Moody had been using his influence in official quarters to attempt to secure support for the proposal. As a member of the Colonial Office's new Advisory Committee on the Welfare of Colonial People in the United Kingdom, he was well placed to bring LCP schemes to government attention. In May 1945, Moody wrote to Keith at the Colonial Office asking that the cultural centre project be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.¹⁶⁹ In fact, it was discussed at an emergency meeting at which Moody stressed that the

¹⁶⁶ S. Morris, 'Report of the fourteenth Annual General Meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples, held on 16th March at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street,' *LCP News Letter* April 1945: 13-14.

¹⁶⁷ *LCP News Letter* April 1945: 5; 14; also *News Letter*, May 1945: 23.

¹⁶⁸ 'President's address to the fifteenth Annual General Meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples held at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, Friday, March 15th, 1946,' *LCP News Letter* April 1946: 4-7.

¹⁶⁹ Moody to Keith, 2 May 1945, CO 876/69.

centre would primarily be targeted at colonial students, with the aim of allowing them to ‘mix freely with the best cultural influences of this country, not only British or English, but from the continent or elsewhere.’¹⁷⁰ Ever the pragmatist, Moody had reshaped the emphasis of the project. Having stressed to LCP members that the centre would focus on African and African-derived cultures, in his discussions with the Committee he laid emphasis on introducing colonial students to European cultures, no doubt hoping that this might hold more sway with the Committee’s predominantly white membership.

In attempting to persuade the Committee of the strength of his scheme, Moody explained that he hoped the centre would include ‘a large lecture hall,’ in which lectures on ‘cultural subjects given by distinguished people’ might take place. There would also be study rooms for those who wished to use them, and the Centre would aid colonial students by providing ‘the cultural uplift of which they were in need.’¹⁷¹ The familiar focus on uplift was thus conjoined with the spatial aspects of the centre, its aspirational character linked to the logic of place. Elsewhere Moody wrote, ‘In this Metropolis of the world we must have a building worthy of our great people and to which they will feel a right to come and a sense of pride in so doing.’ The centre was to be ‘cultural in the highest sense of the term,’ a phrase which betrays the elitism inherent in Moody’s own sense of the term ‘culture.’ Moody also proposed a restaurant which might show off ‘the richness and variety of the foods provided in the Colonies,’¹⁷² and the LCP’s publicity leaflet for the centre (Fig 3.3) described the proposed establishment as a ‘meeting ground for our peoples from Africa and the West Indies’ which would ‘help

¹⁷⁰ ‘Minutes No. 12: The Advisory Committee on the Welfare of Colonial People in the United Kingdom,’ 6 June 1945, CO 876/69.

¹⁷¹ ‘Minutes No. 12: The Advisory Committee on the Welfare of Colonial People in the United Kingdom,’ 6 June 1945, CO 876/69.

¹⁷² LCP *News Letter* October 1946: 3-4.

integrate them into the Family of Nations as an equal member.’¹⁷³ By contributing to the building of racial solidarity, Moody saw the cultural centre as ensuring that black subjects, confident in both their native cultures and in their mastery of ‘high’ culture, could make collective claim to equal status within that ‘Family of Nations’.



**Fig. 3.3. Front Cover, LCP Cultural Centre Leaflet,
St Clair Drake Papers, Schomburg Centre Archives, Sc Mg 309/64/4.**

¹⁷³ 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' LCP propaganda leaflet, n.d. but c. 1945-6., St Clair Drake Papers, Schomburg Centre Archives, New York, Sc Mg 309/64/4.

In 1946, Moody decided to return to the West Indies, his first trip to the region of his birth since 1919. Primarily aimed at enabling him to visit his ailing mother in Jamaica, the trip also provided Moody with the opportunity ‘[t]o convey to my people the need for an enlarged, representative and effective League of Coloured Peoples in Britain housed in a Cultural Centre of which our people can be proud and which will worthily represent them.’¹⁷⁴ The cultural centre, it now appeared, was also intended as a home for the LCP. Whilst in the West Indies, Moody spoke to a range of audiences, including meetings in St Kitts, Jamaica, and Trinidad. He also made a brief visit to New York, meeting with potential donors for the Cultural Centre and giving various speeches in Harlem aimed at raising interest – and funds – amongst New York’s black population.¹⁷⁵ Following Moody’s visit, the Trinidadian George Collymore wrote that

The immediate need of a Cultural Centre for West Indians in England can hardly be over-emphasized. It is, as it were, *a little part of the West Indies transplanted in London* to form a little nursery where the tender shoots from these shores would be nurtured in a richer soil with the watchful gardener to tend its growth and send back an improved stock to develop and grow into stately maturity.¹⁷⁶

Collymore’s impression that the Cultural Centre was intended primarily for West Indians reflected Moody’s presentation of the scheme to his audiences. Whilst in

¹⁷⁴ Moody, ‘Purpose of my visit to the British West Indies,’ *LCP News Letter* October 1946: 7.

¹⁷⁵ D. Vaughan (1950), *Negro Victory: The Life Story of Dr Harold Moody* London: Independent Press: 149-151.

¹⁷⁶ ‘A great West Indian,’ *LCP News Letter* July 1947: 134-136. Collymore’s piece had originally appeared in the magazine of the Trinidad and Tobago Youth Council.

Jamaica, Moody had claimed that ‘[t]he day of the West Indian has come,’¹⁷⁷ and this was probably typical of his speeches on that tour. At a speech in Jamaica attended by Norman Manley and the Governor, Sir John Huggins, Moody described the needs and interests of West Indians as the quintessence of his own objectives, arguing that West Indians travelled to England in order ‘to get educated and cultured, to assimilate to that which is essentially West Indian in ourselves something of that which has made England what she is,’ and that in establishing a cultural centre he sought to ‘bring into being a really educated, talented, cultured, broad-minded group.’¹⁷⁸

Moody’s tour was not the only airing of the scheme beyond Britain’s shores. The black Trinidadian George Padmore, then resident in London, made the centre the subject of one of his many journalistic pieces in the US press. Padmore noted that the centre had as its object ‘the friendly relationship between colored [sic] colonials and white people in the British Isles,’ and quoted from an interview with the LCP secretary Dr Malcolm Joseph-Mitchell. He stressed that the proposed centre would be open to ‘colored [sic] peoples visiting London from America as well as different parts of the British Empire,’ and particularly urged that the ‘achievements of Africans and people of African descent must be known at the heart of the Empire.’ Padmore also took the opportunity to criticise the Colonial Office and the British Council who, he said, ‘are only concerned with promoting imperialistic projects under their own control,’ and as such ‘are hardly likely to help colored [sic] subjects of their empire to form and direct a cultural centre in the heart of the empire.’ For this reason, said Padmore, ‘Negroes in Britain are looking to their colored [sic] friends in America for contributions of books

¹⁷⁷ ‘Our leader has fallen – farewell good friend,’ *LCP News Letter* May 1947: 105.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Dr Harold Moody outlines plans for Cultural Centre in London,’ *The Daily Gleaner* 24 January 1947:

and works of Negro art.’¹⁷⁹ Only two years previously, Padmore had been a key player in the organisation of the Manchester Pan-African Congress, a gathering often praised for bringing to pan-African politics a new-found emphasis on labour struggles and economic exploitation. The vision he articulates here of a pan-African, anti-imperial cultural centre at the heart of the imperial metropolis shows, however, that Padmore and his colleagues did not discard cultural initiatives in their radicalised pan-Africanism, but instead sought to conjoin them with the working class black internationalism which is more often focused on by scholars.¹⁸⁰

Moody died shortly after returning from his travels, and with him went any hope the LCP had of bringing its cultural centre into being. Although the LCP initially kept the proposal alive, hoping to erect the centre as ‘a lasting memorial to [Moody’s] memory,’ it soon became apparent that without his contacts and leadership the plan would not be brought to fruition.¹⁸¹ From mid-1945, the scheme had occupied much of Moody’s attention. Whilst we can never know how the centre might have turned out, Moody’s vision of a reformist educational centre and Padmore’s anti-imperial Pan-African vision were, despite their political differences, united by a desire to form a specifically black-friendly place which would stimulate and represent diverse

¹⁷⁹ G. Padmore, ‘Plan Culture Center in London,’ *The Chicago Defender* 19 April 1947: 15.

¹⁸⁰ P. von Eschen (1997), *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* New York: Cornell University Press: 46.

¹⁸¹ M. Joseph-Mitchell to Mr R.C. Orchard of the London Missionary Society, 15 May 1947, SOAS Archives, Council for World Mission Papers, CWM/LMS/Home Odds/Box 21. See also ‘Report of the seventeenth Annual General Meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples’ and ‘Report of the eighteenth Annual General Meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples,’ both in SOAS Archives, Robert Wellesley Cole Papers, PP MS 35 Box 20 File 151.

transnational cultures of blackness in London, offering a direct challenge to the racialisation of space.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the LCP engaged in a number of specific place-based projects as part of its efforts to contest the racialisation of space in 1930s and 1940s London. Such initiatives were nurtured by transnational connections which the LCP forged with governmental and African diasporic actors, and were also framed as important projects to assist transnational black subjects in imperial London. However, it has also been shown that such initiatives were never straight-forward undertakings. They were often contested, more often than not by fellow black subjects. Thus, whilst the African Hostel Defence Association was a multi-racial coalition, it was led by black activists such as C. L. R. James and some members of WASU. Likewise, when the LCP attempted to establish a cultural centre in London focussed on the self-advancement of the black race, Harold Moody's elitist interpretation of cultural self-advancement nurtured by association with all that was beneficial in British civilisation was turned on its head by George Padmore and reinterpreted as a potential site for pan-African anti-colonialism. Even when still in the planning stages, places such as the proposed Cultural Centre were sites of struggle over which black activists with differing political perspectives wrestled to assert their own meaning.

Such differences and debates within London's diverse black community bring to mind Brent Edwards's insistence that black internationalism, and the visions of a unified racial community on which it rests, is always an inherently fragile form of politics. Indeed, Edwards's entire argument about the nature of black internationalism

rests on his insistence on the ‘constitutive differences’ within black political cultures.¹⁸² Accounting for the contestation of the racialised nature of British space by the LCP in the 1930s and 1940s requires attending to the multiple debates and conflicts which emerged in the black community on the role of particular places within the broader politics of black internationalism. Sites such as Aggrey House, the various LCP headquarters, and the proposed Cultural Centre, cannot be understood outside of the multiple networks of activism and engagement through which they were constituted. The involvement of representatives from such organisations as the Colonial Office and the League Against Imperialism, amongst other groups, reminds us also that these were inherently multi-racial endeavours, and that the debate over how best to provide hospitable places for black subjects in imperial Britain often drew diverse individuals and organisations into dialogue focussed on specific places.

Paul Gilroy has recently stressed the need to ‘be more alive to the ludic, cosmopolitan energy and the democratic possibilities so evident in the postcolonial metropolis.’ As part of this endeavour, Gilroy insists, ‘We need to be able to see how the presence of aliens, strangers and blacks and the distinctive dynamics of Europe’s imperial history have combined to shape its cultural and political habits and institutions.’ If, as Gilroy hopes, we are coming to situate these historical processes ‘as internal to the operations of European political culture,’ then we must necessarily come to terms with the historical operation of the colour bar in British society, with the transnational networks through which it came to be contested, and with the debates which this provoked within the African diasporic community in Britain.¹⁸³ Connecting Gilroy’s argument to geographical thinking about the relationship between space and

¹⁸² Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 11.

¹⁸³ Gilroy, *After Empire*: 154, 157.

politics, it is possible to argue that challenging the racialisation of space in London was essential to the process of creolisation at this time. Indeed, we can conceptualise places like Aggrey House, the various LCP headquarters, and the proposed Cultural Centre as diverse spaces of creolisation, given the way in which they brought elements from the colonies into the heart of the metropolis and unsettled the racial codes which structured life in imperial London. In doing so, they became sites of struggle around which a diverse array of colonial and metropolitan activists engaged with questions of race and empire in Britain.

This chapter has only been able to address a small number of place-based political activities engaged in by black activists in their efforts to contest the racialisation of British space, and there are many others which merit attention.¹⁸⁴ It is clear that black people in Britain have never merely existed as subjugated minorities within urban environments dominated by the normalisation of whiteness. This chapter has illustrated some of the ways in which black West Indian intellectuals reshaped London's urban geography in the 1930s and 1940s, in initially small ways, often drawing on diverse, heterogeneous and transnational connections. The places they forged were both important points of debate across the political networks in which black activists were engaged, and spaces of political and intellectual engagement which enabled the formation of such networks in the first place.

¹⁸⁴ For example, M. Sherwood (1994), *Pastor Daniels Ekarte and the African Churches Mission London: Savannah*; Visram, 'Kamal A. Chunchie of the Coloured Men's Institute'.

Chapter Four

'A ferment of pan-African activity': Black West Indian activists and public gatherings in imperial London

Interwar Britain played host to diverse modes of public political activism. In an era of technological change, radio, television and documentary cinema were slowly developing an audience. However, these new technologies for reaching popular audiences were not yet dominant, and other modes of engagement were arguably more important. In particular, the holding of public gatherings, often incorporating a significant spoken element, remained significant. For Richard Overy, in his recent history of interwar Britain, lecturing and public political meetings represent one amongst several 'mechanisms of dissemination,' alongside mass publishing, radio broadcasts, reading circles, and the like, which enabled the intellectual and political classes to engage with and be engaged by the broader public, or at least those elements of it who wished to be so engaged.¹ Overy's attention to 'the lecture series of voluntary societies and public bodies,' as well as to individual lecturing tours by public figures such as Canon Hugh Richard Sheppard, has shown that public gatherings were an important form of discourse in 1930s Britain.²

However, whilst Overy's framework of 'mechanisms of dissemination' is instructive, it fails to attend to the racialised and gendered nature of much public discourse in 1930s Britain. The normalisation of whiteness in Britain in the 1930s and

¹ R. Overy (2009), *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* London: Penguin: 5.

² Overy, *The Morbid Age*: 16.

1940s meant that black participation in public events and performances represented a significant challenge to racialised understandings of the workings of British politics.³ Whilst limited work has thus far been done in the British context, scholars of American history have demonstrated that ‘oratory has been an essential element in African-American self-expression, community life, and negotiation with whites’ since at least the nineteenth century.⁴ In exploring this history, Philip Foner and Robert Branham explain that in the context of the highly racialised nature of US society, historical speeches by black orators must be understood as ‘acts of rhetorical criticism designed to transform the contexts in which they are understood and interpreted.’⁵ This focus on the transformative potential of black public performances gestures directly to the role they might play in the process of creolisation. Similarly, Gary Wilder has argued that accounting for black activism in interwar France requires a rethinking of the entire definition of the public sphere for that particular geo-historical moment. Writing of the community of ‘Panafrikan subject-citizens’ resident in interwar France, Wilder argues that

this Panafrikan public organized itself not only through political meetings but through popular dances, banquets, and poetry readings. Its members often valued friendship as much as ideology, nonutilitarian

³ S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press.

⁴ P. Foner and R. Branham (1998), ‘Introduction,’ in P. Foner and R. Branham (eds.) *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900* London: University Of Alabama Press: 2.

⁵ Foner and Branham, ‘Introduction’: 11.

sociability as much as instrumental organizing, aesthetics as much as politics, imagination as much as direct action.⁶

Wilder's work begins to question why it was that certain types of gathering and public performance were taken up as being particularly useful in specific circumstances. Such a perspective shifts the focus away from the place of orality in black West Indian political cultures, about which much has already been written,⁷ suggesting instead that it might be equally important to track the geographies of the particular ways in which black colonial activists practised diverse forms of public expression in the imperial metropolis, and how this related to the wider spatialities of their activism. Such an approach relates to a broader attempt to explore the diverse ways in which performance and practice have been entwined within the political projects of African diasporic actors.⁸ However, whilst Wilder's argument separates 'nonutilitarian sociability' from 'instrumental organising' of a political nature, this chapter will seek to hold these two sides closer together, arguing that sociability was itself often politically significant, particularly when it highlighted the everyday nature of crossing the colour bar.

⁶ G. Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* London: Chicago University Press: 197.

⁷ C. Cooper (1995), *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* London: Duke University Press; B. Higman (1999), *Writing West Indian Histories* London: Macmillan Heinemann: esp. 4-9, 16-19.

⁸ J. Boittin (2010) *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-imperialism and Feminism in Interwar France* London: University of Nebraska Press; B. Edmondson (2003), 'Performance spectacles: Caribbean women and the politics of public performance' *Small Axe* 7:1: 1-16; H. Ford-Smith (2004), 'Unruly virtues of the spectacular' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6:1: 18-34.

The chapter begins by developing a framework for a geographical understanding of public gatherings. It then proceeds to develop this framework through a focus on the ways in which black West Indians in imperial London utilised differing types of public performance. To do so, the chapter compares the ways in which public meetings and public speaking events were deployed by the LCP and IAFE/IASB. Doing so enables examination of the ways in which public gatherings shaped the geographies of these organisations' activism, whilst also highlighting some of the similarities and differences between these two bodies through the ways in which they publicly presented themselves.

Historical geographies of public gatherings and performances

Recent years have seen historical geographers pay increased attention to the geographies of the spoken word. Historical geographers of science, in particular, have explored what David Livingstone has termed 'spaces of speech.'⁹ Such work has demonstrated the ways in which public speech practices were impacted upon by the geographies of their performance, and how these geographies in turn had effects upon the ways in which knowledge was transferred and received through such spaces of speech.¹⁰ These accounts emphasise the important role of the places in which knowledge is produced and circulated through speech acts in framing the ways that

⁹ D. Livingstone (2007), 'Science, site and speech: Scientific knowledge and the spaces of rhetoric,' *History of the Human Sciences* **20:2**: 71-98.

¹⁰ I. Keighren (2008), 'Giving voice to geography: popular lectures and the diffusion of knowledge,' *Scottish Geographical Journal* **124:2/3**: 198–203; C. Withers (2007), *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically About the Age of Reason* London: University of Chicago Press: 76-86.

knowledge itself is perceived.¹¹ Livingstone, for example, has noted that ‘[s]ince the positions we speak from are crucial to what can be spoken, there are intimate connections between what we might call ‘location and locution,’” whilst also adding the qualification that ‘[s]ocial spaces facilitate and condition discursive space. They do not determine it.’¹²

Within the context of a broader turn towards the study of practice and performance, speech spaces have taken on increasing importance.¹³ The role of speech within political dialogue and discussion has long been a focus of academic interest.¹⁴ Social movement theorists have situated public speech acts and performances as central to oppositional politics.¹⁵ Work on the geographies of political movements has addressed the specific role which the spaces of public political performance have played

¹¹ D. Finnegan (2011), ‘Exeter Hall science and evangelical rhetoric in mid-Victorian Britain,’ *Journal of Victorian Culture* **16:1**: 46-64.

¹² D. Livingstone (2003), *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* London: University of Chicago Press: 7.

¹³ H. Lorimer (2005), ‘Cultural Geography: The busyness of being “more than representational”’ *Progress in Human Geography* **29:1**: 83-94; C. Nash (2000), ‘Performativity in Practice: Some recent work in Cultural Geography,’ *Progress in Human Geography* **24:4**: 653-664.

¹⁴ T. Dykstal (2001), *The Luxury of Skepticism: Politics, Philosophy, and Dialogue in the English Public Sphere, 1660-1740* London: University Press of Virginia: esp. 1-22; P. Chilton and C. Schäffner (2002) ‘Introduction: themes and principles in the analysis of political discourse,’ in P. Chilton and C. Schäffner (eds.) *Politics as Text and Talk: Analytical Approaches to Political Discourse* London: John Benjamins: 1-44.

¹⁵ A. Phillips (2003), ‘Recognition and the struggle for political voice,’ in B. Hobson (ed.) *Recognition Struggles and Social Movements: Contested Identities, Agency, and Power* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 263-274.

within these movements themselves.¹⁶ For example, the histories and geographies of Speakers' Corner, in London's Hyde Park, have been interrogated to cast light upon the formation of political communities through the relationship between speaker and audience.¹⁷ A body of work on the historical geography of Chartism has also considered at length the place of public speakers and public gatherings in the forging of political communities. Humphrey Southall, for example, has shown how Chartism was grounded to a considerable extent in the work of travelling 'agitators,' and has illustrated how these travellers, who often spoke and lectured around the country, helped to forge Chartism into a national political community.¹⁸ With a more sustained focus on what he terms 'political lecturing,' Howell has demonstrated not only that Chartist political lecturing served to link regional groupings together into a nationally-based political community, but also that 'the formal geography of Chartist lecturing cannot be divorced from the political substance of the movement.' As such, he too positions lecturing as central to Chartist efforts to construct 'a national political community underwritten by geographical mobility and unrestricted political communication.'¹⁹

¹⁶ M. Reiss (ed.) (2007), *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies Since the Nineteenth Century* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ D. Cooper (2006), "'Sometimes a community and sometimes a battlefield": From the comedic public sphere to the commons of Speakers' Corner,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **24**: 753-775; J. Roberts (2000), 'The enigma of free speech: Speakers' Corner, the geography of governance and a crisis of rationality,' *Social and Legal Studies* **9**: **2**: 271-292.

¹⁸ H. Southall (1996), 'Agitate! Agitate! Organize! Political Travellers and the construction of a national politics, 1839-1880,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **21**:**1**: 177-193.

¹⁹ P. Howell (1994), "'Diffusing the light of liberty": The geography of political lecturing in the Chartist movement,' *Journal of Historical Geography* **21**:**1**: 23-38, quotes from 35-36.

Crucial to the development of work on the role of dialogue in relation to political movements has been Jurgen Habermas's inquiry into the development of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.²⁰ For Habermas, in a study at once both historical and theoretical, the public sphere operated through the 'rational-critical debate of private persons with one another.'²¹ However, whilst Habermas's original formulation attended to the coffee houses, taverns and public spaces in and through which the public sphere took shape,²² his broader framework has been justifiably criticised for neglecting the spatialities of the public sphere.²³

Such an absence is disabling since, as Don Mitchell has argued, 'theories of the public sphere – and practices within it – ... must always be linked to theories of public space,' because 'the regulation of public space necessarily regulates the nature of public debate.'²⁴ Following these lines of critique, geographers have argued that Habermas's failure to develop the role of spatiality beyond mere metaphor is connected to his prioritisation of reasoned, rational debate as the only mode through which public discourse can operate.²⁵ By failing to account for social exclusions and the complex

²⁰ J. Habermas, (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press trans. Thomas Burger.

²¹ Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: 43.

²² See Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: 30.

²³ P. Howell (1993), 'Public space and the public sphere: Political theory and the historical geography of modernity,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **11:3**: 303-322.

²⁴ D. Mitchell (2003), *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* New York: Guildford Press: 182.

²⁵ C. Philo and E. Laurier (2007), 'A parcel of muddling muckworms: Revisiting Habermas and the early modern English coffee-houses,' *Social and Cultural Geography* **8:2**: 259-281.

process through which the public sphere takes spatial form, the Habermasian approach to public speech acts remains of limited utility.

However, alternative formulations of the public sphere can enable us to rethink the spatial frames of public political performances. Crystal Bartolovich has persuasively argued that the presumed spatiality of Habermas's 'public sphere' is that of the nation-state. For Bartolovich, this taken-for-granted spatial aspect of Habermas's formulation is in fact a central element of his theory, and she argues for an understanding of public spheres which is more attuned to global flows and to the possibility that supposedly national public spheres may in fact be deeply influenced by people and events positioned beyond their boundaries.²⁶ Nancy Fraser has similarly argued for a transnational conception of the public sphere attentive to the fact that 'transnational flows of public opinion' have historically been situated within the context of the relationship between 'metropolitan democracy' and 'colonial subjection.'²⁷ In the context of the present thesis, these arguments about the nature of what Fraser terms transnational public spheres can help to frame the role of public gatherings in the creolisation of London. This chapter is concerned to demonstrate that black West Indian activists were able to utilise a mode of activism which was widespread in 1930s and 1940s British politics in order to challenge some of the fundamental presumptions on which this politics was based.

A useful conceptual framework for studying such gatherings has recently been developed by the geographer Miles Ogborn, who has argued for the importance of

²⁶ Interestingly, one of Bartolovich's examples includes the role of enslaved people in the Caribbean within British abolitionist public discourse. See C. Bartolovich (2000), 'Inventing London,' in M. Hill and W. Montag (eds.), *Masses, Classes and the Public Sphere* London: Verso: 13-40; N. Fraser (2009), *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* Cambridge: Polity: 76-99.

²⁷ Fraser, *Scales of Justice*: 86.

studying ‘the historical geographies of the spoken word.’²⁸ Ogborn writes that the publicly spoken word ought to be understood ‘as a set of historically and geographically differentiated embodied practices to which different people had unequal access, and which were both shaped by and shaped the spaces in which they took place.’²⁹ In making this claim, he argues for attentiveness to ‘speech practices,’ and to the complex geographies through which speech acts come to be performed publicly.³⁰ Elsewhere, Ogborn has argued that addressing speech acts as practised not only helps to reveal their geographies, but also helps us to move beyond a focus on the representational and the textual.³¹

Such an approach offers many advantages. Ogborn is correct to argue that attending to the historical geographies of speech practices helps to ‘foreground the relationships between people.’³² In this sense, it can be of use in tracing the historical networks within which particular groups positioned themselves, and were positioned by others. Ogborn is also correct to argue that attending to speech can enable us to ‘hear the ongoing fabrication of the world as a situated, relational, conversational accomplishment’ and that this also requires us to ‘think about identities, positions and relationships – of race, civility or freedom – as needing continual articulation and reiteration.’ However, it is also important to recognise that such an approach, especially when deployed in an historical context for which there is little by way of recorded

²⁸ M. Ogborn (2011), ‘The power of speech: Orality, oaths and evidence in the British Atlantic world, 1650-1800,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **36:1**: 109-125.

²⁹ Ogborn, ‘The power of speech’: 110.

³⁰ Ogborn, ‘The power of speech’: 111.

³¹ M. Ogborn (2009), ‘Francis Williams’s bad language: Historical Geography in a world of practice,’ *Historical Geography* **37**: 5-21.

³² Ogborn, ‘Francis Williams’s bad language’: 18.

speech other than the extracts, notes and reports which have been written down, provides its own methodological dilemmas. As Ogborn writes, in such instances ‘the only access that there is to speech is through the texts and images that record it in some way.’³³ However, there are ways around this potential pitfall. Here, the focus on practices once again proves crucial. If ones concern is for the ways in which speech acts and the spoken word have historically and geographically been enacted, then the content of speeches and talks themselves becomes less important than the social formations within which such practices were embedded. Whilst the spoken words and reports thereof remain invaluable, emphasis can also be placed on the geographical conditions within which such acts were embedded by tracking the locations within which speech acts took place, the networks within which they were positioned, and the ways in which they were received by those who made note of them. Ogborn’s framework thus provides a shift towards interpreting public gatherings through a focus on ‘the conditions of speaking itself in particular contexts.’ It is to such ends that this chapter is directed, seeking to explore the historical geographies of black West Indian speech practices in 1930s and 1940s London, concerning itself more with the places in which speech acts took place and the networks within which they came to take on importance than with recovering exactly what was said.

The focus of this chapter is not confined to public speaking, however. Instead, it compares the public gatherings in which LCP and IAFE/IASB members participated, focusing primarily on those events which incorporated a public speaking element in one way or another but including some in which the public speaking element was less important than the general process of sociability. However, Ogborn’s interpretation of public gatherings as performances, that is as sets of practices articulated in particular

³³ Ogborn, ‘The power of speech’: 110.

geographical settings and emerging out of particular social contexts, enables us to examine diverse forms of gathering within the same analytic frame. If, as suggested above, the focus is not always necessarily on exactly what was said, but rather on the social and historical-geographical contexts in which public gatherings took place, then this enables Wilder's supposedly 'nonutilitarian' public gatherings to be read in the same context as more directly politicised events such as public rallies or protest meetings.

In deciding to focus on public gatherings, this chapter inevitably marginalises certain other forms of public performance in which these groups were engaged. There is, for example, no discussion in this chapter of the role of radio as a mode of public speaking with which black West Indians engaged. Likewise, little attention is given to other forms of public gathering, including dramatic performances such as C. L. R. James's play *Toussaint Louverture*, or Una Marson's *At What a Price?*. Nor are events such as the anti-colonial exhibition in which George Padmore and other members of the IASB were involved discussed. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, there is already excellent work on the black West Indian involvement in a number of these public modes of presentation.³⁴ Secondly, and more importantly, the focus of this chapter is specifically on public gatherings as a mode of political practice for black activists in imperial London which has been historiographically neglected, and so it is concerned to explore this particular mode in detail. Thus, whilst other forms of public

³⁴ D. Newton (2008), 'Calling the West Indies: The BBC World Service and Caribbean Voices,' *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* **28**:4: 489-497; F. Sweeney (2011), 'The Haitian play: C.L.R James' *Toussaint Louverture* (1936),' *International Journal of Francophone Studies* **14**:1/2: 143-163; A. Snaith (2008), "Little Brown Girl" in a "White, White City": Una Marson and London,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* **27**:1: 93-114; S. Britton (2010), "'Come and see the Empire by the all red route!": Anti-Imperialism and exhibitions in interwar Britain,' *History Workshop Journal* **69**: 68-89.

performance were undoubtedly important to the geographies of black West Indian activists in 1930s London, they fall outside the purview of this chapter.

Challenging the colour bar and making acquaintances: The League of Coloured Peoples, sociability, and cultural performance

For the League of Coloured Peoples, public meetings were central to their way of campaigning, and speaking publicly about the iniquities imposed by the colour bar and about the need to abolish it was a central part of their organisational practice. As they put it, ‘Too often do we remain silent ... and allow the enemy, who is always vocal and noisy and self-assertive, so to impress himself upon the community that they really believe him to be right.’³⁵ As discussed in chapter three, the League placed education at the centre of their activities. Believing in the inherent reasonableness of the British people, the LCP believed that if they could carry out sufficient educational work then people would come to see that inter-racial cooperation could be accomplished harmoniously. The League saw themselves as having to challenge publicly a minority of people who believed in racism and were currently misleading the British population in their thinking, and public gatherings offered opportunities for them to present their counter-arguments.

Members of the LCP took part in a bewildering array of public events during the 1930s and 1940s. Leading figures such as Harold Moody, Una Marson, W. Arthur Lewis and others addressed gatherings held by a range of groups around London and beyond. The League itself in fact emerged out of a series of public gatherings hosted by the Quakers, in which Moody and others were involved, which led to the establishment

³⁵ LCP *News Letter* January 1944: 51.

of a Joint Council for the Understanding Between White and Coloured People.³⁶ The membership of this group included a number of Labour MP's, humanitarians such as Charles Roden Buxton of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, and other interested individuals such as the Reverend John Fletcher, and the writers Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain. Whilst Moody was the most prominent black person in the organisation, he was not alone – the British Guianan J. A. Barbour James, Barbadian Arnold Ward, and the African-American musician and vocalist John Payne were all members.³⁷ However, during his work with the Joint Council, Moody began to feel that there was a need for an organisation coordinated primarily by African diasporic people themselves, and modelled on the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People in the USA. He had attended a Missionary Council meeting in London at which a Sub-Committee on Africans in England was established, and in March 1931 this body called for the formation of 'one union of all colored [sic] people in England' to break down the colour bar.³⁸ With this in mind, Moody made plans to establish the League of Coloured Peoples. David Vaughan recounts that Moody met Charles Wesley,

³⁶ Friends House Archive (FHA), Papers on the Colour Question, 1929-36, L051.7; 'Conference on the colour bar in England,' *The Friend* 6 December 1929: 1126-1127; 'Deprecating the colour bar: Work of the new Joint Council,' *West Africa* 2 May 1931: 513; 'Colour prejudice in England: The Joint Council inaugurated,' *The Friend* 1 May 1931: 376.

³⁷ The full committee is listed on a propaganda leaflet distributed by the Joint Council. See FHA Papers on the Colour Question, 1929-36, L051.7. 'The Joint Council to Promote Understanding Between White and Coloured People in Great Britain' leaflet. Barbour James, Ward, and Payne would all be associated with the LCP at various stages in the coming years.

³⁸ S. C. Drake (1954), *Value Systems, Social Structure, and Race Relations in the British Isles* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago: 82 fn 1. Drake drew his information about this meeting from the files of the League of Coloured Peoples, which he was able to use at the time of his research, but which are now missing, presumed destroyed.

an African-American Professor of History at Howard University who was active in the NAACP, at a Central Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) meeting on Tottenham Court Road, and that he responded favourably to Moody's suggestion that an NAACP-style organisation ought to be founded in Britain.³⁹ Moody thus organised another meeting at the Tottenham Court Road YMCA on 13 March, with Wesley present as well as 'coloured students from the Colonies,' at which the LCP was inaugurated.⁴⁰ At the meeting, it was reported that there had been 'vigorous speaking.'⁴¹ In June 1931, a larger follow-up gathering was held at the Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street in the Holborn area of London, with Paul Robeson and Ellen Wilkinson, Labour MP for Middlesborough East and former founding-member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, both among the attendees.⁴² Despite being ill, Robeson was reported to have 'spoke superbly' at the meeting.⁴³ Public meetings had therefore played a central role in the establishment of the LCP, both in leading Harold Moody to the realisation that such a body was necessary, and in the way in which the LCP organised and presented itself.

From this point on, the League organised a host of events. Many of these took the form of informal social gatherings, often centred on a garden party or reception for a prominent individual or group, and always attended by a multi-racial crowd. For example, at one event, a reception for the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Samuel Wilson, and his wife Lady Wilson, hosted by R.S. Nehra at his

³⁹ D. Vaughan (1950), *Negro Victory: The Life Story of Dr Harold Moody*, London: Independent Press: 54-55.

⁴⁰ 'League of Coloured Peoples,' *The Times* 16 March 1931: 15.

⁴¹ 'Opposing the colour bar: Another London organisation,' *West Africa* 21 March 1931: 342.

⁴² *West India Committee Circular* 25 June 1931.

⁴³ 'Africa and world destiny,' *West Africa* 13 June 1931: 714.

home in Herne Hill, prominent Britons mingled with African, West Indian, and South Asian men and women.⁴⁴ These sorts of receptions became a regular part of the League's repertoire. They held receptions for figures such as Sir Edward Denham, Governor of British Guiana, Sir Ransford Slater, Governor of Jamaica, Sir Donald Cameron, Governor of Nigeria, and Sir Reginald Stubbs, former Governor of Jamaica.⁴⁵ In these instances, social gatherings enabled the LCP to demonstrate its links to leading figures governing the British Empire, and to make these people aware of the LCP's work.

It is worth pausing here for a moment to reflect upon the 'public' nature of such gatherings. As events hosted by the LCP, garden parties and social events were necessarily important to that organisation itself. They provided opportunities in which members and associates could come together in a single place, thus ensuring a degree of social connection between members, or at least those who were able or inclined to attend such events. Primarily, these gatherings were advertised by the League themselves. After the launch of their periodical, *The Keys*, in 1933, social events were often advertised in advance in its pages. In this sense, they were only restrictively public, being aimed primarily at those attached to or interested in the LCP, rather than at a wider audience. However, such events often reached a broader public through the afterlives they took on. Whilst *The Keys* itself often reported on LCP events, it was not

⁴⁴ 'Reception: Mrs R.S. Nehra,' *The Times* 25 July 1932: 15. R.S. Nehra was an LCP member, originally from India, though he had worked in Kenya on his way to Britain. See also 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 30 July 1932: 802.

⁴⁵ 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 24 September 1932: 1006; 'League of Coloured Peoples,' *The Times* 17 September 1932: 7; 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 22 October 1932: 1110; 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 12 November 1932: 1183; 'Welfare of coloured peoples: Sir R. Stubbs and a new era,' *The Times* 18 August 1932: 7.

alone. A host of newspapers both in Britain and the colonies reported on LCP events.⁴⁶ Examples have already been cited of newspapers such as *The Times* and periodicals like *West Africa* reporting on LCP events. Articles in published sources enabled public gatherings to come to the attention of people who may not have attended them, potentially bringing them to the attention of a wider, more geographically diffuse, public. In these ways, published sources themselves became important to the geographies of public gatherings, placing them into wider networks and potentially expanding the geographical range of those who came into contact with such events.

As well as hosting events for leading colonial officials, the LCP also held receptions for colonial subjects visiting London. For example, they played host to touring West Indian cricket teams,⁴⁷ and also held a reception for Gandhi on his visit to Britain in 1931.⁴⁸ In 1934, they hosted a delegation from the Gold Coast who had come to London to petition the imperial government about changes to the Gold Coast constitution, amongst other things.⁴⁹ The head of the delegation, Nana Sir Ofori Atta, paramount Chief of Akim Abuakwa in the Gold Coast, attended a reception at Harold Moody's home on 14 July 1934.⁵⁰ Two weeks later, on 28 July, the League hosted a

⁴⁶ For colonial examples, see 'A meeting in honour of Mr Marryshow: By the League of Coloured Peoples in the City of London,' *Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica) 19 January 1933: 18; 'Recent labour troubles in West Indies discussed,' *Daily Gleaner* 30 December 1937; 'League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 20 July 1935: 825.

⁴⁷ 'The President's reception to West Indies cricketers,' *The Keys* October 1933: 26-27; 'Activities of the League,' *The Keys*, July-September 1939: 6.

⁴⁸ R. Makonnen (1973), *Pan-Africanism From Within*, K. King (ed.), London: Oxford University Press: 127.

⁴⁹ S. Rohdie (1965), 'The Gold Coast aborigines abroad,' *The Journal of African History*, **6:3**: 389-411.

⁵⁰ 'Reception to the Hon. Nana Sir Ofori Atta, KBE, and the Gold Coast and Ashanti delegation,' *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 2 (n.d.): 36.

well-attended garden party, this time at the home of Dr Cecil Belfield Clarke, at which Atta and his delegation were the main guests.⁵¹ By this point, the delegation had been turned away by the Colonial Office, and their secretary Dr J. B. Danquah expressed their sentiments well when he wrote that ‘the Gold Coast people are very much upset, but they have learnt a lesson, namely that the old grandfatherly policy of the Colonial Office, tolerant of reforms, indulgent of local opinion, willing to aid in the growth of English democratic tradition throughout the far flung Empire, is dead’.⁵² Clearly, the delegation had grown disillusioned by their experiences of British imperial governance as they encountered it in London. By hosting receptions and garden parties for such delegations, the League was able to develop contacts with people living around the empire, and also to learn more about conditions in particular colonies. For some League members, the connections made at such gatherings proved to be of lasting importance. For example, Una Marson’s biographer has described how, after first meeting at these LCP functions, Marson and Ofori Atta spent considerable amounts of time together over the next few months, with the young Jamaican woman attending some of Ofori Atta’s meetings with him, preparing some of his speeches, and conversing at length with him. Through discussions with Ofori Atta, Jarrett-Macauley suggests, Marson was stimulated to ‘give the African continent a new look and to reassess her attitudes towards British colonial policy.’⁵³

Although LCP receptions often involved a short speech from Moody and a response from the honorary guests and other speakers, their emphasis was more on

⁵¹ ‘Reports of League functions,’ *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 2 (n.d.): 34.

⁵² J.B. Danquah, ‘A gesture and a lesson,’ *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 2 (n.d.): 26.

⁵³ D. Jarrett-Macauley (1998), *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-65* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 71.

sociability than on public speaking or directly political activism. As such, they fit the model of those ‘nonutilitarian’ gatherings to which Wilder draws attention in the Parisian context. However, such gatherings brought together an interracial public, explicitly contesting the dominant racialised norms explored in chapter three, whereby a covert and occasionally overt colour bar often rendered interracial sociability uncommon and transgressive.⁵⁴ Significantly, these LCP gatherings also foregrounded expressions of African diasporic artistic and cultural expression. For example, at a 1936 garden party hosted by Dr Cecil Belfield Clarke on behalf of the League, the African-American John Payne sang ‘Negro Spirituals,’ and the British Guianan swing-band leader Ken ‘Snakehips’ Johnson entertained the 100 or so attendees with tap-dancing.⁵⁵ Given the respectable nature of these gatherings, at which prominent individuals from British society were often in attendance, black cultural performances served to demonstrate the vitality of black history and culture, and its suitability for respectable social gatherings. By situating black cultural performances within public gatherings modelled on the norms of respectable British society – garden parties, for example – LCP social functions engaged in a process of creolisation by offering an open and explicit challenge to the colour bar and its associated marginalisation of African diasporic peoples and modes of cultural expression from supposedly British social spaces.

However, audiences at League events seem to have been occasionally taken aback by such African diasporic cultural displays. At one such event, a service held by

⁵⁴ S. Rose (2004), *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁵ ‘The League of Coloured Peoples: The fourth annual garden party,’ *The Keys* October-December 1936: 17-18.

the League at the Camberwell Green Congregational Church in London in 1933, a number of League members sang 'spirituals'. The press described the congregation as having been 'spellbound' by the singing, saying '[w]orshippers raised their heads with astonishment at the musical beauty' of some of the singers.⁵⁶ Frequently, the Jamaican Moody had to put up with being described as an 'African native'. The appearance of a black public speaker clearly troubled some audiences, who were 'startled' to find them 'speaking in faultless English.'⁵⁷ Moody recalled that some who heard him speak were struck by the fact that 'he speaks as if he were a cultured man,' and Doris Morant, a black Jamaican woman and LCP assistant secretary in 1942-3, was equally as likely to be on the receiving end of offensive comments which the League blamed on 'the obtuse outlook' of some to whom they lectured.⁵⁸ Sometimes, League members would be invited to talk at events, only to be turned away on arrival, the League assuming the reason to be down to skin colour.⁵⁹ Moody's public speaking was rejected by some groups because 'his material was unsuitable for them,' often because he included the subject of his marriage to a white woman in the content of his talks.⁶⁰

Aside from social gatherings, the LCP also hosted public events focussed more directly on education and discussion about matters relating to the colonial world. Early lectures hosted by the League included Dr C. C. Adeniyi-Jones on 'British administration in Nigeria' at Student Movement House in London,⁶¹ and C. F.

⁵⁶ 'Negro singers hold a congregation spellbound,' *Daily Herald* 29 May 1933: 3.

⁵⁷ 'African native startles assembly,' *The Bulletin* (Glasgow) 5 May 1933: 7.

⁵⁸ *News Letter* March 1944: 85.

⁵⁹ *News Letter* September 1943: 81-82.

⁶⁰ 'Extract from a letter from one of our members,' *News Letter* September 1943: 88-89.

⁶¹ 'The League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 8 October 1932: 1058.

Strickland on the potential for co-operative industry and agriculture in Africa.⁶² The African-American historian Carter Woodson also addressed the League at some point in 1932, and the Grenadian newspaper editor and political activist Theophilus Albert Marryshow addressed them twice in the early 1930s.⁶³ In the 1930s, by far the majority of such events were held in the Memorial Hall, on Farringdon Street in the Holborn area of London. First opened in 1875, the Memorial Hall was originally the Headquarters of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and the building served as a central location for public speaking in London until its demolition in 1968.⁶⁴ No doubt the building came to the League's attention through Harold Moody's close connections with the Congregationalists. On 19 May 1933, the League held what was probably their first lecture at this venue, at which J. McGregor Ross, formerly director of public works in Kenya and also a close associate of Jomo Kenyatta, himself a former LCP member,⁶⁵ spoke to the title 'The New Kenya Gold Field.'⁶⁶ After McGregor Ross, Sir John Harris of the ASAPS helped the LCP secure the services of Mr C. W. H. Weaver, head of the International Labour Office in Geneva, who spoke on 'The coloured labourer and his difficulties,' and this was followed by a talk by the

⁶² 'Co-operation and reconstruction,' *West Africa* 24 December 1932: 1344.

⁶³ On Woodson, see 'The Keys disclose,' *The Keys* October 1933: 32. For Marryshow, 'Here and there,' *The Keys* July-September 1935: 14.

⁶⁴ C. Binfield (2004), 'Memory enstructured: The case of Memorial Hall,' in M. Campbell, J. Labbe and S. Shuttleworth (eds.) *Memory and Memorials: From the French Revolution to World War One* New Brunswick: Transaction: 160-174.

⁶⁵ For Kenyatta joining the LCP, see *The Keys* April-June 1934: inside back cover. On McGregor Ross, see J. Murray-Brown (1972), *Kenyatta* London: Allen and Unwin: 114-133.

⁶⁶ 'General meeting at Memorial Hall, May 19th, 1933,' *The Keys* July 1933: 17-18.

anthropologist J. H. Driberg on ‘The good African’.⁶⁷ Each of these talks was well attended and, according to the reports in *The Keys*, stimulated numerous questions from their audience. Away from the Memorial Hall, the League was also addressed by the prominent imperial historian Professor William Macmillan at an after-meeting attached to a service they had run at Camberwell Green Congregational Church.⁶⁸ Over the next few years, a number of similar figures would address the League at the Memorial Hall, including Margery Perham, the renowned historian of empire speaking on ‘Indirect rule in Africa’, and Sir Edward Grigg, formerly governor of Kenya, speaking about that colony.⁶⁹

Through such encounters, the League and its membership were thus able to engage with the ideas of a number of leading thinkers and practitioners regarding issues of imperialism in a variety of contexts, though primarily focused on Africa and the West Indies. In this sense, public gatherings offered spaces in which intellectual engagement could flourish.⁷⁰ A prime example of this can be seen in the relationship between the LCP and the Irish humanitarian and anti-slavery activist, Lady Kathleen Simon. Lady Simon was a prominent supporter of the LCP, and by the mid-1940s Harold Moody could write to her that the League ‘so much regard you as one of ourselves that we cannot imagine our having an important Reception without such

⁶⁷ ‘Reports of League functions,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 51, 61.

⁶⁸ ‘The League of Coloured Peoples,’ *West Africa* 9 June 1934: 628; ‘Reports of League functions,’ *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 1 (n.d.): 6.

⁶⁹ ‘Reports of League functions,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934: 67-68.

⁷⁰ M. Matera (2010), ‘Colonial subjects: Black intellectuals and the development of Colonial Studies in Britain,’ *Journal of British Studies* **49:2**: 388-418.

being graced by your presence.’⁷¹ The relationship between Simon and the LCP was mutually beneficial. By attending League events, Viscountess Simon, as she was by the mid-1940s, got to build up a close relationship with a leading black-led organisation in Britain, and was able to converse with members about her own work and the broader issues in which she was interested. The LCP and Lady Simon participated in a process of mutual intellectual engagement, with Lady Simon speaking to the League at meetings in a manner which they regarded as ‘courageous, encouraging, and most welcoming,’⁷² and also occasionally proof-reading some of Moody’s own speeches for him.⁷³

At such events, League members were not only engaging with matters relating to the empire. For example, following J. H. Driberg’s talk at the Memorial Hall, the Barbadian Arnold Ward, member of both the LCP and the Negro Welfare Association, proposed a resolution to be sent by the LCP to the US Consul registering the League’s ‘unanimous protest against the recrudescence of the Lynching of Negroes in the United States of America,’ and noting the LCP’s ‘deep regret at the continued persecution of the Scottsboro boys.’⁷⁴ The case of the ‘Scottsboro boys’, which saw a group of young black men convicted of raping two white women in the southern USA on spurious evidence and given the death penalty, provoked global outcry and led to an international campaign to free the convicted men.⁷⁵ Whilst Ward had considerably more

⁷¹ Moody to Kathleen Simon, 6 June 1945. Lady Simon papers, Rhodes House Library, Mss Brit Emp. s. 25 K 20/3.

⁷² ‘Monthly reception at Overseas House, July 10th,’ *News Notes* August 1941: 120.

⁷³ For example Moody to Simon, 14 March 1945. Mss Brit Emp. s. 25 K 20/3.

⁷⁴ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 42.

⁷⁵ J. Miller, S. Pennybacker, and E. Rosenhaft (2001), ‘Mother Ada Wright and the international campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-34,’ *The American Historical Review* **106:2**: 387-430.

radical tendencies than many of the LCP's members, the fact that these resolutions were passed suggest that the sentiments he expressed struck a chord with the broader membership on this issue, and that in this instance public gatherings offered a space in which black West Indian activists whose ideological standpoints differed were able to find common ground.

As the 1930s progressed the League turned their attention more directly to questions of race and global politics. For example, at a General Meeting in December 1934, a number of significant speakers addressed the LCP on these themes. William Ballinger, the liberal colonial critic, spoke on South Africa, and Charles Roden Buxton reported on a recent trip to Liberia, about which he had also published a pamphlet for the LCP.⁷⁶ However, without doubt the most anticipated speaker was Paul Robeson, who addressed the meeting on 'The Negro in the modern world'. Robeson's speech, which urged African diasporic peoples to take pride in their cultural heritage whilst also drawing from aspects of other cultures, was described by the League as 'thought provoking.' The meeting was extremely well attended, and following the speeches a 'lively discussion' ensued, in which Jomo Kenyatta, Arnold Ward, League members Stephen Thomas and Dennis Degazon, Winifred Holtby, and Eslanda Robeson all took part. Other significant members of the audience included the General Secretary of the London Missionary Society, Rev. A. M. Chirgwin, and Margery Perham.⁷⁷

Robeson's speech, coupled with Ward's earlier Scottsboro resolutions, demonstrate that League public meetings were occasions for a multi-racial audience to

⁷⁶ C. R. Buxton, *Impressions of Liberia: A Report to the League of Coloured Peoples* London: League of Coloured Peoples, in LSE Archives, ILP/8/1934/4.

⁷⁷ 'The 21st general meeting,' *The Keys* January-March 1935: 52; 'Mr Paul Robeson on African culture,' *West Africa* 24 December 1934: 1453.

debate matters relating to imperialism and colonialism, as well as to racial politics and cultures on a global scale. However, this debate was not always resolved amicably. For example, at the League's Annual General Meeting for 1934, held at the Memorial Hall, there was considerable unrest amongst those present. Moody wrote that at this meeting the League had been 'fiercely attacked,' and in the official report it was noted that a strong Indian element, opposed to the current LCP executive and its prioritisation of Africans and West Indians, had attempted both to disrupt the meeting and to propose an alternate body of officers.⁷⁸ Likewise, Ras Makonnen also recalled that he and George Padmore, attending a League function on Abyssinia, rounded on Moody and the League as follows: 'How dare you, Moody, who receives so much of your money from missionaries and the Colonial Office, use your apparatus to denigrate and defame African people?'⁷⁹ Clearly, whilst the public events hosted by the League created a space to debate matters of global politics and racial relations, this debate did not always proceed along placid lines, nor were the League always able to control the direction in which the discussion went. In this sense, although such gatherings functioned as 'convergence spaces' in which diverse activists could come together, there was no guarantee that their discussions would end amicably.

Such debates did not only take place in social gatherings and lectures, however. The LCP also organised a large number of conferences, and these events were arguably the most prominent way in which the LCP sought to display itself publicly. From its earliest years, the League endeavored to host an annual conference. The conferences themselves often took the form of an 'away weekend,' usually held in High Leigh, Hoddleston, just outside London. The nature of these gatherings can be gleaned from

⁷⁸ 'Editorial' and 'Third Annual General Meeting,' *The Keys* April-June 1934: 64, 70.

⁷⁹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 160.

the League's report on their 1933 conference, held over the weekend of 23-25 March, in which they describe the event as allowing members and friends 'to discuss a few of the problems facing the races in this country and abroad.' However, alongside discussion sociability was another core aspect, with the League noting that 'a Social and games' were arranged in order to 'put everyone in a happy frame of mind,' whilst some members rose early in order to 'get in a bit of hiking in the country-side before attending the first session of the Conference.' In line with other League events, 'Spirituals' were performed in the evenings, and the Sunday of the conference began with a religious service, emphasising the importance of Christianity to the League's mode of operation. The conference itself was attended by around 40 participants, with a diverse list of speakers including C. L. R. James and Moody himself, covering topics such as 'The American Negro,' 'the West African,' 'the West Indian,' and 'the Indian student,' amongst others.⁸⁰

As this list of themes makes clear, conferences were often designed to facilitate discussion of matters relating to imperialism and racial equality around the world, and LCP conferences thus often played host to leading thinkers on imperial matters. For example, shortly after C. F. Strickland had published an article on 'Cooperation for Africa' in the journal of the International African Institute,⁸¹ he appeared at an LCP conference to talk on this issue.⁸² In particular, LCP conferences were concerned to address the place of African diasporic people in the modern world. For example, in 1934 the LCP hosted a conference under the title of 'The Negro in the World To-day.'

⁸⁰ 'Conference report,' *The Keys* July 1933: 3-8.

⁸¹ C. F. Strickland (1933), 'Cooperation for Africa,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* **6:1**: 15-26.

⁸² 'Conference report,' *The Keys* July 1933: 3-8.

The League attempted to involve a broad range of organisations in planning the conference, including the West African Students Union, the Student Christian Movement, the Joint Council for Understanding Between White and Coloured People, the Negro Welfare Society, the League Against Imperialism (LAI), and the Ceylon Students Union. Conferences thus offered opportunities for collaboration between differing organisations. Such collaborations, though, did not merely help to improve links between different groups, and could in fact lead to the expression of conflict between organisations whose perspectives on particular issues differed. Writing of planning discussions for the 1934 conference, for example, the LCP noted that ‘one thing is needed to make this conference really worth while, and that is the co-operation of the Coloured Peoples in London and the Empire as a whole.’⁸³ In his own column in *The Keys* Moody went even further, arguing that ‘If coloured people who are ostensibly working for the race cannot agree among themselves and with those English folk who are working on our behalf, how then can we ever hope to obtain our objective.’⁸⁴ Such statements gesture at the tense nature of inter-organisational collaborations which came together in the planning of such conferences.

Conferences and other public events themselves also fed into other modes of political practice. Throughout the 1930s, many talks given at LCP conferences were printed in *The Keys*. Perhaps most notably, in 1937 the LCP devoted two entire issues to being special conference report issues, in which they carried many of the talks from their 1937 conference. Again, the League had collaborated with a range of organisations in advance of the conference, holding a coordinating meeting in the Memorial Hall on

⁸³ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* July 1934: 1-2.

⁸⁴ ‘President’s message,’ *The Keys* July 1934: 3.

28 April.⁸⁵ The conference itself was held on 25, 26 and 27 June, also at the Memorial Hall. The long list of speakers included Chris Jones of the IASB, as well as figures such as Reginald Sorenson, Professor W. M. Macmillan, and Sir Donald Cameron. The conference itself took as its subject ‘The African in the Empire,’ and the League noted that its main aim had been to enable the LCP to ‘define more completely and concretely its Policy’ in this area.⁸⁶ After the release of their first special issue, the League noted that they had received much positive feedback on it, and produced a second containing the remainder of the conference reports.⁸⁷

Reporting on their own conferences, as well as other public events, was an important way for the League to ensure that the proceedings of such events reached their largest possible audience. By producing textual accounts of public events, the LCP ensured an afterlife for these gatherings beyond merely the audience in attendance. Given that the League claimed a membership beyond Britain’s shores, and indicated a readership for *The Keys* outside of Britain, such reports enabled the LCP to expand the public for such events to include members and readers outside London and overseas.⁸⁸ The textual afterlives of public gatherings thus positioned such events within a wider geographical network, drawing them to the attention of people otherwise unable to attend them in ways which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

Reporting on conferences also enabled the LCP to emphasise the importance of the events which they had organised. For example, in the aftermath of the 1934

⁸⁵ ‘Report of the work of the League since the Annual General Meeting of the 12th March, 1937,’ *The Keys* April-June 1937: 56-57.

⁸⁶ ‘President’s message,’ *The Keys* July-September 1937: 2.

⁸⁷ *The Keys* October-December 1937.

⁸⁸ The LCP claimed readership for *The Keys* in Africa, the West Indies and America. ‘Third Annual General Meeting,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934:70.

conference on 'The Negro in the world today,' the League portrayed the conference as having been a roaring success. Harold Moody's own presentation on 'The Negro in the Future' was judged 'a speech which will in time come to be considered to be a classic,' and was subsequently published by the LCP as a three-pence pamphlet.⁸⁹ As far as unity between differing organisations was concerned, the League also stressed that this had worked successfully, noting that 'For the first time an attempt was made to hear all groups within the Race, and as a result plebeian and patrician found a common ground. The conference we trust is but the first of many, for we are convinced that they serve a very useful purpose.'⁹⁰

However, the LCP's representations of their own conferences were not always allowed to pass unchallenged. For example, this same conference of 1934 received a far more critical review from another significant periodical. Printed in the *Negro Worker*, and presumably penned by Arnold Ward, this report noted that 'the conference was extremely small, with an average attendance of about 30 people.' The reporter dismissed Moody's speech as advocating 'a curiously confused and contradictory programme of 'race solidarity' on the one hand and inter-racial cooperation on the other.' The *Worker* denounced Moody as standing for 'no independence from British slave rule,' and deemed his presentation as being representative of his 'class position.'⁹¹ The *Negro Worker* had been edited by George Padmore until his recent split from the Communists in February 1934,⁹² and it was often critical of Moody and the LCP. As is

⁸⁹ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* October 1933: 21; H. Moody (1933), *The Negro in the Future* London: League of Coloured Peoples, in Hull History Centre, Winifred Holtby Papers, L WH/4/4.28/03i.

⁹⁰ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* October 1933: 21.

⁹¹ 'A conference on 'The Negro in the World Today,' *Negro Worker* August 1934: 18.

⁹² Pennybacker gives the date of Padmore's formal break with the communist movement as 23 February 1934. See Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 80.

clear from this example, the reporting of conferences became one way in which ideological differences between black activists could be played out.

As well as organising their own conferences, the LCP worked with other organisations interested in similar issues in order to hold public gatherings. In July 1939, for example, the LCP was at the forefront of a group of organisations, including the Coloured Film Artistes' Association, the Gold Coast Students Association, the Negro Welfare Association, and the IASB, in organising a conference on African peoples, democracy and world peace.⁹³ Moody was chairman of the conference, and the initiative was supported by a wide variety of individuals, including a number of MP's, Communists, Church leaders, and many others, such as the publisher Victor Gollancz, actor Paul Robeson, Professor William Macmillan, Barbadian Grantley Adams and Langston Hughes from the USA.

⁹³ I. Geiss, (1974) *The Pan-African Movement* London: Methuen: 361-362; D. Whittall (2010), 'The conference on African Peoples, Democracy and World Peace, 1939,' *BASA Newsletter* **58**: 22-29.

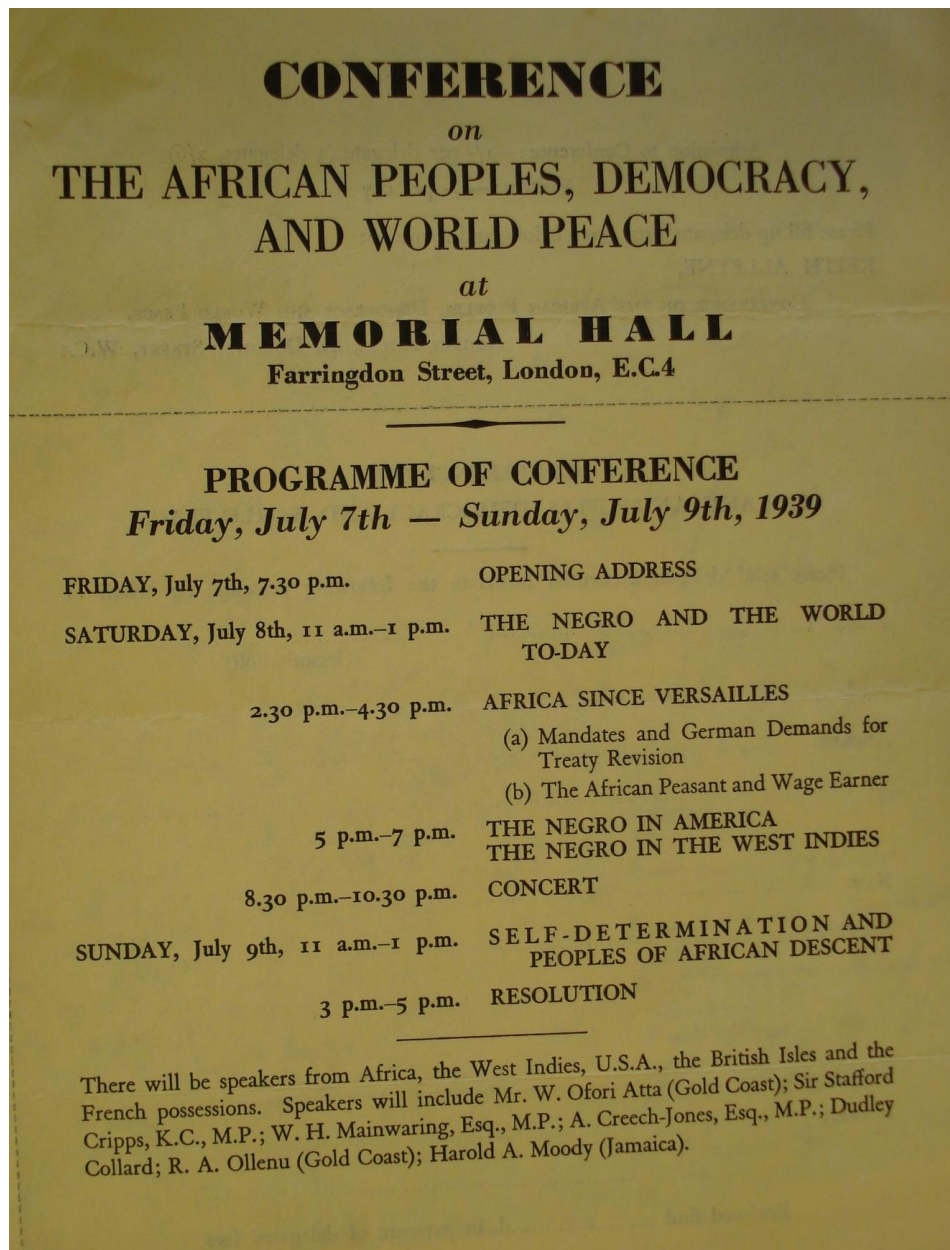


Fig 4.1: Flyer for the Conference on African Peoples, Democracy and World Peace, CO 323 1679 5.

When advertising the conference in *The Keys*, the LCP did so under the sub-heading ‘Propaganda and knowledge,’ and went on to stress that one function of the conference would be to challenge some of the wrong-headed assumptions about Africa and the wider empire which often appeared in the British press, and to ‘bring to light and to provide some correction for such glaring wrongs’ as were being committed around the

empire.⁹⁴ As early as 1938, the LCP had been planning to hold a ‘world congress of Africans and people of African descent’ in 1940, and these plans had garnered support in Sylvia Pankhurst’s anti-fascist newspaper, *New Times and Ethiopian News*, in which the proposed gathering was even described at one point as a ‘Pan-African World Congress’.⁹⁵ Whether or not the 1939 gathering was intended as a preliminary to a larger event in 1940 is unknown, though no large conference organised by the LCP appears to have taken place in 1940, perhaps because the Second World War made arrangements difficult.

Colonial Office officials took note of this conference, primarily because they were worried that Aggrey House was originally listed as the correspondence address for the event, though they also deemed it of fairly minor significance. However, they did express concern that a number of the organisers, particularly Peter Blackman, were believed to have ‘rather extreme ideas.’⁹⁶ The conference itself brought together a diverse array of speakers, including Princess Tsahai of Ethiopia, H. G. Wells, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Krishna Menon, then President of the India League and described by historian Nicholas Owen as ‘the leading figure in anti-imperialist politics in London’ in 1939.⁹⁷ Other important speakers included Moody, the Barbadian Peter Blackman, Trinidadian George Padmore, Desmond Buckle from the Gold Coast, and many other black activists in Britain. Notably, Princess Tsahai, daughter of the Ethiopian Emperor

⁹⁴ ‘Editorial,’ and ‘President’s message,’ *The Keys* July-September 1939: 4-5.

⁹⁵ ‘Africans world congress,’ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 2 July 1938: 6; ‘African world congress,’ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 9 July 1938: 8; ‘Memorial Hall conference on African Peoples,’ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 15 July 1939: 5.

⁹⁶ Memo by H. Vischer, 22 May 1939, in TNA CO 323 1679 5

⁹⁷ N. Owen, (2007), *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 250.

Haile Selassie, seems to have been the only woman to speak at the conference, a fact which illustrates the male-dominated nature of many such gatherings and raises questions about just how inclusive conferences such as these were for black women. The Conference was reported in several newspapers, including those such as *West Africa* and *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica) which circulated in the colonies, and an extensive report also appeared in the Communist *Colonial Information Bulletin*.⁹⁸

For the LCP, then, public gatherings served a number of functions. On the one hand, they played an important role simply in offering social spaces in which members, friends and associates could come together. In this sense, garden parties and other events served an important role in enabling the LCP membership to get to know one another. Reporting on their own events allowed the League to fill out the pages of their own periodical, and also to put a positive gloss on any LCP event, whilst also ensuring that members living outside of London were informed of the League's activities in the imperial metropolis. Such representations could be challenged, however, and the ideological differences evident at conferences in particular were often played out in later reporting of these events. Social events also offered opportunities to develop connections both with prominent Britons and with imperial subjects visiting the metropolis. They also enabled the League to display African diasporic cultural performances in respectable settings, implicitly making an argument for the acceptability of such cultural expression within British society and engaging in the process of creolisation by challenging the colour bar and positioning colonial cultural

⁹⁸ 'Cooperation, not anti-whiteism: West Africa and the London conference,' *West Africa* 22 July 1939; 'Cooperation, not anti-whiteism: West Africa and the recent London conference,' *Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica) 10 August 1939; 'A Conference on African peoples, democracy and world peace,' *Colonial Information Bulletin* 15 July 1939.

practices as important elements of British society. Some LCP public meetings also played an important educational role, enabling those in attendance to learn about matters relating to colonial and global racial politics, and also to debate both with leading thinkers on these matters and amongst themselves. In the process, such debates could both enable shared perspectives to emerge, but also allow for the public display of ideological differences between activists.

Public gatherings allowed LCP members to openly air their challenge to the colour bar and their opinions on the British Empire, but it also opened them up to the perspectives of those audiences, allowing them to gauge some aspects of the public response to their ideas. This entailed having to publicly defend their ideas, but also to be on the receiving end of prejudiced comments from white Britons who may have been unused to seeing a black man, and especially a black woman, standing before them and speaking in an authoritative manner. In a society in which the unofficial colour bar persisted, these black West Indian public performances were always likely to unnerve some white Britons. It is also clear that LCP gatherings provided spaces in which non-white people in Britain could themselves disagree, arguing over particular interpretations of global events or organisational strategies. As such, whilst public events hosted by the LCP evidently partook in the process of creolising London, they demonstrate some of the many difficulties and tensions inherent within this process.

‘Educating public opinion’: Imperialism, class and the IAFE/IASB

Upon arriving in Britain from Trinidad via Barbados in March 1932, C. L. R. James immersed himself in a range of public meetings. In a series of articles written for the Trinidadian newspaper *The Port of Spain Gazette* from his London base, James described how he was regularly attending lectures as he moved on the fringes of Bloomsbury society, including a talk by the poet Edith Sitwell at London’s Student Movement House. He also noted that he himself lectured to the Society for International Studies, and was subsequently invited to address the Friends of India Society and the Indian Students’ Central Association.⁹⁹ When, in the second half of 1932, James moved to Nelson in Lancashire to stay with his close friend Learie Constantine, also from Trinidad, James joined him as he lectured around the region, and soon began lecturing regularly himself, as well as participating in meetings of the local Labour Party, though he later recalled that ‘I found myself to the left of the Labour party in Nelson, militant as that was.’¹⁰⁰ In James’s estimates he and Constantine were ‘educating thousands, including ourselves.’¹⁰¹ The pair were speaking mainly about the West Indies, although they also addressed wider issues relating to the African diaspora, such as when James spoke to the Sunday Lecture Society in Colne, Lancashire, at which Lady Kathleen

⁹⁹ C. L. R. James, ‘The Bloomsbury atmosphere,’ *Port of Spain Gazette*, 21 June 1932; and ‘Bloomsbury again,’ *Port of Spain Gazette*, 22 June 1932, both in C. L. R. James (2003), *Letters From London* N. Laughlin (ed.) Oxford: Signal Books: 19-34, 39-54.

¹⁰⁰ A. Richardson, C. Chrysostom and A. Grimshaw (1987), *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism* London: Socialist Platform: 1.

¹⁰¹ C. L. R. James (2005 [1963]), *Beyond a Boundary* London: Yellow Jersey: 156.

Simon was in the audience, taking as his topic the lynching of black people in the USA, whilst also making mention of Kenya and South Africa.¹⁰²

When he returned to London in 1933, James continued his immersion in British political gatherings. When the opportunity arose to attend a meeting addressed by the well-known black Communist George Padmore in a building on the Gray's Inn Road, described by Reginald Reynolds as the street where 'a whole network of satellite organisations in the 'Communist Solar System'' had their headquarters,¹⁰³ James jumped at the chance. As he recalled, 'I had heard a lot about George Padmore, the great man from Moscow who was organising black people all over the world, so I said I would go, because in those days I was going to see and hear all that I could.' However, when he arrived at the meeting James was met with a surprising realisation. In his words,

I went to the meeting and there were about fifty or sixty people, half of them white, and suddenly, after five minutes, there walked in the great George Padmore. Who was he but my friend Malcolm Nurse? ... By that time he was tied up with Moscow, I was headed away from Moscow, I was a Trotskyist, but that didn't trouble us. That night we went home. I went either to his room or he came to mine, I don't remember, but we stayed talking till about 4 o'clock in the morning.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² 'The case for the Negro: Mr C.L.R. James a spirited champion,' *Colne and Nelson Times* 16 March 1935, in Lady Simon Papers, Rhodes House Library, Mss Brit Emp. s. 25 K 13/5.

¹⁰³ R. Reynolds (1956), *My Life and Crimes*, London: Jarrolds: 99.

¹⁰⁴ C. L. R. James (1984), *At the Rendezvous of Victory* London: Alison and Busby: 254.

George Padmore was in fact none other than James's old school-friend from Trinidad, Malcolm Nurse. Whilst Padmore and James possessed differing brands of left-wing politics by this point, it seems they may have kept in touch, for when Padmore broke with Communism James recalled that 'one day in 1935, George Padmore appeared at my door.'¹⁰⁵

Reunited in London, James and Padmore became leading figures in the IAFE. As with the LCP, encounters at public meetings were thus crucial to the origins of this organisation, bringing James and Padmore back into contact with one another at a time when both were developing radical leftist politics with a deep interest in Africa and the Caribbean. The IAFE itself, again like the LCP, was inaugurated at a public meeting, this time on 23 July 1935. At the meeting, which was described as being 'crowded' with an audience largely of 'men and women of African descent,' the IAFE passed resolutions in support of Abyssinian independence, and also began to collect for a fund to provide an ambulance for Abyssinia, or a hospital if war should not be forthcoming.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after this meeting, another was held in the Memorial Hall on Sunday 28 July, again described in *West Africa* as 'crowded.'¹⁰⁷ Amy Ashwood Garvey presided over the meeting, which some parts of the press wrongly noted as the inaugural meeting of the new organisation. James was reported to have given 'a lucid history of the European treaties with Abyssinia,'¹⁰⁸ and again the meeting passed a resolution, this time calling for the League of Nations to take action against Italy for her invasion of

¹⁰⁵ James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*: 241.

¹⁰⁶ *West Africa* 27 July 1935.

¹⁰⁷ 'Africans and Abyssinia: Meeting of London sympathisers,' *West Africa* 3 August 1935: 873.

¹⁰⁸ *Manchester Guardian* 29 July 1935; 'Africans and Abyssinia: Meeting of London sympathisers,' *West Africa* 3 August 1935: 873; also 'A London diary,' *New Statesman and Nation* 3 August 1935.

Abyssinia.¹⁰⁹ James in particular would soon regret this resolution. As he put it, ‘I got myself into a blunder. Being a Marxist I was naturally opposed to the League of Nations, but in the excitement of forming the organisation we passed a resolution.’¹¹⁰ However, he would shortly defend the differing perspectives within the IAFE on Abyssinia in a letter to the *New Statesman*, arguing that ‘whatever our views, we are in this struggle as one, in that we stand by Ethiopia ... And most of us are fortified by the knowledge that in conflict with Italian fascism we are with the stream of history and not against it.’¹¹¹

A variety of public meetings thus played important roles in the formation of the IAFE. From these earliest meetings, we can see a number of similarities between the IAFE and the LCP. Both organisations were rooted in discussions which took place at public meetings held in London by other organisations. Both organisations also held public gatherings in the Memorial Hall, a prominent venue for such events in 1930s London. However, whilst these similarities are important, a longer perspective on the role of public events within the political practice of the IAFE and IASB reveals significant differences.

Although the IAFE held its earliest meetings in the Memorial Hall, its members soon began to devote more of their time to organising events elsewhere. Two spaces were of particular importance. In 1935, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia was a prominent issue in British politics, and the IAFE devoted their efforts to engaging in

¹⁰⁹ *The Times* 29 July 1935.

¹¹⁰ C. L. R. James (1974), ‘Black intellectuals in Britain,’ in B. Parekh (ed.) *Colour, Culture and Consciousness: Immigrant Intellectuals in Britain* London: Allen and Unwin: 158; ‘The game at Geneva: Behind the scenes at the ‘thieves kitchen,’’ *New Leader* 18 October 1935: 2.

¹¹¹ ‘A London diary,’ *New Statesman and Nation* 10 August 1935.

this wider public debate.¹¹² In doing so, their members often took to the platform at Speakers' Corner in London's Hyde Park. Ras Makonnen, an IAFE member, recalled spending his days in the British Museum reading room, reading up on Abyssinian history before heading to Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, as well as other 'more serious meetings' with fellow members of IAFE at which they would try to 'educate English public opinion' about Abyssinia.¹¹³

Later in the 1930s, when IAFE had morphed into the IASB, Speakers' Corner remained an important space of public engagement for them. Makonnen recalled that the group 'organised a rota of speakers for Hyde Park,' and that at these meetings they were particularly able to sell large amounts of their literature, especially the journal *International African Opinion*.¹¹⁴ Aside from speaking themselves at Hyde Park, the IASB also challenged the ideas of other speakers in this setting. In one such instance, discussed at more length in chapter six, James and Padmore took Marcus Garvey to task over his analysis of the recent Trinidadian labour unrest, provoking Garvey into an outburst in the Trinidadian press which criticised the IASB for leading Caribbean workers astray with their radicalism.¹¹⁵ This incident offers an insight into the debates and disagreements that were rife amongst London's black West Indian community over the pressing political issues of their day, highlighting that these debates were often played out in public at a range of events in diverse locations.

¹¹² D. Waley (1975), *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, 1935-6* London: Maurice Temple Smith; D. Whittall, 'Colonial fascism,' *History Today* October 2010: 44-48.

¹¹³ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 115.

¹¹⁴ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 118-119.

¹¹⁵ 'Marcus Garvey on Trinidad strikes: Interview in London,' *Sunday Guardian: Sunday Edition of the Trinidad Guardian* 29 August 1937: 1, 3; R. Lewis (1988), *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* Trenton: Africa World Press: 271.

Aside from Hyde Park, the other location which was of particular significance for the holding of events by the IAFE/IASB was Trafalgar Square. Ronald Mace, in his extensive history of Trafalgar Square as a space of public performance, has argued that in the 1930s ‘demonstrations in Trafalgar Square reflected the two dominant issues that faced the Labour movement: unemployment, and the fight against fascism’.¹¹⁶ Whilst this is true to an extent, it misses the important pan-African and anticolonial elements of the IAFE and IASB gatherings in Trafalgar Square. In advance of one such meeting, the prominent journalist Hannen Swaffer used his column in the *Daily Herald* to advertise the event.¹¹⁷ He noted that ‘[t]o-morrow, the International African Friends of Ethiopia, as they call themselves, are holding a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square ... I advise Labour people in London to go and hear the Negroes case. C. L. R. James, a West Indian journalist ... speaks with eloquence and with an honest fervour. Beside him, you will see Mrs Amy Ashwood Garvey ... Mrs Garvey, too, is a fluent speaker.’ Padmore, Kenyatta, and the West Indian seaman Chris Jones were also billed to speak at the event.¹¹⁸ This IAFE event clearly drew the attention of the left-wing press in Britain. Ritchie Calder, writing in the *Herald* two days later, noted that ‘Negroes and coloured peoples from every part of the world crowded the plinth of Nelson’s Column and mixed with the large white audience in Trafalgar Square, at yesterday’s protest meeting.’ James stressed that ‘this is not an anti-white demonstration, but it is pro-Negro,’ whilst Ashwood Garvey (Fig. 4.2) emphasised the fact that ‘In this struggle the black women

¹¹⁶ R. Mace (1976), *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* London: Lawrence and Wishart: 212.

¹¹⁷ On Swaffer, see T. Driberg (1974), *Swaff! The Life and Times of Hannen Swaffer* London: Macdonald and Jane’s.

¹¹⁸ H. Swaffer, ‘I heard yesterday,’ *Daily Herald* 24 August 1935: 8.

are marching beside the men.¹¹⁹ The Barbadian Arnold Ward, of the Negro Welfare Association, also spoke at the gathering. In conversation with another journalist afterwards, James expressed his desire to establish a ‘fighting force for service in Abyssinia.’¹²⁰



Fig 4.2: Amy Ashwood Garvey speaking in Trafalgar Square, from T. Martin (2007), *Amy Ashwood Garvey: Pan-Africanist, Feminist and Mrs Marcus Garvey No. 1, or, a Tale of Two Amies* Dover, MA: Majority Press: 136.

At some point in late 1935 or 1936, the IAFE seems to have joined the Abyssinian Association, a more general campaigning body which had brought together a diverse collective of activists to oppose the Italian invasion. During this year, it appears that efforts were made by members of the IAFE to replace it with a ‘Pan-African

¹¹⁹ R. Calder, ‘Trafalgar Sq. warning against invasion: ‘Mussolini will face whole black race,’ *Daily Herald* 26 August 1935: 3.

¹²⁰ ‘Negro army for Abyssinia,’ *News Chronicle* 26 August 1935: 2.

Federation,' which continued to organise public protest meetings but now stretched its remit beyond Abyssinia. Jonathon Derrick reports that Nigerian archives contain correspondence from the Colonial Office warning colonial governors of a 'Pan-African Brotherhood' formed by Padmore and Tiemoko Garan Kouyate, then based in France.¹²¹ On 14 June 1936, Jomo Kenyatta was reported by Special Branch officers to have addressed a Trafalgar Square meeting organised by the Pan-African Federation, and also to have attended a meeting of the same organisation in London on 29 June 1936, along with 'Tomasa Rawaki Griffith' (Ras Makonnen), and the long-time Pan-Africanist Robert Broadhurst.¹²² A later report by Special Branch also mentioned a bulletin called *Voice of Africa*, published by the 'Pan-African Congress (British Section).¹²³ On July 1936, the Pan-African Federation called for 'Peace Lovers, Enemies of fascism, Friends of the Colonial Peoples' to come to the Memorial Hall to attend a rally at which would be discussed slavery, forced labour, oppressive taxation and a range of other issues, with a focus on Africa. Padmore was to chair the meeting, and amongst the speakers were Labour MP Arthur Creech Jones, William Mellor, chairman of the Socialist League, Fenner Brockway, ILP secretary, Reginald Bridgeman League Against Imperialism secretary, and Krishna Menon, India League secretary.¹²⁴

By 1937, this group had officially formed itself into the International African Service Bureau. This reformulated collective continued to use Trafalgar Square as one of the main venues for their public gatherings. In August 1937, for example, they held a

¹²¹ J. Derrick (2008), *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-colonialism in Africa and the West, 1919-1939* London: Hurst: 337.

¹²² See reports from 14 June 1936 and 3 July 1936 in TNA KV2/1787, and KV2/1817.

¹²³ 3 March 1938, KV2/1787.

¹²⁴ Notice written on headed paper of Pan-African Federation, no date but 1936, KV2/1817.

protest meeting there with regard to striking and labour unrest in the West Indies, at which Kenyatta, Ward, Makonnen and Padmore were among the speakers.¹²⁵ On 8 May 1938, the IASB held a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square to protest against rumoured proposals to transfer British Protectorates in Africa to the Dominion of South Africa.¹²⁶ The following month, the IASB again spoke from the plinth at Trafalgar Square, with an audience of around 200 present, with Jomo Kenyatta reportedly saying that the meeting hoped to ‘explain to those present the poverty and starvation existing in the West Indies.’¹²⁷

Protest meetings in Trafalgar Square and public addresses delivered from places like Speakers’ Corner served particular purposes for the IAFE/IASB. Often, such gatherings resulted in the passing of a resolution on a particular matter relating to the global politics of imperialism or the African diaspora. As we have seen, press representatives, particularly those representing left-wing papers, occasionally reported on IAFE/IASB events, and these public gatherings thus served to build publicity for the organisation. The meetings themselves could also help to advertise the work of the group to a broader audience, and thus to help recruit members. Ras Makonnen, for example, recalled that it was at a gathering in Trafalgar Square that he first encountered IAFE during a brief visit to London, being invited up onto the plinth to contribute to the

¹²⁵ Report by agent ‘MGH,’ dated 14 January 1938, KV2/1824; report by Sergeant Bull of the Metropolitan Police, 11 August 1937, CO 318/427/11. Prominent African-American Communist Frank Patterson was reportedly at this event. See Metropolitan Police report, 17 August 1937, in TNA MEPO 38/91.

¹²⁶ Metropolitan Police report, 8 May 1938, MEPO 38/91.

¹²⁷ Report by Sergeant Fraser, Metropolitan Police, 26 June 1938, MEPO 38/91; ‘Activities of the Bureau,’ *International African Opinion* August 1938: 16.

discussion and later joining the organisation when he moved to Britain.¹²⁸ As well as helping to draw attention to the work of the IAFE/IASB, these public gatherings also enabled them to sell literature, and thus both to make money and to circulate their ideas more widely. Makonnen noted that the IASB were able to sell ‘a large number’ of copies of their periodical *International African Opinion* after speaking at Hyde Park, sometimes selling ‘more than twenty pound worth in a single meeting.’¹²⁹ Similarly, at Trafalgar Square gatherings the group also sold their literature. The photograph overleaf, originally printed in the IASB’s *African Sentinel*, appeared with the caption ‘Mrs Geraldine Young ... a patron of the Bureau, selling the news bulletin ‘Africa and the World’ at the Trafalgar Square meeting on August 8th 1937.’¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 113.

¹²⁹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 119.

¹³⁰ *African Sentinel* October – November 1938.

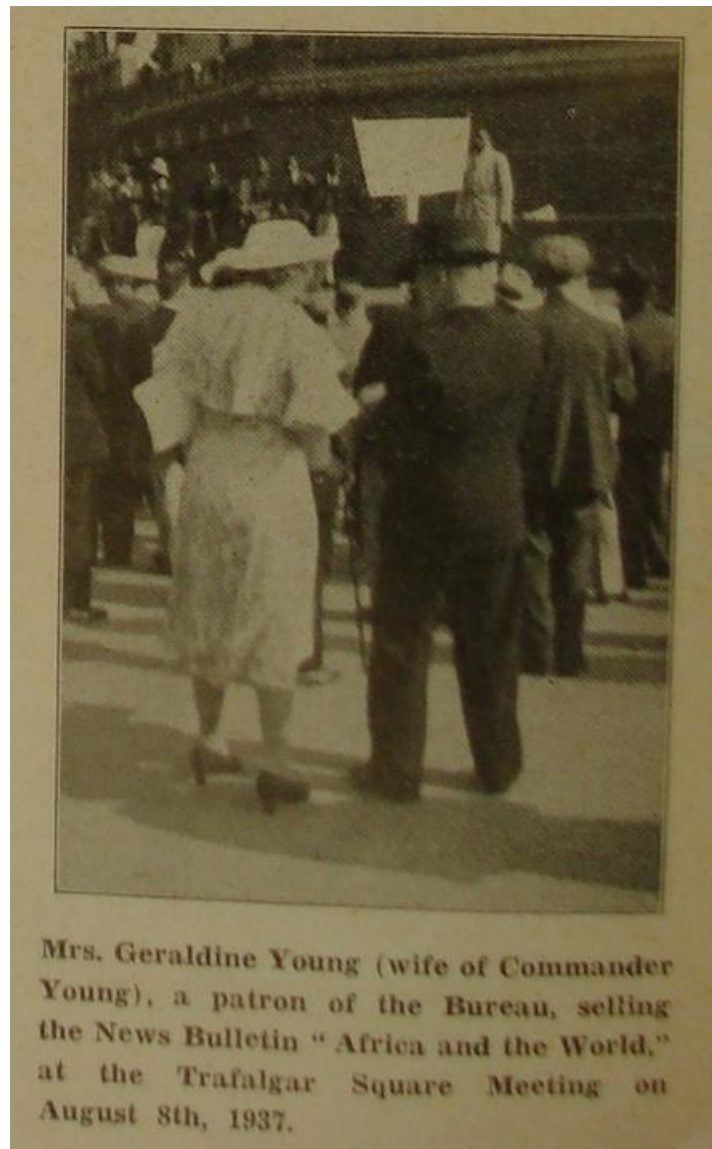


Fig. 4.3: Photograph of IASB members selling literature in Trafalgar Square, from the *African Sentinel*.

Whilst all these motivations no doubt inspired the enthusiasm of IAFE/IASB for public meetings, the need to publicly present their ideas about the iniquities of imperial rule and global racial inequality was also driven by a deeper conviction on which the entire organisational practice of the IAFE/IASB was based. From very early on, members of these organisations made clear that educating the people of Britain, and in particular the working classes, was a central aim to which they were devoted. In particular, the IAFE/IASB emphasised the need to educate the British working classes on the

relationship between class politics in Britain and imperial subjection abroad. In the October – November edition of the *African Sentinel*, the IASB laid this perspective out clearly in an article on ‘educating public opinion.’ Here, the organisation argued that ‘one of the chief functions of the Bureau is to help and enlighten public opinion in Great Britain, particularly amongst the working and middle classes, as to the true conditions in the various colonies, protectorates and mandated territories in Africa, the West Indies and other colonial areas.’¹³¹ The IASB saw themselves participating in a ‘common effort for the independence of the colonial peoples and the emancipation of the European workers.’¹³² Consequently, when speaking at public meetings, IAFE/IASB members would reinforce this point by openly aiming their arguments at the British working classes in particular, urging them to see themselves as working together with colonial working classes to overthrow imperialists, who they termed ‘our common enemy.’¹³³ Doing so required that they reframe the geography of British imperialism, insisting not just that it was damaging to colonial populations, but also that it was supporting capitalist hegemony over the working classes in Britain. Thus, reporting on an event held in August 1937 the IASB emphasised that it had been called ‘in order to explain to the British public the economic, political and social conditions of the coloured populations in the West Indies.’¹³⁴ In doing so, they ensured that IAFE/IASB public meetings became spaces in which colonial events were explicitly linked to

¹³¹ ‘The International African Service Bureau: Its aims and objects,’ *African Sentinel* October – November 1938: 4.

¹³² ‘Politics and the Negro,’ *International African Opinion* October 1938: 9.

¹³³ ‘Politics and the Negro,’ *International African Opinion* October 1938: 9.

¹³⁴ ‘Mass meeting in London,’ *Africa and the World: A News Bulletin Issued by the International African Service Bureau* 14 August 1937: 7. The resolution adopted at this meeting can be found in ‘Activities of the London committee,’ *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 10. Both in CO 847 11 16.

developments in the imperial metropolis. In May 1938, C. L. R. James, speaking from the plinth at Trafalgar Square, reportedly argued that the National Government in Britain missed no opportunity to ‘pump the working classes of this country with “colour prejudice propaganda,”’ and called for British workers to ‘take an active interest in the problems of colonial coloured peoples and support them in their struggles.’¹³⁵ Dinah Stock, a white female IASB associate who also lectured for the Workers Educational Association, argued at the same meeting that it was the responsibility of British workers to protest on behalf of colonial workers because ‘they could make louder protests and also make them more effective,’ presumably because of their proximity to the seats of government.¹³⁶ Special Branch officers noted that the IASB claimed at this meeting that they ‘intended to draw the British people’s attention to the oppression of the coloured masses in the Empire, where fascism was just as prevalent as in certain other European countries.’¹³⁷

In this way, IAFE/IASB public gatherings had another thing in common with those of the LCP, in that both placed a high value on the importance of educating the British people. However, in the case of the IAFE/IASB, their interest was primarily in educating working class Britons. Consequently, it is unsurprising that they would seek to hold the bulk of their public meetings in venues such as Trafalgar Square and Speakers’ Corner. Such locations offered the chance of engaging with passing Britons who may not have come intending to attend an IAFE/IASB event, but who might have taken an interest once they became aware of it. Indeed, the IASB appear to have been

¹³⁵ See Metropolitan Police report, 8 May 1938, MEPO 38/91.

¹³⁶ Metropolitan Police report, 8 May 1938, MEPO 38/91. On Stock, see Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, 85-86.

¹³⁷ Special Branch note, 10 May 1938, KV2/1824; MEPO 38/91; ‘Activities of the Bureau,’ *International African Opinion* August 1938: 16.

aware of this, and thus also hung banners up at their events proclaiming ‘workers of Britain support the colonial peoples.’¹³⁸ Such an approach was markedly different to that of the LCP, whose garden parties and indoor public gatherings were less likely to draw in passers-by. Not only does this relate back to the point made earlier about the way in which certain gatherings were, particularly in the case of the LCP, only restrictively ‘public,’ but it also underscores some of the central tactical and strategic differences between the two groups. Whereas, for the LCP, highlighting the everyday normality of interracial social interaction in conventionally construed British social situations such as garden parties was an important element of their accommodationist critique of British race relations, for the IASB the use of prominent central locations such as Trafalgar Square for overtly political rallies enabled them to position themselves as more directly oppositional, and facilitated their appeal to a wider audience for their educational endeavours. Both modes of public gathering, the overtly political rally and the supposedly ‘nonutilitarian’ garden party, made politically significant points, but the geographies of public performance reveal significant differences both in the ideological standpoints of the two groupings, and in their conceptions of politics and the tactics most appropriate for political action.

This desire to engage working class Britons also saw IAFE/IASB members taking to the platform in other contexts. In November 1935, for example, C. L. R. James spoke to the North London Independent Labour Party (ILP) alongside prominent ILP activist Fenner Brockway on Abyssinia.¹³⁹ Before long, he was lecturing around Britain and Ireland on matters relating both to Abyssinia and to international socialism. For example, in December 1935 he was in Dublin lecturing to a crowd interested in the ILP

¹³⁸ Metropolitan Police report, 8 May 1938, MEPO 38/91.

¹³⁹ A Shock: Communist denounces his party’s policy,’ *New Leader* 8 November 1935: 2.

on Abyssinia, and in March 1936 James spoke to ILP groups in Glasgow.¹⁴⁰ He later recalled being particularly close to a group of workers in Wales, who would often request he return and lecture to them.¹⁴¹ James also became a prominent lecturer and public speaker for British Trotskyists. The Indian activist Ajit Roy would later recall that the British Trotskyists ‘built a portable platform and the three of us, James, a tall West Indian, Stanton, a very Jewish looking chap from the East End, and myself, an Indian, [took] the portable platform to the shopping centres all over London, regarding ourselves as the vanguard of the proletariat!’ He recalled that ‘It is all very amusing – but people did listen – probably the very strangeness of it gave us an audience ... once James started speaking he always got a crowd.’¹⁴² The power of James to impress whilst speaking publicly was attested to by another of his Trotskyist associates, Louise Cripps, who later described him as ‘a charismatic speaker.’¹⁴³ Many more of James’s lectures to left-wing groups around London and beyond were advertised in the ILP’s periodical, the *New Leader*, and Fenner Brockway would later recall that as an orator, James was ‘immensely popular in the ILP,’¹⁴⁴ suggesting that the efforts of IAFE/IASB members to publicly engage with the British working classes were occasionally successful.

James was not alone amongst IAFE/IASB members in endeavouring to address British workers through association with organisations on the left. In 1938, both

¹⁴⁰ ‘Imperialism exposed: ILP attitude to Abyssinia dispute explained to Dublin audience,’ *New Leader* 13 December 1935: 3; *New Leader* 27 March 1936: 6.

¹⁴¹ Richardson, Chrysostom and Grimshaw, *C. L. R. James and British Trotskyism*: 3.

¹⁴² D. Renton (2007), *C. L. R. James: Cricket’s Philosopher King* London: Haus: 65.

¹⁴³ L. Cripps (1997), *C. L. R. James: Memories and Commentaries* London: Cornwall: 30.

¹⁴⁴ *New Leader* 5 February 1937: 6; 26 February 1937: 6; 5 March 1937: 6; F. Brockway (1977), *Towards Tomorrow* London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon: 129.

Padmore and Kenyatta lectured at an ILP summer school on colonial issues,¹⁴⁵ and Padmore also spoke at a large anti-war meeting held in London's Conway Hall in 1939.¹⁴⁶ During these years, Padmore and other IASB members also often lectured at meetings of the British Centre Against Imperialism, a small body affiliated to the ILP which met in Chalk Farm, London.¹⁴⁷ Besides all this, Padmore clearly lectured at a wide variety of ILP branches around Britain. When in 1941 he had to have his tonsils removed, a note appeared in the *New Leader* stating that 'George is not yet able to take on any Public Meetings ... we must not ask him to speak for some time. Branches need not worry. As soon as Comrade Padmore can do meetings it will be announced in no uncertain way in these columns.'¹⁴⁸ Padmore returned to public speaking at the ILP summer school of 1941, at which Chris Jones, another IASB member, also spoke.¹⁴⁹ Jones himself was often on the platform for the IASB in the late 1930s, became a regular speaker at leftist political rallies in the 1940s, for example reportedly speaking to an audience of over 1,000 in Bristol about conditions in the British colonies.¹⁵⁰ Reginald Reynolds later recalled that '[a]t public meetings Chris was dynamite. At his best in the open air, where his tremendous voice scorned the use of a microphone, he

¹⁴⁵ 'ILP summer school for comradeship and keen discussion,' *New Leader* 15 July 1938: 8.

¹⁴⁶ 'Huge anti-war meetings,' *New Leader* 24 November 1939: 2.

¹⁴⁷ E. Mannin (1939), *Privileged Spectator* London: Jarrolds: 150-151.

¹⁴⁸ J. McNair, 'Party notes and news,' *New Leader* 22 February 1941: 6.

¹⁴⁹ J. McNair, 'Party notes and news,' *New Leader* 5 July 1941: 6; 'Two Negro leaders,' *New Leader* 23 August 1941: 6.

¹⁵⁰ J. McNair, 'ILP renews pledge of international socialism at great May-day meetings,' *New Leader* 16 May 1942: 5.

would startle a crowd as much by his sudden vocal inflexions as by his blazing revolutionary wrath.’¹⁵¹

However, seeking to educate the British workers was not the only reason for IAFE/IASB members to participate in public gatherings. On many occasions, they took to the platform with the express intent of arguing for an alternative perspective on a particular issue or set of issues to that being taken by the organisation hosting that event. It is in this way that we can understand C. L. R. James speaking to a conference of the LCP in 1936, long after he had left this organisation. James had addressed a League conference as a member in March 1933. After this event, the LCP’s report had referred to him as a ‘brilliant young man,’ and carried a detailed report on his ‘eloquent address’ on ‘the West Indian.’¹⁵² At this point in 1933, James’s politics could perhaps best be described as ‘Fabian socialist.’¹⁵³ However, James’s political horizons were shifting fast, and he would soon be immersed in radical British politics. The impact this had on his relationship with the LCP can be gauged from the response to his address to the 1936 LCP conference, on ‘economic organisation in the Tropics.’ James’s fundamental argument, as reported in *The Keys*, was that ‘what we saw in Africa was capitalism in its vilest form. In Africa, as elsewhere, it was producing its own destroyer, the native proletariat, who were destined sooner or later, in company with their comrades elsewhere, to establish a free Africa.’ The talk reportedly resulted in him being ‘cross-examined on his view of the imminence of revolution in Africa, and on the theory that revolution could be an instrument of social progress.’ James also joined with Norman Leys in castigating Leonard Barnes’s belief, expressed in his own talk at the

¹⁵¹ Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*: 118.

¹⁵² ‘Conference report,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 5-6.

¹⁵³ C. Høgsbjerg (2006), ‘C.L.R. James and Italy’s conquest of Abyssinia,’ *Socialist History*, **28**: 17-36.

LCP conference, in the inherent values of African 'tribal culture'.¹⁵⁴ Clearly, James's politics had by this point moved a long way from those of the main members of the LCP, but speaking at one of the League's own conferences offered James the opportunity to present his new perspective to its membership, as well as to debate with prominent intellectuals interested in British imperialism and the African diaspora.

IAFE/IASB members also frequented a range of other conferences and public meetings in which imperial and global racial issues were being discussed. One such example can be seen in their participation at events held by the LAI. For example, at a conference of the LAI on the 10 March 1937 several members of what would become the IASB, including George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, Ras Makonnen and Chris Jones, were in attendance. Unsurprisingly, given that the LAI was a Communist-run organisation and Padmore had just undergone an acrimonious split with Communism, disagreement flared. Padmore himself addressed the conference, speaking about Africa, but he and Makonnen in particular reportedly opposed several of the motions proposed at the conference. Arnold Ward, himself a member of the LAI and a fellow West Indian, seems to have taken particular dislike to the actions of Padmore and Makonnen. The officer sent to report on the conference to Indian Political Intelligence, a secret intelligence service linked to the India Office, reported that 'Throughout the proceedings, a wide divergence of opinion was manifested between sections of the delegates and there was marked hostility to the platform upon certain of the resolutions submitted to the conference.' Tensions were so great that Ward and Makonnen were

¹⁵⁴ 'The annual conference,' *The Keys* July-September 1936: 4-7.

reported to have ‘come to blows,’ though ‘the fight was soon stopped and the incident hushed up.’¹⁵⁵

Padmore’s tense relationship with Communism was also played out at other public gatherings, such as the 1939 Conference on African Peoples, Democracy and World Peace, mentioned above. Communist reports of the conference left Padmore’s presence out entirely, which is hardly surprising given his acrimonious split from Communism. Later recollections of the event suggest that Communists present challenged Padmore’s presentation directly. Dorothy Abrahams, for example, recalled that a Communist element ‘tried to control the proceedings’ at the conference, and that they were particularly critical of Padmore, who calmly but firmly rebutted them. Amongst the other interested observers at the conference was the prominent imperial historian Margery Perham, who also noted Padmore’s contribution. In her notes on the event, Perham describes Padmore as ‘v. belligerent,’ and describes him as of the ‘agitator type,’ but she also notes that his speech was ‘Rather impressive. Much more self-possessed than any other African present, and aware of how to conduct public business.’ About the other conference attendees, Perham wrote that ‘Africans varied v. much. Some v. nice, quiet, sensible ones didn’t speak at all. On the whole those that spoke were impressive. V. nice manners, and nicely dressed.’ Other contributions to the conference, however, came in for withering criticism. She wrote, ‘Europeans present a ghastly collection - whose ignorance arrogance and stupidity would have taken a lot of beating. All Labour, or left of Labour. Mostly quite young ... A good many Indians present - also pretty nasty. The professional agitator type - but lacking the attractive

¹⁵⁵‘Extract from New Scotland Yard Report No. 85 dated 10th March 1937. League Against Imperialism – Annual Conference,’ in Indian Political Intelligence papers, India Office Records, British Library, IOR L/PJ/12/275.

naiveness of eg. Mr Kenyatta.’ Much can be read into Perham’s own prejudices from these comments, particularly the way in which she seems to favour non-white activists who are ‘quiet’ and ‘sensible,’ or else have some degree of ‘attractive naiveness.’ Clearly, she had little sympathy for the political left, regardless of race. The fact that the Conference brought together a multi-racial community of activists from a broad range of political positions demonstrates the importance of such events in forging connections between diverse activist networks, but Perham’s notes and other sources also enable some insight into the arguments and differences which could emerge at these events.

This section has argued that a desire to educate working class Britons about the nature of British imperialism, and its effects at home, underscored the way in which the IAFE/IASB used public gatherings. It affected the way in which material was presented from the platform, with an emphasis on drawing connections between colonial matters and British workers, and it also impacted on the choice of location, as well as the wider organisations to which IAFE/IASB members spoke publicly. Their differing conception of the role of public meetings, propaganda and education also impacted upon the locations in which IAFE/IASB public gatherings took place, the events in which its leading members participated, and the kinds of outlets in which reports of such events appeared.

Conclusion

The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress is by far the most well-known public gathering in which black West Indians participated during these years. Much scholarly work has been done on this event, and it is now true that ‘[t]he Manchester Congress has assumed considerable significance in the history of the end of colonial rule in

Africa.’ As David Killingray has argued, however, viewing the Manchester Congress in this way, as a starting point on the road to decolonisation, is ‘to read the significance of the event long after it occurred.’¹⁵⁶ It is just as important to engage with the historical context out of which the congress emerged. However, little has thus far been done to explore this wider nexus of public gatherings in the 1930s and 1940s. This is surprising, given that Ras Makonnen, a prominent figure in the organising of the Manchester Congress, noted in his autobiography that it ‘was not an isolated event, but just a natural outgrowth of a ferment of pan-African activity. It had been preceded in the 1930s and war years by innumerable conferences which had brought together West Africans, West Indians, and North American blacks’.¹⁵⁷ This chapter has attempted to recover some of these previously little-noted events and to argue for their importance to the organisational geographies of the LCP and IAFE/IASB, not simply in order to reconstruct a chronology out of which the 1945 Congress emerged, but in order to illustrate the wider milieu out of which this Congress came to take place.

In doing so, however, it has sought not just to recover a series of forgotten historical events, but to interpret them within the wider context of black West Indian activism in Britain. It has been shown that there were several similarities, but also important differences, between the ways in which the LCP and the IAFE/IASB utilised public gatherings. For the League, sociability was often as important as direct political posturing, and they thus held several events such as garden parties which, on the face of it, were ‘nonutilitarian’ in character. However, such gatherings in fact served an array of more ‘utilitarian’ functions. They enabled the League to come into contact with

¹⁵⁶ D. Killingray (2009), ‘Rights, land, and labour: Black British critics of South African policies before 1948,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies* **35:2**: 396-7.

¹⁵⁷ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 163.

leading colonial officials, imperial historians and colonial subjects visiting the metropolis. They also allowed the League to insert black cultural performances into the context of respectable British society, as well as to debate issues of global importance to the African diaspora. In these ways, LCP social gatherings made political points about the everyday normality of interracial sociability, and also worked to situate African diasporic peoples and cultural performances within conventionally construed British social situations.

For the IAFE/IASB, public gatherings were also important. Similarly to the LCP, this grouping emerged out of a series of public meetings, some of which were even held in the LCP's favoured venue, the Memorial Hall. Similarly to the LCP, the IAFE/IASB also viewed their involvement in public gatherings as part of an educational process. However, the latter group viewed education differently to the LCP, arguing that it was necessary to focus their educational work primarily on awakening the British working classes to the role of imperialism in capitalist dominance both in the colonies and in Britain. This pedagogic philosophy in turn impacted upon the geographies of IAFE/IASB public gatherings, leading them to concentrate on speaking out of doors and in settings which they hoped would draw them into contact with British workers. However, this was not the only setting in which IAFE/IASB members joined public gatherings. They also did so in order to engage critically with organisations with which they disagreed, such as the LCP or LAI.

In particular, it is clear that public gatherings held by black organisations in Britain were contested events. Not only did they disrupt the conventional beliefs of many white Britons who came into contact with them, unaccustomed as they were to the sight of African diasporic cultural performances, or articulate black speakers, but they also became sites in which black activists themselves could debate and disagree

with one another. We have seen this repeatedly, whether in the differing representations of LCP events in *The Keys* and the *Negro Worker*, in C. L. R. James's arguments with LCP members over the role of revolution in African social transformation, or in the battles between black members of the IAFE/IASB and those attached to the LAI. If, as Brent Edwards argues, African diasporic politics is marked by tension and division as much as unity, spaces of public performance offer one of the foremost places in which such divisions become apparent.

Carol Polsgrove has recently argued that black intellectuals in 1930s and 1940s Britain ought to be understood as a writerly community. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this argument is correct up to a point. However, confining the contours of public political activity in which members of the IAFE/IASB and the LCP were engaged to the field of writing, as Polsgrove does, is to limit things too much. Public gatherings were important parts of the political geographies of both these groups. They served a number of practical organisational purposes, such as bringing the work of these groups to wider public attention and enabling them to link up with wider individuals and organisations. However, they also played an important role in the broader creolisation of London. As we have seen, white British audiences were often taken aback by black public performances and the appearance of articulate black public speakers. If, as Bernard Porter has argued, 'the majority of people were unlikely to have been greatly concerned with the empire in this period,' then the persistence of black intellectuals on speaking publicly about imperialism, colonialism and their ramifications for the modern world in a diverse range of contexts offered a significant challenge to the dominant forms of public discourse.¹⁵⁸ By ensuring that issues which were not necessarily of primary interest for British people – the imperial aspects of the

¹⁵⁸ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*: 268.

Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the relationship between imperialism and the British working classes, African diasporic forms of cultural expression, and so on – black activists in Britain attempted to change the terms of British public discourse, and alter the ways in which race and empire were discussed within it.

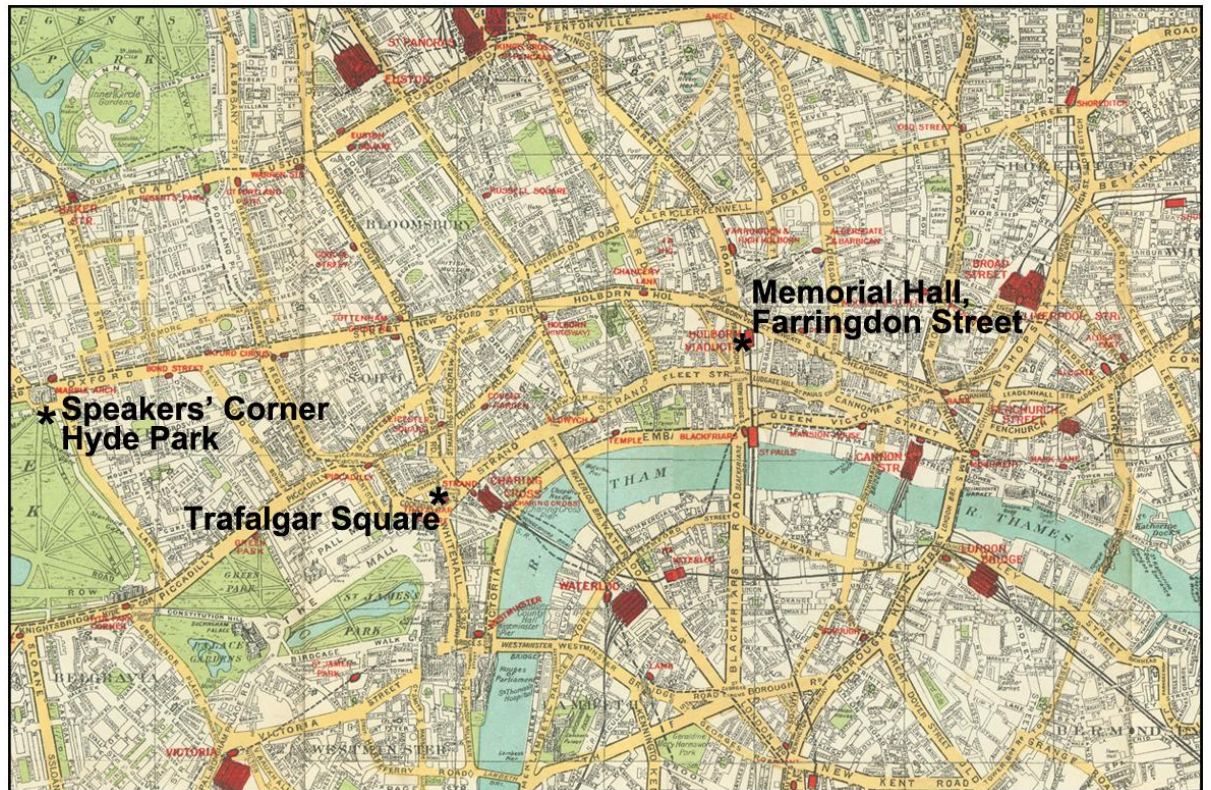


Fig 4.4: London map, showing main locations of public speaking by LCP and IASB/IAFE.

In this sense, the spaces in which black public events took place, the main ones of which are depicted on the map above, could become central locations for the coming together of the politics of empire and metropolitan society. No exact figures exist for the number of people who were spoken directly to, or read reports of, black West Indians on various platforms in the 1930s and 1940s, although we can infer from the vast array of gatherings discussed above, and the many more which have not been included, that it was a significant number. However, such figures are in a sense

unimportant. What mattered in terms of the role of black colonial public gatherings in imperial London was their very existence, as much as their extent and influence amongst the population. Simply to imagine Trafalgar Square, on a busy Saturday afternoon, adorned with posters announcing that ‘Africans demand the right to live in their own country,’ or ‘Abolish fascist methods in the colonies,’ whilst colonial Africans and West Indians join white Britons to reveal colonial abuses from the platform is to appreciate the way in which such public gatherings were crucial locations in the fraught process of creolisation.¹⁵⁹ Regardless of whether or not people paid attention, black West Indians used public gatherings in a variety of ways to insist upon the equal treatment of African diasporic and other colonial peoples.

¹⁵⁹ Metropolitan Police report, 8 May 1938, MEPO 38/91.

Chapter Five

'A living weapon in the struggle': Periodicals and political networks

Introduction

The history of periodicals produced by black people in Britain goes back at least to the early nineteenth century. The publication of *The Forlorn Hope* in 1817, by the Jamaican activist Robert Wedderburn, is thought to have been amongst the earliest black-run periodicals in Britain, described by E. P. Thompson as 'a little ill-printed journal.'¹ By the twentieth century, a broader, though still limited, array of black periodicals had begun to appear. Following the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London, the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams published the short-lived journal *The Pan-African*.² In 1911, the Egyptian Duse Mohamed Ali began publishing his *African Times and Orient Review*, an outgrowth of the 1911 Universal Races Congress held in London.³

These periodicals were often the sole black-run publication in Britain at any one time. However, by the 1930s this had begun to change.⁴ In 1926, the West African

¹ E. P. Thompson (1964), *The Making of the English Working Class* London: Random House: 806.

² C. Innes (2002), *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700-2000* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 172.

³ Innes, *History of Black and Asian Writing*: 182-199.

⁴ R. MacDonald (1992) 'The wisers who are far away: The role of London's black press in the 1930s and 1940s,' in J. Gundawara and I. Duffield (eds.), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain* Aldershot: Avebury: 150-168.

Students' Union (WASU) launched their periodical, *Wasu*, which offered readers a variety of contributions from predominantly West African authors on a diverse range of British and global affairs, and served as 'an ongoing forum to keep aspiring West Africa in touch with the broader metropolitan scene.'⁵ By the 1930s, *Wasu* was joined by *The Keys*, the periodical of the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP), and then sporadically by Marcus Garvey's *Black Man*, originally published in Jamaica prior to Garvey's move to Britain in 1935. In the late 1920s and early 1930s the official organ of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), *The International Negro Worker's Review*, which subsequently became *The Negro Worker*, could also be found in Britain, edited from 1930-1933 by George Padmore. It included contributions from an international group of writers, including Padmore himself and some British based black writers and activists such as the Barbadian Arnold Ward. Published from a variety of locations in Europe, initially Hamburg, *The Negro Worker* focused primarily on issues in the British Empire and the English speaking world.⁶ Later in the 1930s, the International African Service Bureau (IASB) also issued a number of short-lived periodicals, the most significant of which was the *International African Opinion*.

From this list, it is clear that by the 1930s a vibrant network of black periodicals were circulating in Britain and beyond. The onset of World War Two impacted significantly on the activities of the press in Britain, but throughout the 1940s WASU were able to maintain publication of *Wasu*, albeit more irregularly than during the 1920s and 1930s, and the LCP introduced a slimmed down publication entitled the *League of Coloured Peoples Newsletter* which they issued throughout wartime and beyond. The

⁵ MacDonald, 'The wisers who are far away': 153.

⁶ MacDonald, 'The wisers who are far away': 153-154; J. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* New York: Praeger: 18-38.

IASB, which in the 1940s was reformulated as the Pan-African Federation, were unable to maintain a periodical during wartime, but in 1947 they launched a quarterly publication called *Pan-Africa*, which ran for just over 12 months.

This chapter will focus on those periodicals which emerged in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s in which black West Indians were the driving force. The fact that Garvey's *Black Man* was first published in Jamaica, and that *The Negro Worker* was a Comintern initiative, means that they are not the focus here. Instead, the chapter will attend to those periodicals issued by the LCP, the IASB and the Pan-African Federation. As primarily the initiatives of black West Indians, these publications offer significant insights into the political thought and activism of these individuals and the organisations they established. However, they can also be treated as both historical artefacts and as circulating objects which were central elements of the political processes and networks in which they were embedded. The chapter begins by elaborating upon the theoretical framework for approaching periodicals both as textual representations of the past, and as material objects with circulatory histories of their own. It then turns to discuss specific periodicals, beginning first with *The Keys* and the *LCP News Letter*, followed by the various periodicals of the IASB, and finally *Pan-Africa*. It closes by offering some conclusions on the role of black West Indian periodicals in 1930s and 1940s Britain and the implications they have for understandings of the political networks within which organisations like the LCP, IASB and Pan-African Federation were operating in these years.

Space, politics, and periodical networks

In tracing the history of the East India Company, the geographer Miles Ogborn has drawn attention to the constitutive role of texts within the politics of empire. Ogborn has studied a variety of texts, from written letters to manuscripts, Royal decrees, newspapers and printed volumes, in order to explore the diverse writing practices of the East India Company, as well as the relationship between writing, written texts, and the power structures of the company and those it engaged with.⁷ Following on from Robert Darnton's 'communications circuit' model for the study of the history of books,⁸ Ogborn focuses on the 'concrete processes of the making, distribution, and use of texts as material objects' in order to emphasise simultaneously 'the groundedness and the mobility of written objects.'⁹ By treating texts as circulating objects which both emerge out of and are read within particular local contexts, Ogborn is able to draw out the significance of 'the geography of writing or communication' in broader social and political contexts.¹⁰ In particular, there is an acute sense in Ogborn's work of the political significance of various forms of writing. For the East India Company, Ogborn notes, '[w]riting was not simply a commentary upon what happened, it was very much part of the action.'¹¹ Writing and the production of texts thus serves as 'a political

⁷ M. Ogborn (2007), *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* London: University of Chicago Press; also D. Lambert (2005), 'The counter-revolutionary Atlantic: White West Indian petitions and pro-slavery networks,' *Social and Cultural Geography* 6: 407-422.

⁸ R. Darnton (1982), 'What is the history of books?', *Daedalus* 111:3: 65-83.

⁹ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 6, 11.

¹⁰ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 10; P. Adams (2009), *Geographies of Media and Communication* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹¹ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 26.

technology that not only is formed by the social relations that made it work, but also acts to shape those social relations.’¹² Within the imperial context, Ogborn argues that ‘a close consideration of forms of writing, reading and printing is well placed’ to reveal ‘the contingencies of imperial power and the agency of colonized peoples.’¹³ Such an emphasis allows Ogborn to touch on the argument that ‘a longer-term view’ than his own seventeenth and eighteenth century focus ‘sees the construction of print as the preeminent technology of anti-imperial nationalism.’¹⁴

Ogborn is not alone in drawing attention to the constitutive social and political role of various forms of text. Historical geographers of science, for example, have explored a range of textual forms and the diverse geographical networks of publishing, translation, readership and reviewing within which they were embedded.¹⁵ Meanwhile, scholars more interested in the political geographies of activist networks have similarly attended to the importance of textual forms. David Featherstone, for example, has stressed the importance of texts as ‘part of the production and reproduction of particular networked social relations.’ In Featherstone’s account, texts are viewed as ‘constitutive of world-building activities, and not just representing such activities,’ and ought thus to

¹² Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 274.

¹³ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 14-15.

¹⁴ Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 16.

¹⁵ C. Withers (2007), *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically About the Age of Reason* London: University of Chicago Press: 50-57, 167-187; R. Mayhew (2007), ‘Materialist hermeneutics, textuality and the history of geography: Print spaces in British geography, c. 1500-1900,’ *Journal of Historical Geography* **33:3**: 466-488.

be situated as part of the ‘dynamic spatial practices through which ... movements constituted and negotiated geographies of connection.’¹⁶

Recent work on African diasporic political forms has similarly drawn attention to the formative role of texts, and especially periodicals and newspapers, in the formation of diasporic identities. Penny von Eschen has shown that in the 1930s and 1940s the international black press formed ‘a dense nexus’ stretching ‘[f]rom Pittsburgh to Lagos to Chicago to London to New York to Johannesburg’ and beyond.¹⁷ Extending von Eschen’s ‘dense nexus’ to incorporate Paris as well, Brent Edwards has argued that black periodicals in the early twentieth century both established the ground on which colonial nationalist identities could be built, and operated ‘as the “technical means” for representing the imagined community of diaspora.’¹⁸

Edwards places particular importance on the role of periodicals in articulating the complex transnational linkages required to practise a diasporic identity. The ability of periodicals to draw together diverse issues from across the globe and to situate them side by side on the printed page under the sign of an adversarial racial community constitutes, in Edwards’s account, the most radical contribution of black periodicals to political thought and practice. Edwards deploys the concept of ‘coevalness’ in order to grapple with the temporal dimensions of internationalism,¹⁹ but it is also important to recognise that the rendering of events and identities as diasporic also requires a spatial

¹⁶ D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell: 63.

¹⁷ P. von Eschen (1997), *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anti-colonialism, 1937-1957* New York: Cornell University Press: 8, 14-17.

¹⁸ B. Edwards (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism* Harvard University Press: 115.

¹⁹ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 118

element. If, in the words of Benedict Anderson, periodicals and newspapers can provide ‘the refraction of “world events” into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers,’²⁰ then they do so by linking events and personalities not just across time, but across space too. In this sense, the concept of coevalness seems deficient, given that it neglects this spatial dimension. Black periodicals brought together a range of events taking place across time and space, and situated them side-by-side on the printed page so that, for example, racialised lynchings in the Southern USA, ‘colour bar’ exclusions in Europe, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, might all be situated together, related to one-another through ‘the framing of modern identity under the sign of race.’²¹ By doing so, they played an active and constitutive role in the formation of African diasporic political and cultural identities. Periodicals, as material objects, circulated between an international and multi-racial community of readers and helped create a sense of racial and organisational unity, but they also acted to mark out the boundaries of the African diaspora itself, mapping the locations and events that were central to understanding what sort of identity was being claimed under the sign of racial unity.

Such a conceptualisation feeds back to the work of Ogborn and others discussed above. If, as Edwards avers, periodicals were a primary conduit through which conceptions of the African diaspora travelled and took shape, then they can be treated as circulating objects which are at once locally produced and more widely mobile.²² Consequently, tracing the geographies of production and circulation which underlay these periodicals helps to reveal their role within wider political networks. At the same

²⁰ B. Anderson (2006 [1983]), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* London: Verso: 65.

²¹ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 116.

²² Ogborn, *Indian Ink*: 11-12.

time, such an understanding does not detach periodicals from their role as representational mechanisms within which the contours of the African diaspora, and related notions of blackness and internationalism, were debated and performed. The publishing of periodicals by black West Indian activists in London connected these materialist and discursive geographies, functioning as a mode of political practice that produced texts which both circulated within the wider activist networks that black West Indians were a part of, and in turn played formative roles in the construction and shaping both of these networks, and of the particular diasporic identities present within them.

‘Unity within our ranks’: *The Keys* and the League of Coloured Peoples Newsletter



Fig 5.1. Masthead from cover of first issue of *The Keys*

For the LCP, periodicals were openly acknowledged to be physical embodiments of their overall strategy of ‘[c]ooperation between black and white.’²³ As the opening editorial of *The Keys*, first launched in 1933, explained, the title of this new venture was intended to be ‘symbolic of what the League is striving for – the opening of doors and avenues now closed to Coloured peoples, and, inspired by Aggrey, the harmonious co-operation of the races.’²⁴ The name had been derived from the Gold Coast educationalist

²³ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January-March 1937: 29.

²⁴ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 2.

J. E. K. Aggrey, and was intended to highlight the multi-racial nature of the LCP, illustrating that ‘musical harmony was only possible when the black and white keys of the piano were played together.’²⁵ Whilst the name of the journal came from Aggrey, its perceived purpose was derived from Charles Darwin. Harold Moody wrote in his opening article that ‘Darwin declared that it is a very easy thing to allow the imagination to die for lack of exercise and we feel this is what has happened in the case of many of our English friends so far as our race is concerned.’ With this in mind, Moody explained the purpose of the new periodical. ‘It is the aim of this journal,’ he continued, ‘simply to supply the required exercise both for our friends here and for those overseas.’ Moody thus saw *The Keys* as providing a space in which ideas relating to race, and blackness in particular, could be aired, given that these subjects were so often absent within wider public debate. Moody’s Presidential ‘foreword’ to the new periodical can be read as an attempt to frame the form which the periodical would take, attempting to situate multi-racial cooperation at the heart of the endeavour. It also sought to set out the kinds of people Moody hoped would read *The Keys*, with the LCP President calling for ‘the support of a large and sympathetic public for this new venture’ amongst ‘all who possess vision.’²⁶ That Moody desired a readership amongst what he perceived to be the ‘visionary’ elements of all races is no surprise, echoing as it does broader themes in his understanding of the LCP as a multi-racial organisation centred on respectable, thoughtful and statesmanlike activities, as discussed in chapter three.

²⁵ D. Killingray (2003), “‘To do something for the race’: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,” in B. Schwarz (ed.), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 63.

²⁶ H. Moody, ‘Foreword by the president,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 1.

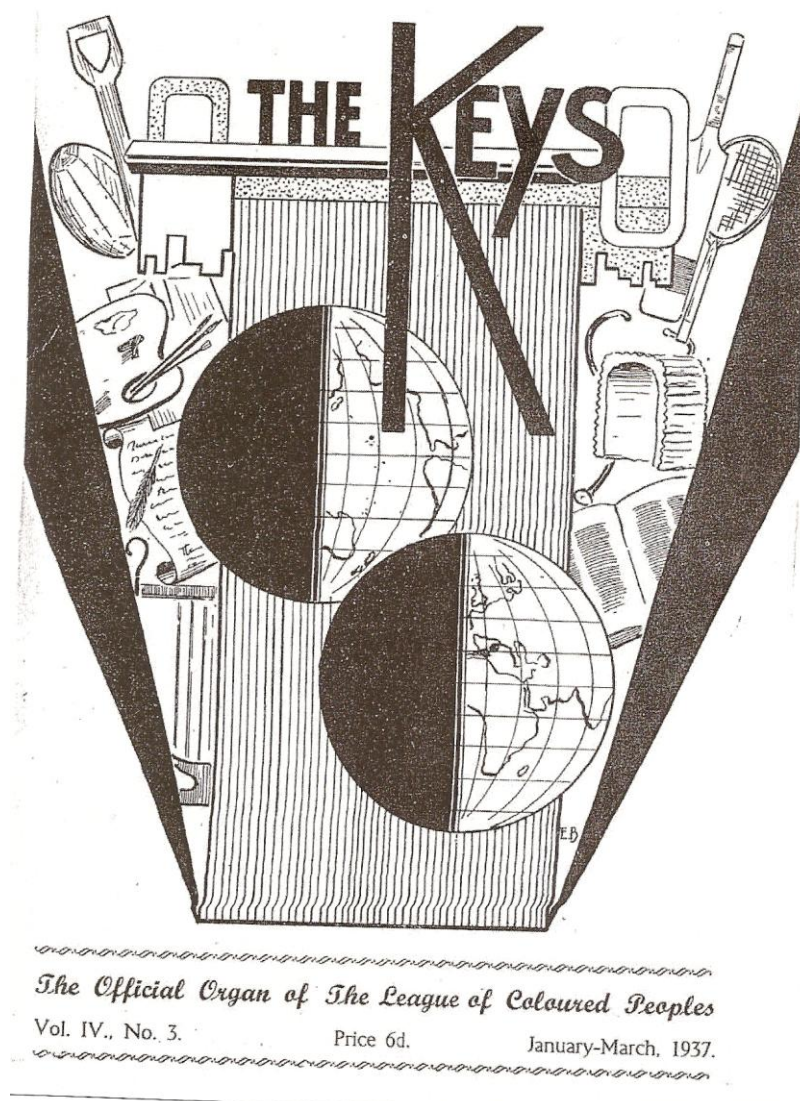


Fig 5.2. Front cover of *The Keys* January-March 1937

The first editor of *The Keys* was David Tucker, a Barrister from Bermuda. In his opening editorial, Tucker wrote that ‘[i]t has not taken the League long to discover that an organ which could be read, and sent to our many friends and well-wishers was urgently needed.’ This statement suggests one important role of *The Keys* within the broader organisational geography of the LCP, that of tying together a broad community which had already begun to cohere around the organisation. With the League having a membership spread around Britain and, in some cases, further afield, periodicals helped convey a sense of being able to participate in an organisation even from afar. In this sense, it was the periodical as material object that helped tie together the LCP’s

disparate membership. Positioning the periodical as apolitical and objective, Tucker wrote that '[w]e hope always to state the true facts on any issue of importance concerning people of colour, in a fair, unbiased and dispassionate manner.' And yet, only a few lines later, he wrote that 'we have reached a critical period in the history of our race,' and went on to describe recent incidents of racial antagonism in Kenya, the USA, and Australia, as well as the 'persecution of the Jews in Germany,' whilst situating these global happenings alongside recent events in Cardiff, Liverpool and London, where non-white sailors had recently been meeting with racial prejudice in their quest for employment.²⁷ Whilst Tucker thus attempted on the one hand to suggest that *The Keys* would offer dispassionate analysis of contemporary global affairs, it was clear also that on the question of racism and the colour bar they would be particularly critical.

Moody's foreword and Tucker's editorial give a clear indication of the purpose which *The Keys* was intended to serve at its outset. As an explicitly inter-racial endeavour, it was supposed to offer a space in which questions of racial prejudice on a global scale, but particularly centred on Britain and its empire as well as the USA, could be discussed and debated. The periodical openly committed itself to focusing on objective facts, but simultaneously took political positions on global racial antagonism. Practically, the journal was intended to enable the LCP to communicate with its members and those who might be interested in its work, and thus would serve a central role in the organisational geography of the LCP. As the LCP put it in one editorial, '[t]he power of the press is ... needed to bring our cause before the scattered millions of the British Empire.'²⁸ Finally, the journal would, through intelligent debate and

²⁷ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* July 1933: 1-2.

²⁸ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* January 1934: 41.

commentary, position the League as the foremost black-led organisation in Britain, and allow them to take on the leadership role in forging ‘unity within our ranks’.²⁹

In the second issue of *The Keys*, the editorial announced with pride that the first issue had been ‘enthusiastically received by readers, not only in this country, but in Africa, the West Indies and America.’ It also reported that ‘every available copy was out by the middle of August,’ following the publication date of July. Thus, according to the League’s own testimony, their periodical had been popularly taken up and appreciated around the Atlantic world. Before long, they would claim that circulation had reached 2000, spread around ‘East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, India, West Indies, Bermuda, America, and Great Britain.’³⁰ Extracts from a range of prominent individuals were printed praising *The Keys*, including from The Prince of Wales, as well as colonial officials such as Sir Ransford Slater, Sir Edward Denham, and Sir Donald Cameron, who wrote that he had ‘read all of it’ and that he ‘found it very interesting, although – naturally, I suppose – I do not agree with every view expressed in it.’³¹ The League also printed extracts from colonial newspapers, including *The Gold Coast Guardian* and *The Jamaican Times*, which had lavished praise on *The Keys*, and they also noted that other periodicals – primarily amongst the religious press, including *The Friend*, *The Christian Endeavour Times*, and *The Christian World* – had written favourably of the new publication.³² In doing so, they situated *The Keys* within a broader textual network of periodicals and newspapers based in and circulating between

²⁹ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* July 1933: 1.

³⁰ ‘Third Annual General Meeting,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934:70.

³¹ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* October 1933: 21.

³² ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* October 1933: 21.

Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, establishing *The Keys* as part of a material network of publications which traversed the Atlantic.

In early issues of *The Keys*, materials referenced within its pages included those issued by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in the USA, as well as press releases from International Labour Defence (ILD), another organisation based in the USA who were leading an international campaign against the imposition of the death penalty on the ‘Scottsboro Boys’.³³ As well as these materials, the League also noted early on that they were receiving copies of newspapers from throughout the empire, including *The Demerara Tribune*, *The Lagos Daily News*, *Advance India*, and *The Bermuda Fraternal Review*.³⁴ *The Times* of London was frequently quoted in *The Keys* when it covered matters relating either to imperialism or race and racism, and in early issues a section entitled ‘Gleanings’ summarised articles drawn from an international array of periodicals and newspapers.³⁵ In its second issue, the ‘Gleanings’ covered only newspapers and periodicals published in Britain, though some of these related to colonial matters, such as the *West India Committee Circular*.³⁶ January 1934 proved to be the last outing for the ‘Gleanings,’ but the LCP continued to run short summaries of global happenings in a form which suggested they had been drawn from a diverse series of newspapers and periodicals through sections of their own

³³ S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: esp. 20-26. Materials from the NAACP and ILD are mentioned in *The Keys* October 1933: inside back cover.

³⁴ *The Keys* October 1933: inside back cover.

³⁵ ‘Gleanings,’ *The Keys* October 1933: 36-38, 40.

³⁶ ‘Gleanings,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 63.

periodical entitled ‘*The Keys disclose*’ and ‘Here and there’.³⁷ Occasionally, they were forced to respond to criticism of their organisation in the colonial press, as when the British-based Barbadian Arnold Ward published what *The Keys* described as ‘a scathing attack on Dr Moody and the LCP’ in *The Gold Coast Spectator*.³⁸

The Keys thus partook in a dialogue with other organisations and the wider metropolitan and colonial press. In printing extracts from correspondence and press discussion of *The Keys*, as well as material sent to them by other organisations or clippings from other newspapers, the LCP explicitly positioned the magazine within a broad set of networks. The correspondence from prominent persons served to bolster the impression that the LCP was a respectable organisation capable of influencing those with political control over the British Empire, and positioned *The Keys* as a crucial tool in these endeavours. Similarly, printing extracts from the colonial press suggested that *The Keys* had enabled the League to forge connections with people throughout the empire, and with respectable organisations in Britain. By referencing such publications, the League explicitly attempted to situate themselves within an international public sphere of discussion and debate over matters relating to imperialism and global racial issues.

³⁷ ‘The Keys disclose,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934: 71; *The Keys* Vol. 2 No.1 (n.d. but 1934): 19; *The Keys*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (n.d. but 1934): 42-43; *The Keys* January-March 1935: 58-60.

³⁸ ‘Attack on the LCP,’ *The Keys* January-March 1935: 58. Ward was described by the Quaker John Fletcher in 1931 as ‘about the most influential of the resident Negroes [sic] in London.’ Letter from Fletcher to Walter White of the NAACP, 24 July 1931, quoted in Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 29. He became a leading figure in the Negro Welfare Association (NWA), and an outspoken critic of the LCP and of Moody in particular. A. Ward, ‘The Negro situation in England,’ *Negro Worker* October-December 1934: 7-9.

The content of *The Keys* was broad, and included everything from political analysis to book and theatre reviews or poetry. However, in broad outline the contents of the periodical represent an attempt by the LCP to sketch out their understanding of the global colour line, drawing together diverse parts of the world through their shared involvement in contemporary questions centred on racism and the African diaspora. Read in this way, the contents demonstrate the LCP's view that racial antagonism existed across the British Empire – especially in Southern Africa³⁹ and the West Indies⁴⁰ – and beyond, in places such as the USA and Liberia,⁴¹ as well as at home in Britain.⁴² Consequently, the periodical itself served a world-building purpose, mapping out the

³⁹ For the LCP's concern with Southern Africa, see N. Magxaka, 'Colour bar in South Africa,' *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 1 (n.d. but 1934): 13, 19; 'Southern Rhodesia,' *The Keys* April-June 1936: 44; H. Lewis, 'General Herzog's demands for the handing over to British Protectorates of Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland,' *The Keys* Vol. 2 No. 1 (n.d. but 1934): 10, 12-13; 'Divine mission and divine right,' *The Keys* April-June 1937: 54.

⁴⁰ C. L. R. James, 'West Indies self government,' *The Keys* April-June 1934: 72, 84; 'Revolt in the West Indies,' *The Keys* January-March 1936: 37-38. 'Labour unrest in the colonies,' *The Keys* October-December 1937: 45; 'Labour disturbances in the West Indies,' *The Keys* January-March 1938: 64-66; W. Arthur Lewis, 'Notes on the Trinidad Report,' *The Keys* April-June 1938: 80-82.

⁴¹ Aside from articles in *The Keys*, Moody also debated Liberian politics, slavery and British humanitarianism at length with the abolitionist John Harris. See the following letters, all in the *Manchester Guardian*: 'The future of Liberia: Proposed League control,' 30 October 1933: 16; 'The future of Liberia: Native races oppressed,' 2 November 1933: 18; 'The Government of Liberia: The American loan,' 7 November 1933: 18; 'The Government of Liberia,' 8 November 1933: 18; 'The future of Liberia: Necessary reforms,' 23 November 1933: 18; C. R. Buxton (1934), *Impressions of Liberia: Report to the League of Coloured Peoples* London: League of Coloured Peoples.

⁴² Most issues of *The Keys* discuss race and racism in Britain. For an example, see N. Sharpe, 'Cardiff's coloured population,' *The Keys* January 1934: 44-45.

areas in which the LCP saw the operation of a global colour line and enabling analysis of world events to account for the role played by racism and racialised identities.

However, in positioning analyses of the British colour bar alongside those on global race relations the League did not simply juxtapose the two. Instead, they insisted on the inter-related nature of both. Such a position recurred throughout *The Keys*, as when an editorial called on readers to ‘[r]emember the coloured countries which form the Empire ... [r]emember the sufferings of our fellow subjects in Kenya, in Rhodesia, in South Africa, in the Protectorates ... [r]emember the difficulties of the coloured man in England ... [r]emember the misery of the coloured children in the seaport towns ... Will it always be race against race?’ In these reflections on racism in metropolitan Britain, the League insisted that it was deeply implicated in the running of the British Empire itself. In their efforts to contest the perceived prevalence of racism in the imperial social formation the LCP appealed to notions of Britishness as multi-racial, and asked that non-white peoples be included as Britons through their participation in the Empire.⁴³ Chapter four showed that similar arguments to these were made by LCP members when speaking publicly. In this way, both written texts and public gatherings worked to reinforce the League’s message of inter-racial harmony, and functioned as important tools in the LCP’s efforts both to analyse and to shape global racial relations. In combination with other modes of political practice, *The Keys* sought to play an active and constitutive role in building a world free from racism.

The Keys also reveals the differences between leading LCP members over how best to understand the nature of racism, and concurrently how best to ground an understanding of African diasporic unity. As we have seen, Moody advocated a

⁴³ A. S. Rush (2002), ‘Imperial identity in colonial minds: Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples,’ *Twentieth Century British History* **13:4**: 356-383.

Christian humanitarian approach which called for reform across the British Empire, rather than abolition of it. The first editor of *The Keys*, David Tucker, who wrote ‘Let the Union Jack wave, but only let it wave over an Empire where there is equality of opportunity, regardless of race,’ was broadly in agreement with this line, and with Moody’s vision of ‘imperial Britishness.’⁴⁴ In some senses, Una Marson, the second editor of *The Keys*, shared the focus on respectability and responsible approaches to politics advocated by Moody and Tucker, hence her assertion in an editorial for *The Keys* that ‘Communism won’t help us.’⁴⁵ However, whilst Moody’s vision of racial uplift centred on the important role of significant black individuals, such as Booker T. Washington and Aggrey, Marson took a different approach.⁴⁶ For her, racial antagonism was not as unintended as Moody made out. Rather, black people around the world ‘have barriers raised against them and their life is one long battle.’ Implicitly criticising Moody’s focus on black achievers, Marson wrote that ‘we fool ourselves into thinking that a handful of Negroes who have attained can be turned into a race.’ For Marson, what was important was not individual accomplishment, nor even primarily inter-racial cooperation, but the fact that ‘the Negro must come together.’ She believed in a form of racial unity which transcended national divisions, and she argued trenchantly that ‘[i]f the matter of nationality makes it more difficult for American Negroes to join Negroes in the British Empire, under the British flag we must unite ... as a race.’⁴⁷

⁴⁴ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January 1934: 42.

⁴⁵ ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January-March 1935: 46.

⁴⁶ For Moody’s focus on ‘really great Africans and persons of African descent,’ see Killingray, ‘To do something for the race’: 63.

⁴⁷ All quotes from Marson in this paragraph come from ‘Editorial,’ *The Keys* January-March 1935: 45-46.

Marson's successor as editor was W. Arthur Lewis, who studied at the London School of Economics from 1933.⁴⁸ By his second issue as editor of *The Keys*, Lewis had disposed of the editorial all together and opened the magazine with a 'current comment,' presumably penned by himself. He, too, departed from Moody's insistence that racism came about primarily due to ignorance, writing instead that 'colour prejudice is not really spontaneous. It is the result of a deliberate policy, executed for sound economic reasons. Colour prejudice is the active expression of the theory of racial superiority, the foundation of the modern excuse for imperialism.' Whilst no doubt this stronger criticism of the imperial system as being fundamentally grounded in economic exploitation based on racial superiority was linked to growing unease over the labour unrest in the Caribbean and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Lewis must also be credited with introducing the focus on the political economy of empire. He argued that 'Empires exist to compel coloured races to grow cheap rubber, cotton, sugar, etc' and that '[t]he man in the street in Europe is deliberately made to feel himself superior to coloured persons.' He also followed Marson by depicting racial oppression as uniting black people in international solidarity, writing that '[t]oday, as never before, there is a consciousness of racial unity. ... Nothing has been more potent to achieve this unity than the operation of colour prejudice, not only in the colonies, where it is recognised as an integral part of the economic system, but in Europe as well.'⁴⁹

However, whilst Marson and Lewis offered differing assessments of the emergence of racial prejudice to Moody, and also articulated stronger visions of racial

⁴⁸ R. Tignor (2006), *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: 17-24. For Lewis's academic success, see 'Outstanding student success,' *The Keys* July-September 1937: 6.

⁴⁹ 'Current comment,' *The Keys* January-March 1936: 29-30.

unity grounded firmly in resistance to oppression, they were at least close to him in their political perspectives. Lewis shared Moody's mistrust of anti-imperialists, and though on good terms with Marxist black West Indians such as George Padmore and C. L. R. James he 'found no appeal in [their] strident Marxism.'⁵⁰ Marson too, as we have seen, eschewed Communism in the pages of *The Keys*, and shared Moody's belief that '[w]e are under a democratic government and that government is acting as trustees for us until we can stand on our feet.'⁵¹ The same could not be said, however, of the Barbadian Peter Blackman, who took over the post of editor in mid 1938, serving for 12 months until the final issue of *The Keys* in the middle of 1939. Blackman had joined the Communist Party in 1937,⁵² and was also a member of the NWA, an organisation committed to 'the struggle against colonial oppression,'⁵³ and linked to the Communist-led League Against Imperialism (LAI).⁵⁴ Although Moody welcomed him into the post, and expressed his hope that *The Keys* would 'achieve exploits' under his editorial control,⁵⁵ it was not long before differences in their perspectives began to show. In a contribution to the debate over proposals to enable Germany to retake control of League

⁵⁰ Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*: 34.

⁵¹ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* January-March 1935: 46.

⁵² See the biographical details contained at the start of the file on Blackman in The National Archives, Kew, KV 2/1838.

⁵³ Report of the International Secretariat of the LAI for 1935, in the papers of Reginald Bridgeman, Hull History Centre, U DBN/25/1.

⁵⁴ Jean Jones suggests that Blackman joined the NWA in September 1937. See J. Jones (1997), *The Anti-colonial Politics and Policies of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1951* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton: 163.

⁵⁵ 'The President's Message,' *The Keys* July-September 1938: 4.

of Nations protectorates in Africa stripped from it after World War One,⁵⁶ Blackman wrote that whilst Hitler's attempt to acquire territory in the Sudetenland was 'extravagant and incompatible with ... national independence,' it was nonetheless the case that 'the British Government is conducting a campaign of the most savage repression in all colonial countries.'⁵⁷ The clear inference was that British colonial governments differed little from that of Hitler when it came to their readiness to deploy violence against the people of another country. Unsurprisingly, Moody did not share this perspective, arguing instead that '[t]he reply to Hitler's claim to Colonies is to produce colonies of free independent, progressive, happy and healthy people.' He went on to describe the campaign for such an imperial system as a 'glorious cause' towards which to work. Thus, whilst Blackman responded to the debate over German appeasement by highlighting the violence of British imperialism, Moody took it as an occasion to restate his appeal for imperial reforms which would produce a benevolent form of imperial governance.⁵⁸

These political differences amongst the editorial groupings of *The Keys*, and the various debates between editors and the League's President Harold Moody, demonstrate that *The Keys* did not simply espouse a single interpretation of the relationship between

⁵⁶ On the wider debate, see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*: 137-143, 241-247; M. Callahan (2004), *A Sacred Trust: The League of Nations in Africa, 1929-1946* Brighton: Sussex Academic Press: 87-93.

⁵⁷ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* October-December 1938: 1-3.

⁵⁸ Harry O'Connell, the black Cardiff activist, later told St Clair Drake that Moody was well aware of Blackman's communism, but that he 'needed a man like Blackman and he thought he could control him.' Notes of St Clair Drake interview with O'Connell, no date, entitled 'Attitudes to Padmore-Mckonnen [sic]-James Set: O'Connell,' in St Clair Drake Papers, Schomburg Centre for Research in Black Culture, Sc Mg 309, Box 62, file 4.

the global black population and the effects of imperialism and racial oppression. Instead, the periodical itself served as a stage on which leading LCP figures could articulate their competing understandings of blackness and internationalism. If, as was argued earlier, the production of texts plays a constitutive role in the construction of social and political worlds, then these debates in print between leading LCP figures demonstrate how an organisational periodical could serve as a platform for leading figures in that organisation to debate the kind of world they were working to create. Whilst all those involved in the project shared a commitment to challenging racism and racial oppression, this left considerable space for alternate political perspectives on the motivating factors for racism, and the best ways in which these could be challenged.

The onset of war hampered the LCP's efforts to regularly produce *The Keys*, the final issue being published in July-September 1939. From October, members and subscribers received a short *Letter*, accompanied by a separate document entitled *News Notes*. The *Letter* was signed by Harold Moody, while the contents of the *News Notes* varied from brief reprints of articles from other publications and reports on LCP activities to more substantial essays. Running to little more than four pages, these informally produced publications represented a dramatic shift from the professional appearance of *The Keys*. This is hardly surprising, given the paper shortages which afflicted the broader publishing and printing industries with the onset of war. Yet, in another sense, it was also unfortunate timing given that, as Valerie Holman has argued, wartime England saw the emergence of a 'new reading public,' for whom reading became an important pastime in the context of regular blackouts and the limitations placed on other leisure activities.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ V. Holman (2008), *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England, 1939-1945* London: British Library: 27, 47-54, 62.

In his opening *Letter*, Moody noted that financial contributions which had been expected from the colonies were now unlikely to arrive, and thus the LCP were looking for donations from supporters towards clearing the League's £297 debt. Nevertheless, he was keen to stress that 'the exigencies of war make our existence more necessary than ever.'⁶⁰ The first issue of the *News Notes* included a short note on the demise of *The Keys*. 'Owing to the increased expense of publication and our depleted funds', the LCP asked that readers accept the shortened publications as an intermediate measure, which 'will be sent out as opportunity permits and occasion demands.' Emphasising the League's awareness of the important role played by periodicals, they stressed their hope that they would soon 'replace this publication by a larger and more important organ which will serve the needs of our people the world over and thus command a much larger circulation.'⁶¹

The content of the *Letter* and *News Notes* proved popular with readers, with Moody noting that 'circulation goes up by fifty with each issue.'⁶² Letters were published from members in locations as diverse as London and Grenada lavishing praise on the *News Notes*, particularly for its examination of the colour bar as it existed amongst commanding officers in the military.⁶³ The response to the LCP's call for financial assistance was also swift and, given the limited size of the organisation, somewhat remarkable. By November, £54 had been forthcoming from 36 donors, and nobody had sent in a complaint about the reduced size of their periodical.⁶⁴ Moody argued that the *Letter* and *News Notes* were intended to 'convey to you ... how we feel

⁶⁰ H. Moody, *Letter* October 1939: 1-2.

⁶¹ *News Notes* October 1939: 2.

⁶² *Letter* March 1940: 2

⁶³ 'Letters from members,' *News Notes* March 1940: 5-6.

⁶⁴ *Letter* November 1939: 1.

about those matters which touch us deeply, and ... to secure your understanding and co-operation,' explicitly articulating the public role of the publications and their place within the LCP's organisational apparatus.⁶⁵ He also reiterated the role of periodicals within the League's wider anti-racist work, writing that 'we are the only Organ in the Country which is making a conscious effort to create a new climate in the racial relations between black and white by explaining the aims and aspirations of the black man and endeavouring to relate them with those of the white man.'⁶⁶ This focus on the transformative capacities of periodicals gestures towards the role which the LCP hoped they would play in creolising the metropolis.

Despite their troubled finances, the LCP were soon able to put their periodical on a more stable footing thanks to a donation of £50 from an unnamed reader. The donation allowed the League to launch a properly printed periodical once more, albeit noticeably smaller than *The Keys*. In April 1940, the new monthly publication, the LCP *News Letter*, was published for the first time. This new venture kept the same structure as had been used in preceding months, opening with a 'Letter' from Moody, followed by a series of 'News notes'. Moody also added a 'Preface' to the opening issue in which he thanked the anonymous donor, and asked for help from readers to enable the LCP to increase the circulation of their periodical to 10,000. The League's finances, he reported, had improved dramatically, reducing their pre-war debts to just over £115, in part thanks to a strengthened overseas membership which reportedly numbered thirty in Sierra Leone and a small number in Jamaica.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Letter* December 1939: 1.

⁶⁶ *Letter* January 1940: 1.

⁶⁷ 'Preface', *News Letter* April 1940: 2. A branch in British Guiana was also established. See 'Our British Guiana branch,' *News Letter* August 1940: 82. On the LCP overseas, see B. Josiah (2010), 'Organizing

The *News Letter* continued to air the LCP's view, inspired by Moody, that racism in Britain was 'not, as such, indigenous,' but derived 'from a fear of incompatibility' brought about in part by the 'imperial background of racial relations.'⁶⁸ However, it also represented a narrowing of the divide between the supposed black radicals in Britain and their more conservative counterparts in the LCP. For example, an article by Padmore appeared in an LCP periodical for the first time, and Moody also took the unprecedented step of quoting Padmore at length on the need for global self-determination, though he qualified Padmore's statement by adding that self-determination would not necessarily detract from loyalty to Britain.⁶⁹ Padmore was also thanked by the LCP for providing them with information on a proposed march of African-Americans to Washington in protest against the colour bar in the USA.⁷⁰ Alongside their more open stance towards Padmore, the League also grew firmer in their criticisms of the imperial establishment in Britain. For example, in a fierce review of the book *Africans and British Rule*, W. Arthur Lewis argued that its author, the Oxford-based imperial historian Margery Perham 'is so busy asking whether Africans are inferior and justifying racial prejudice that she shows no more sign of having glimpsed [the] key problems than do the [colonial] rulers whose apologists she has elected to be.'⁷¹ Even Moody became more forthrightly critical of certain imperial

within the diaspora: Claude H. A. Denbow, Howard University, and the League of Coloured Peoples,' *Journal of African American History* **95:2**: 229-247.

⁶⁸ 'Colour prejudice in Britain,' *News Letter* March 1941: 133-134.

⁶⁹ G. Padmore, 'Negro governor heads revolt in French colonial empire,' *News Letter* October 1940: 15-18; *News Letter* May 1941: 31.

⁷⁰ 'American Negroes to march on Washington,' *News Letter* November 1942: 50-51.

⁷¹ 'Africans and British Rule, by Margery Perham,' *News Letter* September 1941: 125-130. The review drew a response from M. M. Green, from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, in

policies, appearing to grow more impatient with the continuance of the colour bar as war dragged on. In late 1941, the LCP published correspondence in the *News Letter* between Moody and the Colonial Office regarding land policy in Southern Rhodesia. Moody argued that proposed legislation was segregationist, and that it embodied the spreading of 'South African' policy northwards. As if to emphasise the imperial nature of the colour bar as he saw it developing, Moody also made reference to the recent detainment in Jamaica of a number of labour leaders, including W. A. Domingo, and asked the Colonial Secretary for a personal guarantee that the 'liberty of the subject' was not being infringed in the colonies.⁷² The following month, building upon a letter which the LCP had received from Lord Olivier regarding the spreading of the colour bar around Southern Africa, Moody went as far as to write that '[n]ever was there a more shameful deed in the history of the British Empire; and it occurs, almost unnoticed and unchallenged, in the midst of a war in which Britain is supposed to be fighting for democracy and against racialism.'⁷³ Although Moody's strengthened criticisms were placated somewhat by a series of colonial reforms, including a new constitution for Jamaica,⁷⁴ publishing a periodical nevertheless had enabled Moody both to voice his criticism of the colour bar, and to publicise his correspondence with those in power.

The *News Letter* continued the LCP's engagement with diverse transnational newspapers and periodicals, positioning itself within a dense textual network. Amongst

defence of Perham. 'Africans and British Rule. Criticism of Dr Lewis's review with Dr Lewis's reply,' *News Letter* October 1941: 7-10.

⁷² 'Southern Rhodesian Land Apportionment Act – Correspondence with the Secretary of State,' *News Letter* December 1941: 55-62; for more on Domingo and his arrest, see 'The case of Domingo,' *News Letter* March 1942: 131.

⁷³ *News Letter* January 1942: 79.

⁷⁴ *News Letter* January 1944: 50-52.

the British press, *The Times* again often served as a significant reference point for the LCP, from which they would draw information but about which they would also pass critical comment.⁷⁵ Other domestic papers, such as the *Daily Mirror* and *News Chronicle*, were also referenced within the pages of the *News Letter*, particularly when they carried stories pertaining to colonial affairs.⁷⁶ Likewise, the *West India Committee Circular* was used as an occasional source for information on the West Indies,⁷⁷ and Sylvia Pankhurst's *New Times and Ethiopia News* was also used to update readers on events involving Abyssinia.⁷⁸ Even the Communist publication the *Daily Worker* was extracted when it reported on the achievements of two black troops in saving a man from drowning, and again for a report on the colour bar in the Royal Air Force.⁷⁹

The *News Letter* also continued and deepened the LCP's engagement with the colonial press. Moody noted in November 1940 that the LCP would 'draw our information from an ever-increasing number of representative Colonial papers' in order to 'present as accurately as possible the present current of thought in our West Indian and African Colonies and Dependencies.' In so doing, he hoped that the LCP's periodical would become a primary reference point for 'leaders of thought everywhere,'

⁷⁵ 'The Delhi conference,' *News Letter* January 1941: 88-89; *News Letter* January 1944: 64-67; *News Letter* August 1940: 77-78; *News Letter* January 1941: 79-80.

⁷⁶ 'Jamaica reaches her goal' and 'West Indian defence bases,' *News Letter* December 1940: 66-67.

⁷⁷ 'The West India Committee Circular,' *News Letter* December 1940: 74; 'Colonial co-operation,' *News Letter* February 1941: 113; 'Colonial air squadrons,' *News Letter* July 1941: 85.. For an introduction to the West India Committee, see D. Hall (1971), *A Brief History of the West India Committee* Mona: Caribbean Universities Press.

⁷⁸ For example, *News Letter* November 1941: 23.

⁷⁹ 'Anglo-American soldiers save drowning worker: Awarded,' *News Letter* December 1942: 83; *News Letter* December 1944: 47.

and also that ‘the Press in Britain, the United States of America, the West Indies and Africa’ might draw upon the *News Letter* ‘even more freely than heretofore.’⁸⁰ When he focused on the role of the periodical in wartime, Moody inevitably portrayed the *News Letter* as an important tool of critical imperial reformism, one centred on the role of colonial peoples themselves. As he put it, ‘[t]here is no other organ in Britain which seeks to give you, from the angle of the Colonial himself, authentic news of current tendencies, concrete achievements and evidences of a participation in Britain’s war effort.’⁸¹ Moody framed the *News Letter* as a periodical rooted in the colonies, but one which was committed to transmitting information about the loyalty of colonial peoples to Britain and their active involvement in the war effort. References to the colonial press helped to further such claims. Between January 1942 and December 1943, *Public Opinion*, a Jamaican periodical for which Una Marson had occasionally written, and the Jamaican newspaper *Daily Gleaner* were quoted or extracted in the *News Letter* on 20 occasions.⁸² From South Africa, *The Sun* and *Race Relations News* received regular citation, the former being quoted or extracted 9 times and the latter 8 times between 1942-3.⁸³ The *Southern Rhodesian Herald* was also referenced as a source for the LCP’s assertion that the South African colour bar might be in danger of spreading northwards, being quoted on 6 occasions between 1942-3,⁸⁴ and other newspapers such

⁸⁰ *News Letter* November 1940: 22.

⁸¹ *News Letter* January 1941: 77.

⁸² ‘The Act of Havana, by N. W. Manley K. C. *Public Opinion*, Sept. 21st 1940,’ *News Letter* December 1940: 72-75; ‘The banana puzzle’ and ‘East Indian J. P. appointed in Jamaica,’ *News Letter* January 1941: 87-88.

⁸³ *News Letter* January 1941: 95-98; *News Letter* July 1941: 89-91.

⁸⁴ *News Letter* August 1942: 121-122; *News Letter* May 1943: 21.

as the *West African Pilot* received less regular mention.⁸⁵ At least some of the articles referenced in the *News Letter* came to the LCP's attention having been sent to them by members overseas. For example, the Reverend Arthur Shearly Cripps, who also contributed poetry to the *News Letter*, was credited with supplying the LCP with an article from the *Basuto Mirror* in May 1942.⁸⁶ Black American periodicals were also cited, and the League were aided in their access to such periodicals by members of the American Red Cross stationed in Britain who joined the LCP and promised to supply them with copies of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*.⁸⁷

As is clear from the periodicals listed above, the LCP situated their own publication within a broader global network that included periodicals from across the political spectrum, illustrating that the LCP's focus was on drawing attention to issues and events which related to their agenda of promoting racial unity and inter-racial cooperation against the global colour bar. It is in this way that the LCP's referencing of both the *Daily Gleaner*, a long-running Jamaican newspaper described by Gordon Lewis as 'the mouthpiece of Jamaican conservatism,' and of *Public Opinion*, a weekly Jamaican periodical described by Lewis as 'a forum for the publication of every progressive idea,' can be understood.⁸⁸ The strategy of the LCP when it came to referencing material from other periodicals and newspapers was to draw on sources

⁸⁵ *News Letter* January 1943: 127.

⁸⁶ 'Secretary's notes,' *News Letter* May 1942. For Cripps's poetry, 'An open letter (to our parallel developer),' *News Letter* August 1942: 124. On Cripps, M. Steele (1975), "'With hope unconquered and unconquerable": Arthur Shearly Cripps, 1869-1952,' in T. Ranger and J. Waller (ed.), *Themes in the Christian History of Central Africa* Berkeley: University of California Press. The LCP thank overseas members for sending in 'valuable press cuttings' in *News Letter* July 1942: 81.

⁸⁷ 'Special general meeting,' *News Letter* January 1943: 112.

⁸⁸ G. K. Lewis (1968), *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* Kingston: Ian Randle: 173.

regardless of position on the political spectrum, provided that they carried stories which the LCP felt were relevant to their visions of racial unity and uplift.

When Moody left London for a tour of the West Indies and USA in 1946, his influence over the *News Letter* inevitably waned. St Clair Drake, who arrived in Britain in 1947 to study racial relations with a particular focus on Cardiff, and who spent considerable time at the offices of the LCP and in the company of prominent black activists in Britain, wrote of the period after Moody's death that within the LCP 'a struggle for control broke out between the Christian humanitarian group and a more aggressive group.' This 'aggressive group' Drake described as 'the Pan-Africans.'⁸⁹ In Moody's absence, the new editor of the *News Letter*, Malcolm Joseph-Mitchell, instigated a shift in rhetoric. He wrote that the LCP could no longer allow itself to be 'accused of catering to one class-group of West Indian and African.'⁹⁰ The League also began to write of themselves as representing an 'alien group in the imperial metropolis.'⁹¹ The focus on the role which class had played within the LCP's earlier work, and the sense of being somehow alien from metropolitan Britain, represented significant departures from the dominant arguments made by the *News Letter* whilst Moody had retained some control over its workings.

This shift in rhetoric and ideological positioning was reflected in changes to the *News Letter* editorial staff. For example, George Padmore's partner Dorothy Pizer was listed amongst the periodical's editorial staff for 1948, symbolising the new position of

⁸⁹ S. C. Drake (1954), *Value Systems, Social Structure, and Race relations in the British Isles* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago Press: 117.

⁹⁰ *News Letter* April 1947: 87.

⁹¹ *News Letter* October 1947: 182.

the periodical.⁹² However, these new directions had little opportunity to gain full expression in the *News Letter* because of a change in the LCP's fortunes. Finances clearly tightened, no doubt in part due to a lower influx of donations from Moody himself and his own network of personal friends and associates, and issues of the *News Letter* frequently included calls for financial assistance. Unrest emerged amongst the League's membership over Joseph-Mitchell's role as secretary, and in particular his failure to discuss with other members the contents of the *News Letter*.⁹³ The *News Letter* itself decreased in size, and included fewer reports on League activities. Gone too was the occasional reprinting of correspondence with government officials, and references to wider press networks also decreased. From 1947, the *News Letter* became more irregular in its publication dates, with the League no longer able to maintain a monthly periodical. In 1948, the LCP published their last *News Letter* for two years, not issuing a periodical again until November-December 1950, after which they published a solitary issue of *The League of Coloured Peoples Review*, which proved to be the LCP's final periodical.⁹⁴ With Moody gone the League had lost their figurehead and the man around whom their internal factions had, however uncertainly, been united. This slow, drawn out decline of LCP periodicals during these later years in comparison to their

⁹² 'The League of Coloured Peoples seventeenth Annual General Meeting,' in Robert Wellesley Cole Papers, SOAS Archives, PP MS 35 Box 20 File 151.

⁹³ 'The League of Coloured Peoples seventeenth Annual General Meeting,' and letter from C. Jones to M. Joseph-Mitchell, 4 May 1948, in Robert Wellesley Cole Papers, SOAS Archives, PP MS 35 Box 20 File 151.

⁹⁴ *News Letter* July-September 1948; *News Letter* November 1950; *The League of Coloured Peoples' Review* 1951. For an analysis of the LCP's decline in these years which explicitly foregrounds the shift in political strategy as the main contributing factor, see Rush, 'Imperial identity'.

regular monthly contributions during wartime is a fitting illustration of the extent to which the LCP was organisationally weakened by Harold Moody's death.

'To create a connecting link between the Africans at home ... and the Africans abroad': International African Opinion and other IASB periodicals

In the late 1930s, the IASB too briefly managed to issue its own periodicals. The first, a short news bulletin published in 1937, was entitled *Africa and the World*. Christian Høgsbjerg has suggested that the title may have been derived from that of the 'main British anarchist paper of the day,' *Spain and the World*, whose editor, Vernon Richards, used to meet C. L. R. James, at the time editor of the Trotskyist periodical *Fight*, at the offices of their shared printers, the Narod Press, in Bedford Street, London.⁹⁵ Available on a three-monthly subscription of two shillings, or at one penny per copy, *Africa and the World*, subtitled *A News Bulletin Issued by the International African Service Bureau*, contained little by way of editorial comment and instead focused mainly on reporting important speeches or public pronouncements relating to imperialism, and especially to British possessions in Africa and the West Indies.⁹⁶

Late in 1937, the IASB published a new periodical, the *African Sentinel*. It opened with a masthead which depicted Africa and America being linked by a pair of shaking hands, underwritten by the subtitle 'A journal devoted to the interest of Africans and people of African descent, all over the world.' The *African Sentinel* had a more

⁹⁵ C. Høgsbjerg (2009), 'A 'Bohemian freelancer'? C. L. R. James, his early relationship to anarchism and the intellectual origins of autonomism,' unpublished paper given at 'Is Black and Red Dead' conference, University of Nottingham.

⁹⁶ Unfortunately, no copies of the first issue of this periodical are known to have survived. *Africa and the World* 27 July 1937: 5, in TNA CO 847/11/16.

professional appearance than *Africa and the World*, with contents which included editorial commentary, newly-commissioned articles and photographs.

It is not known how many issues of *African Sentinel* were ever produced. However, by August 1938 the IASB had launched yet another periodical, this time entitled *International African Opinion* (fig. 5.3.) With all seven issues available, *International African Opinion* is by far the most studied of the IASB's periodicals,⁹⁷ described by Matthew Quest as 'the journal of record for a class-struggle Pan-Africanism'.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ C. Polsgrove (2009), *Ending British Rule in Africa: Writers in a Common Cause* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 34-36; Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 299-305.

⁹⁸ M. Quest (2009), 'George Padmore's and C. L. R. James' *International African Opinion*,' in F. Baptiste and R. Lewis (eds.), *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary* Kingston: Ian Randle: 105-132.



Fig 5.3. Cover of *International African Opinion*, October 1938

Most articles in *International African Opinion* are unsigned, and it is thus difficult to assign them to particular individuals. The Metropolitan Police believed that James was the editor of the periodical, and James himself later confirmed this.⁹⁹ However, informal collaboration was an important element of the IASB, and fed into their practices in producing *International African Opinion*. As Makonnen later recalled, ‘we cannot see [the IASB] as a large highly-organized movement ... there wasn’t any clear membership. A lot of them came around simply because we provided a base and a

⁹⁹ Col. Sir V. Kell to F. Howard, 9 July 1938, CO 323/1610/2; C. L. R. James (1984), *At the Rendezvous of Victory* London: Allison and Busby: 242.

talking point where the coffee pot was almost always on the stove.’¹⁰⁰ On his role in the writing of *International African Opinion*, Makonnen wrote that ‘James and Padmore would ask me what I wanted them to write up.’¹⁰¹ Collaboration between IASB members over published works was a regular occurrence. For example, when Raymond Postgate, editor of the *Fact* series of monographs, approached Padmore to write a history of black insurrection, Padmore passed the job to James since he himself was too busy. As James recalled,

I wrote the book, George bringing his great knowledge of Africa to bear. We had marvellous time putting in a number of provocative statements which we knew Postgate would object to. But by putting in those and then agreeing to take them out, much really good stuff was bound to get in.¹⁰²

The result of this collaboration was James’s book *A History of Negro Revolt*.¹⁰³ James also discussed the manuscript for one of his other books, probably *The Black Jacobins*, with the Trinidadian Eric Williams, then studying at Oxford,¹⁰⁴ and Padmore often had collaborators in the writing of his books, including Nancy Cunard, Dorothy Pizer and

¹⁰⁰ R. Makonnen (1973), *Pan-Africanism From Within*, K. King (ed.), London: Oxford University Press: 118.

¹⁰¹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 119.

¹⁰² C. L. R. James (1972), ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore,’ microfilm copy of draft manuscript, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, Sc Micro R-3549: unnumbered page.

¹⁰³ C. L. R. James (1938), *A History of Negro Revolt* London: Fact.

¹⁰⁴ Williams to R. Bunche, 12 October, no year but probably 1937, in Ralph Bunche Papers, Schomburg Centre Library and Archive, Sc Mg 290.

other friends and associates.¹⁰⁵ Through collaboration, the practice of writing itself functioned both as a method of debating and formulating ideas, but also as a more practical basis for the forging of solidarities. *International African Opinion* ought therefore to be read as at heart a collaborative venture, although it is still possible to detect the influence of individuals at certain moments – James’s interest in the forces of world-historical events, for example, and Padmore’s polemical focus on what he termed ‘colonial fascism,’ a concept which he deployed in his own writings but which regularly made its way into *International African Opinion*.¹⁰⁶

The role of periodicals within the IASB was closely connected to broader principles underlying the organisation. In the opening editorial of the *African Sentinel*, for example, they wrote of their desire to ‘serve as a medium of information between the Colonial and European public,’ and ‘to create a connecting link between the Africans at home (in Africa) and the Africans abroad (in the West Indies, United States of America, and other Western countries).’¹⁰⁷ They took up this theme again in *International African Opinion*, writing that although ‘our position in London makes us more immediately familiar with the problems of Negroes in the British Colonies,’ they nevertheless sought collaboration with ‘Negroes wherever they are, in French and Belgian colonies, in the United States and South America.’¹⁰⁸ For the IASB, publishing periodicals was a directly political act, and an important component part of their wider

¹⁰⁵ See Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: esp. 6-7, 83-85.

¹⁰⁶ For example, when the IASB wrote that ‘Imperialism, whatever its high pretensions to philanthropy, cannot be anything else but Fascist in its actual operation.’ ‘The transfer of protectorates,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 3. Also G. Padmore, ‘Fascism in the colonies,’ *Controversy* February 1938: 94-95.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Our policy,’ *African Sentinel* October-November 1937: 1. In TNA MEPO 38/91.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Editorial,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 2.

activism. They acknowledged that periodicals enabled them to ‘[plunge] ourselves once more into the battlefield of journalism,’¹⁰⁹ and aspired to produce periodicals which acted as ‘journal[s] of action,’ and ‘living weapon[s] in the struggle’ against racism, fascism, capitalism and imperialism.¹¹⁰

One function of a periodical which intended to link together the African diaspora across the world was to publish articles focussed on a diverse array of contexts. In the *African Sentinel*, for example, a column entitled ‘in the colonial empire’ carried articles on South Africa, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Gambia and Trinidad, whilst race relations in the USA were also discussed.¹¹¹ Other articles addressed labour unrest in Mauritius and, in a 2-page centre spread, working class conditions throughout the empire.¹¹² In *International African Opinion*, articles ranged equally widely, though Abyssinia, Liberia, Southern Africa and the West Indies were particularly important focal points.¹¹³ Emphasising the practical links which the journal hoped to forge between ‘intellectuals’ and ‘masses’, it carried articles addressing literary and cultural themes, but each issue also included a column by the Barbadian sailor and trade unionist Chris Brathwaite – alias Chris Jones – entitled ‘Seamen’s notes,’ addressed primarily to the itinerant community of black sailors travelling the globe who Jones saw as

¹⁰⁹ ‘Editorial,’ *African Sentinel* October-November 1937: 6.

¹¹⁰ ‘Editorial,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 2-3.

¹¹¹ ‘In the colonial empire,’ *African Sentinel* October-November 1937: 5; ‘America’s age-long race barrier in Catholic schools given the knock-out,’ and ‘Lynch law claims another victim,’ *African Sentinel* October-November 1937: 14.

¹¹² ‘The strikes in Mauritius,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 6-7; ‘Gold Coast youth reviews working-class conditions in colonial empire,’ *African Sentinel* October-November 1937: 8-9.

¹¹³ For more detail, see Quest, ‘George Padmore’s and C. L. R. James’ *International African Opinion*’.

providing ‘a link in uniting the struggles going on in all parts of the black world.’¹¹⁴ Wide-ranging regular columns on ‘Politics and the Negro’ and ‘the African world’ gave brief overviews of news and events from around the world centred on the African diaspora.¹¹⁵ The names for these columns, particularly ‘the African world,’ were themselves symbolic, particularly because the West Indies, and occasionally the USA, were included within their remit. Brent Edwards has written that, for the IASB, ‘the term African is above all a claimed identity’ which also ‘marks a particular take on internationalism.’¹¹⁶ By framing wider diasporic happenings within the remit of ‘the African world,’ the IASB’s periodicals thus mapped out the boundaries of a diasporic identity, working to constitute a transnational African identity within the pages of the periodical.

However, whilst *International African Opinion* enabled the IASB to formalise its interest in the African diaspora through the range of issues addressed within its pages, it also offered a platform from which IASB members could debate with one another about differing understandings of and approaches to African diasporic politics. To this end, Bureau members critically engaged with one another in the pages of *International African Opinion*. In one instance, C. L. R. James took to task Jomo Kenyatta’s conception of African politics in a review of the latter’s book *Facing Mount Kenya*. Despite praising Kenyatta’s book by writing that ‘[i]f ever there was a book that

¹¹⁴ Chris Jones, ‘Coloured seamen,’ *International African Opinion* August 1938: 16. On black cultures, see ‘The literary scene,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 14-16. On Brathwaite, see C. Høgsbjerg (2011), ‘Mariner, renegade and castaway: Chris Brathwaite, seamen’s organiser and pan-Africanist,’ *Race and Class* **53:2**: 36-57.

¹¹⁵ ‘The African world,’ *International African Opinion* September 1938: 4-7; ‘American notes,’ *International African Opinion* October 1938: 8.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 303.

students of Africa needed, this is it,' James also stressed that '[p]olitically, I believe that there are the seeds here of an immense confusion,' which he saw as stemming from Kenyatta being 'ideologically rooted in the social and religious ideals of the civilisation which is being so ruthlessly destroyed by the united front of settler, official and missionary.' James agreed with Kenyatta's assessment that the root cause of this destruction of Kenyan society was the removal of traditional forms of land tenure by British colonists. However, he took issue with Kenyatta's vision of how things ought to change, suggesting that Kenyatta believed that after reclaiming their land, Kenyans should 'go back to the old life, merely selecting what they approve of in European civilisation.' James argued instead that 'When the land is won the African will have to modernise his method of production, and his religion will inevitably follow.'¹¹⁷ At root, the debate between Kenyatta and James hinged on their understanding of the nature of African tribal society, with Kenyatta supportive of traditional forms whilst James believed that, as he was reported to have argued at a conference of the LCP, 'the tribe, dominated by superstitious custom and narrow loyalties, belonged to the past, and could never stand up to the spread of education and transport facilities.'¹¹⁸

James, too, came in for criticism within the pages of *International African Opinion*. In the course of his short book *History of Negro Revolt*, James had written a fiercely critical section on Marcus Garvey, in which he denounced Garvey as 'a reactionary' and argued that Garveyism was 'in many respects absurd and in others thoroughly dishonest.'¹¹⁹ However, when the book was reviewed in the pages of *International African Opinion* by William Harrison, he argued that 'Mr James has not

¹¹⁷ C. L. R. James, 'The voice of Africa,' *International African Opinion* August 1938: 3.

¹¹⁸ *The Keys* July-September 1936: 4-6.

¹¹⁹ James, *History of Negro Revolt*: 70-71.

done full justice to the Garvey movement.’ Whilst Harrison agreed that Garvey had often spoken ‘twaddle,’ he characterised James as typical of ‘Marxist critics’ in failing to ‘stress the positive value of Garveyism; the awakening of race consciousness in the Negro masses the world over’ which also entailed, whether Garvey wanted it to or not, ‘a resurgence of class consciousness, especially in Africa itself.’ Recognising this aspect of Garveyism, argued Harrison, was ‘of pivotal importance to an understanding of race relations as well as the class composition of African society at this epoch.’¹²⁰ Such disagreements demonstrate that *International African Opinion* functioned in a similar way to how *The Keys* did for the LCP, as a stage on which internal debates over politics and the African diaspora could be played out. Arguing with one another in the pages of periodicals enabled members of the IASB to publicise their own perspectives on African diasporic politics, and to attempt to convert fellow members to their standpoint.

Whilst we have no indication of the number of copies of each issue which the IASB produced, James later claimed that it was ‘sent everywhere to every address we could find.’¹²¹ Makonnen recalls that it was his job to ‘look up all the halls where leftist meetings or peace meetings were on ... and sell [*International African Opinion*] illegally at the door on the way out.’ He claimed that the IASB ‘made pounds and pounds this way,’ and that they also ‘sold a large number ... after speaking at Hyde Park.’¹²² As discussed in chapter four, the distribution of the IASB’s print journalism was thus closely bound to their attendance at, and participation in, a wide range of public gatherings.

¹²⁰ ‘Negro life and letters,’ *International African Opinion* October 1938: 13.

¹²¹ James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’: 33.

¹²² Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 119.

That the IASB's periodicals were well-known to other leftists is confirmed by the wider periodical networks in which *International African Opinion* became implicated. The ILP, of which James had been a member until breaking with them over their attitude to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and with whom Padmore had close ties, ran advertisements in their weekly paper the *New Leader* which described *International African Opinion* as 'a monthly magazine indispensable as a guide to colonial affairs.'¹²³ Arthur Ballard, who wrote prominently on colonial matters in the *New Leader* and was also secretary of the Trotskyist organisation known as the Marxist Group chaired by C. L. R. James, also made reference to the periodical in his articles.¹²⁴ Reference was also made to *International African Opinion* in the ILP's monthly periodical *Controversy*, which noted that the periodical could be purchased from London's Socialist Bookshop, and it was also mentioned in Sylvia Pankhurst's anti-fascist newspaper *New Times and Ethiopian News*.¹²⁵ Even periodicals of the more mainstream left gave attention to *International African Opinion*. For example, an IASB article was reprinted, under the title of 'A native protest,' in the magazine of the Federal Union, *World Review*,¹²⁶ and the *Liberal Magazine*, the periodical of the Liberal Party,

¹²³ *New Leader* 26 August 1938: 2.

¹²⁴ A. A. Ballard, 'The rising tide in India,' *New Leader* 10 March 1939: 6. For James and Ballard in the Marxist Group, see A. A. Ballard and C. L. R. James, 'Towards the new workers' Party,' *Fight* 12 December 1936: 5-6.

¹²⁵ 'In brief,' *Controversy*, August 1938: inside back cover; *Controversy* October 1938: inside back cover; *New Times and Ethiopian News* 16 July 1938: 8.

¹²⁶ 'A native protest,' *World Review* August 1939: 55. For more on the Federal Union, see J. Partington (2003), *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* Aldershot: Ashgate: 157-164.

also mentioned the launch of *International African Opinion* during the course of an article on protectorates in Southern Africa.¹²⁷

There is also some indication that the IASB were able to circulate their periodicals throughout the British Empire. In its correspondence pages the IASB printed letters from Jamaica and British Guiana,¹²⁸ though we must treat such letters with a degree of caution in the light of Makonnen's later remark that 'like many papers in this early stage, we would sometimes concoct letters purporting to come from the Congo and many other places.'¹²⁹ However, the focus given to IASB periodicals by colonial officials gives some idea of their success in accessing the colonies. As early as the first issue of *Africa and the World*, the IASB caught the attention of the Colonial Office when the Governor of the Gold Coast, who had come across copies circulating within that colony, instructed that 'this bulletin should ... be included in the list of publications which deserve a close watch.'¹³⁰ When the second issue of *Africa and the World* came out, Gold Coast officials wasted little time in deeming it seditious. The Executive Council of the Gold Coast government decreed that 'the importation of all issues of this publication, past, present and future, should be prohibited' under the terms of the Criminal Code (Amendment) Ordinance of 1934.¹³¹ Reginald Sorensen, a patron of the IASB, responded to this banning order by asking the Secretary of State for the Colonies,

¹²⁷ 'South African protectorates,' *Liberal Magazine* August 1938: 441-442.

¹²⁸ 'Correspondence,' *International African Opinion* September 1938: 15; 'Correspondence,' *International African Opinion* October 1938: 15.

¹²⁹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*: 120.

¹³⁰ A. Hodson, Governor of Gold Coast Colony, to W. G. A Ormsby-Gore, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 February 1938, CO 847/11/16.

¹³¹ 'Extract from minutes of a meeting of the Executive Council held at Government House, Christiansborg, Accra, on Friday, the 10th September, 1937 at 10am,' in CO 847/11/16.

W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, in the House of Commons for an explanation. Pressed on whether he would intervene to investigate the banning of this periodical, Ormsby-Gore stated that '[i]t must be left to the Governor in Council on the spot to have any particular issue of a particular newspaper prohibited from being circulated. I could not possibly interfere.' He also acknowledged that he had not in fact seen a copy of the periodical, and stated that he would gladly place copies in the Parliamentary library at Westminster.¹³² Sure enough, in January 1938 the Colonial Office received a letter from I. T. A. Wallace Johnson, IASB General Secretary, enclosing copies of *Africa and the World*.¹³³ Wallace Johnson's involvement may well have been the primary factor in the periodical being deemed seditious in the Gold Coast, given that he had initially travelled to London to protest against an earlier conviction for sedition in that colony, related to an article he had published as organising secretary of the West African Youth League in the *African Morning Post*.¹³⁴

When the IASB replaced *Africa and the World* with the *African Sentinel*, they were soon to find that their periodical was again dimly viewed by colonial authorities. By April 1938, Wallace Johnson was becoming increasingly frustrated with life in England. Struggling financially, he had written to colleagues in the West African Youth League based in Accra complaining that he was no longer 'prepared to suffer death and privation by cold in a strange country.'¹³⁵ Special Branch reports suggest that he may

¹³² *Hansard*, Commons Debate, 24 November 1937, vol. 329 col. 1211-2.

¹³³ Wallace Johnson to Ormsby Gore, 10 January 1938, CO 847/11/16.

¹³⁴ See L. Spitzer and L. Denzer (1973), 'I. T. A. Wallace Johnson and the West African Youth League,' *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6: 3: 413-452; B. Bush (1999), *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* London: Routledge: 117-118; 'A Negro sedition prosecution in the Gold Coast', CO 323/1610/2.

¹³⁵ Spitzer and Denzer, 'I. T. A. Wallace Johnson': 450-451.

also have been involved in misappropriating IASB funds to supplement his meagre income, and was thus thrown out of the organisation, although this has never been confirmed.¹³⁶ Whatever the reason, in April 1938 he left London bound for Sierra Leone, taking with him 2,900 copies of the *African Sentinel*. Upon arriving in the West African colony, however, Customs officers seized most, though not all, copies of the periodical. The March/April issue caused particular offence, though it has not survived in archival repositories, and all other issues were returned to Wallace Johnson.¹³⁷

As Carol Polsgrove has written, dealing with charges of sedition in the colonies had by now become ‘a cat-and-mouse game’ between the IASB and Colonial governments.¹³⁸ Each time one publication was banned, the IASB would put out a newly entitled periodical. When the IASB began publishing *International African Opinion*, Colonial Office officials were concerned that the periodical might be distributed in Africa and the West Indies, and instructed colonial governors in these areas to be ‘on the look out for this new publication’.¹³⁹ Sir Vernon Kell, of the Metropolitan Police, also suggested that the Colonial Office ‘may like to consider adding this paper to your list of literature which is prohibited for circulation in the Colonies,’ although no firmer action seems to have been taken in this instance.¹⁴⁰ Given that the IASB were successful in having some of their other materials distributed internationally at the same time as they were issuing *International African Opinion*,

¹³⁶ Col. Sir V. Kell, Special Branch, to F. J. Howard, Colonial Office, 11 April 1938, in CO 323/1610/2; Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 33.

¹³⁷ Mr Brody, Commissioner of Police in Sierra Leone, to Mr Lamont, Intelligence Officer, 8 May 1938, CO 323/1610/2. Jardine to O. G. R. Williams, 12 May 1938, CO 323/1610/2.

¹³⁸ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 33.

¹³⁹ Memo by O. G. R. Williams, 27 June 1938, CO 323/1610/2.

¹⁴⁰ Sir V. Kell to Colonial Office, 8 September 1938, CO 323/1610/2.

such as the copies of *Hands off the Protectorates* which were reported to be circulating in Gambia in 1938, it would seem likely that this periodical may have made its way into several African and West Indian colonies.¹⁴¹

In October 1938, James ceased to edit *International African Opinion* and travelled to the USA.¹⁴² According to a report handed to the Colonial Office, Makonnen took over the job of editing *International African Opinion* in James's absence, although he makes no mention of this in his autobiography.¹⁴³ The onset of war in September 1938 created grave difficulties for the IASB, and with finances running low they were forced to put out appeals for support from readers.¹⁴⁴ On 3 October 1938, Padmore wrote to Alain Locke in the USA that 'every obstacle was put in [the IASB's] way for normal functioning,' hinting at some of the difficulties which the organisation faced at this tense time.¹⁴⁵ The seventh issue of *International African Opinion*, that for May-June 1939, was to be the final one.

'A storehouse for information on African affairs': *Pan-Africa*

In the late 1940s, another publication emerged from the members of the former IASB, now re-constituted as the Pan-African Federation, entitled *Pan-Africa: A Journal of*

¹⁴¹ H. R. Oke, acting governor of Gambia, to M. MacDonald, 1 July 1938, CO 323/1610/2.

¹⁴² 'American notes,' *International African Opinion* February-March 1939: 16. Reasons for the trip are discussed in Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 45.

¹⁴³ Special Branch report, 19 October 1938, KV 2/1824.

¹⁴⁴ 'Appeal to our readers,' *International African Opinion* February-March 1939: 3.

¹⁴⁵ G. Padmore to A. Locke, 3 October 1938, in Locke Papers, Box 164-76, cited in Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 44.

African Life, History and Thought (fig. 5.4.) Ras Makonnen served as publisher and, for the opening issue, managing editor for the periodical.

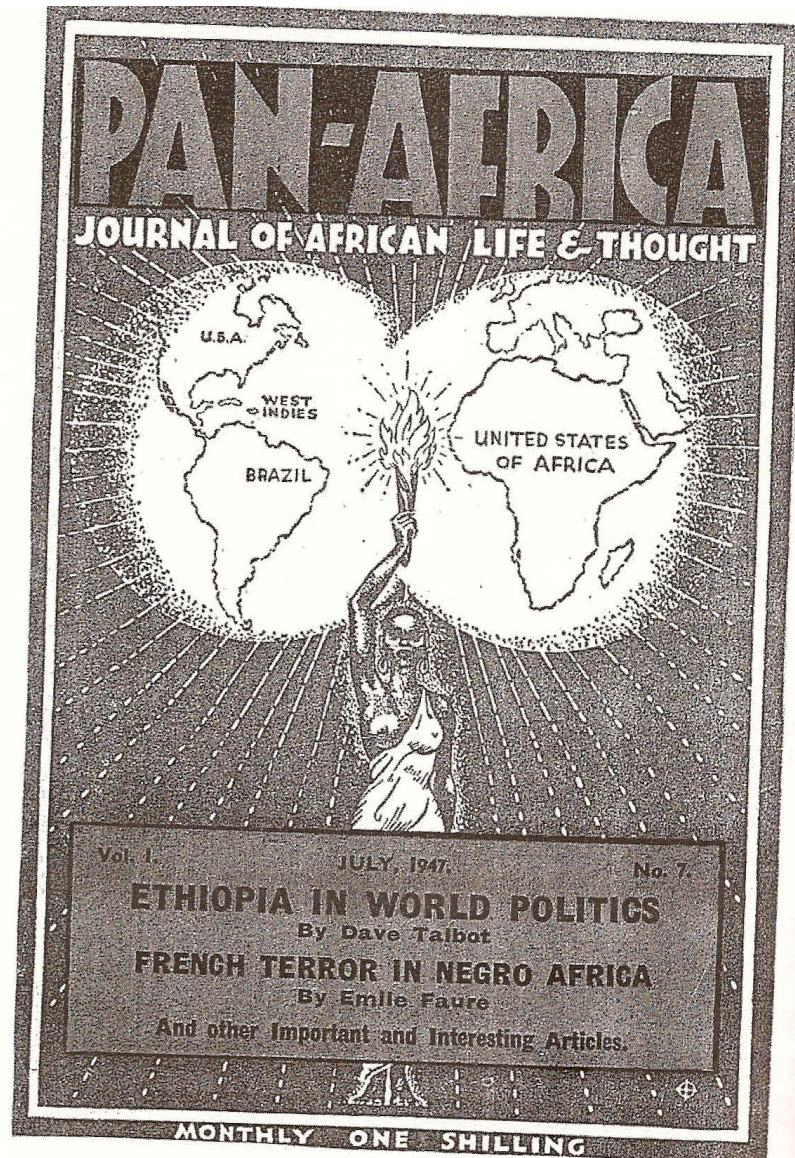


Fig 5.4. Front cover of *Pan-Africa*, July 1947

Reflecting upon the intentions behind the periodical many years later, Makonnen explicitly foregrounded a desire to improve ‘the place of the black writer ... in Britain’. His belief was that ‘such few writers as there were had to enter a field that was predominantly white – white journals, white publishers, and nearly always white men

writing about black.’¹⁴⁶ Makonnen makes no mention of the *News Letter*, no doubt in an attempt to amplify the significance of his own achievements. Yet the contents of *Pan-Africa* itself bear out his later assertion that the journal styled itself as a challenge to the normalisation of whiteness in writing on or about Africa. The opening statement of the periodical asserted that ‘much has been written about African peoples, their history, life and customs ... most reveal a biased hostility, while even the best and most sympathetic frequently lack ... a full acknowledgement that the African does not differ from his fellow-men.’ Such criticisms were aimed primarily at European authors and publishers, but were also stretched to include those ‘African authors who have drawn their inspiration from these sources ... [which] produces apology and patronage.’¹⁴⁷ Africa was positioned centrally within the imaginative geographies of *Pan-Africa*, though as with *International African Opinion* before it this was an understanding of Africa which embraced its internationalist and diasporic ties. Thus, the periodical positioned as its audience ‘the children of Africa everywhere,’ and noted that whilst ‘white folk who have something important to tell us’ would be welcome within its pages, ‘the success or failure of *Pan-Africa* depends on the support or lack of it Africans and peoples of African descent give it.’¹⁴⁸

The periodical itself took its place amongst Makonnen’s broader business activities. By 1947, he owned a number of restaurants, a club, a publishing house entitled the Pan-African Publishing Company, and a bookshop named the Economist, all in Manchester. As Makonnen described the latter, ‘it wasn’t a race bookshop, either in the sense that it catered only to blacks ... or in the sense that we only sold books

¹⁴⁶ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*: 144.

¹⁴⁷ *Pan-Africa: A Journal of African Life, History and Thought* January 1947: 1-2.

¹⁴⁸ *Pan-Africa* January 1947: 3.

about blacks. However, when there was some particular book on blacks that I felt needed promoting, we went to town.¹⁴⁹ Given that Makonnen was the periodicals primary financier and publisher, Carol Polsgrove is surely correct to argue that *Pan-Africa* was ‘above all Makonnen’s project.’¹⁵⁰ Yet he did have considerable outside assistance in the venture. For example, the British socialist Dinah Stock, formerly assistant editor of the ILP’s paper *New Leader*, was listed amongst the editorial committee on the opening issue and appeared as executive editor by the second. Stock, a friend of Jomo Kenyatta’s who had earlier helped him write his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, had also been secretary of the British Centre Against Imperialism, had lectured for the Workers Educational Association, and had edited the *Socialist Review*.¹⁵¹ Makonnen recalled Stock being one of a number of ‘white girls [who] were invaluable in all this literary and promotional activity.’¹⁵² As well as writing for and editing the periodical, Makonnen also recalls that it was Stock who made contact with Reginald Reynolds and drew him into an involvement with *Pan-Africa*. Reynolds, a socialist and pacifist who had served as General Secretary of the No More War Movement and also written a book which critically examined the British role in India, had in fact been a fringe member of the IASB in the 1930s, befriending George Padmore and Chris Jones

¹⁴⁹ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*: 146.

¹⁵⁰ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 87.

¹⁵¹ B. Hans (1999), *Taking What Comes: A Biography of A. G. Stock (Dinah)* Chandigarh: Panjab University Press; D. Stock, ‘Cattle in Kenya,’ *Pan-Africa* January 1947: 13-19; B. Berman and J. Lonsdale (2007), ‘Custom, modernity and the search for *Kihoto*: Kenyatta, Malinowski and the making of *Facing Mount Kenya*,’ in H. Tilley and R. Gordon (eds.), *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Politics of Knowledge* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 173-200.

¹⁵² Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*: 147. Stock left for India a few months after taking over the editorial role at *Pan-Africa*. See Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*: 87.

in particular.¹⁵³ Amongst the others who were involved with *Pan-Africa*, the list of contributing editors printed at the start of each issue included George Padmore for the first four issues, after which his name disappeared from the list although he did continue to contribute occasional articles.¹⁵⁴ The South African novelist Peter Abrahams was listed amongst the editorial committee for the earliest issues, and wrote to Richard Wright in America inviting him to contribute to the periodical.¹⁵⁵ Other contributing editors included two individuals who had also been members of the LCP, Hugh Springer and Samson Morris, as well as Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah.

The periodical itself printed articles from British socialists such as F. A. Ridley, as well as pieces from a range of prominent black individuals around the world, including Amy Jacques Garvey and Richard Hart from the West Indies, E.W. Mathu, an African representative on the Kenya Legislative Council, and a number of contributions from members of the NAACP in the USA.¹⁵⁶ On the cover of each issue was depicted a black woman standing holding aloft a torch, similar to that which had appeared on the cover of *International African Opinion*. This time, however, the map behind this figure depicted the Atlantic world, with the USA, the West Indies, and Brazil highlighted on one side, and on the other the United States of Africa. This image, along with the periodicals name, its international contributors, and the range of subject matter clearly

¹⁵³ R. Reynolds (1956), *My Life and Crimes*, London: Jarrolds: esp. 116-119; 'A caution and warning to Great Britain and her colonies,' *Pan-Africa* April 1947: 3-7; *Pan-Africa* May 1947: 17-21.

¹⁵⁴ G. Padmore, 'Imperialism: London and Paris styles,' *Pan-Africa* July 1947: 12-17.

¹⁵⁵ P. Abrahams to R. Wright, n.d., referenced in Polsgove, *Ending British Rule*: 83.

¹⁵⁶ A. J. Garvey, 'What's wrong with our world?' *Pan-Africa* May 1947: 3-5; F. A. Ridley, 'Smuts – A study in black and white,' *Pan-Africa* May 1947: 28-34; R. Hart, 'Our problems and the future,' *Pan-Africa* April 1947: 8-10; E. W. Mathu, 'Kenya to-day,' *Pan-Africa* June 1947; The first issue of 1948 reprinted at length an NAACP publication. *Pan-Africa* January-February 1948.

suggests that Makonnen and the Pan-African Federation envisaged the journal itself as an embodiment of the pan-African politics which they were now outlining. Indeed, the editorial for the February 1947 issue explicitly foregrounded the role of the periodical in representing pan-Africanism itself. The piece noted that in the contents of that issue could be seen ‘something of the many-sidedness of the Pan-African idea.’¹⁵⁷ This issue carried articles on Ethiopia, Tunisia, and South Africa, and positioned these alongside a piece on ‘Colour persecution on Tyneside’ which explored racial relations in the North East of England, and a piece by the writer Cedric Dover entitled ‘Towards coloured unity,’ originally printed in an Indian periodical in 1937 but described by the Pan-African Federation as ‘urgently contemporary’.¹⁵⁸ In positioning such diverse pieces together, Makonnen and his fellow editors hoped that ‘the reader will find himself wondering whether they have indeed any underlying unity.’ *Pan-Africa* itself, the editorial argued, remained acutely aware of the difficulties of articulating a pan-African politics of unity, given that ‘[i]t is certainly not possible to draw up a programme of immediate action in which the Kingdom of Ethiopia, the coloured people of the Cape and the restaurant keepers of Tyneside would feel their interests equally at stake.’ Yet despite these potential differences, the editorial argued that ‘[t]here is hardly any violation of freedom and equality of which Africans are not the victims ... That in itself is a reason for acknowledging the unity of the Pan-African idea, and for trying to bring together the problems and prospects of African peoples all over the world in a common forum.’ In seeking to promote this unity, *Pan-Africa* was not intended to ‘be the

¹⁵⁷ ‘Editorial,’ *Pan-Africa* February 1947: 1.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Towards coloured unity,’ *Pan-Africa* February 1947: 30-32.

mouthpiece of a policy,' but instead to 'become a storehouse for information on African affairs, and a field for the widest discussion of African views.'¹⁵⁹

In an attempt to draw in a wider readership from the African diaspora, Makonnen made explicit efforts to draw in black American readers and to include them more forthrightly in *Pan-Africa*. In a letter to his contacts in the USA, including St Clair Drake, Makonnen explicitly foregrounded the place of black Americans in pan-Africanism, and the close bonds which he saw between them and the people of Africa. He wrote that 'Africans in Africa and Afro-Americans, despite the effects of environment, history and geography have a common ancestry' and that 'in isolation the achievements of one section of a people so numerous and divided as ours cannot solve the problems of the whole.' Stressing the important role of Africans and people of African descent in the future of world affairs, Makonnen wrote that *Pan-Africa*, by seeking to draw together the globally-spread African diaspora, would 'serve as a valuable medium by being a living expression, a reflection of the everyday life and deeds of the African peoples,' and would 'examine carefully the strides made by Africans and people of African descent.'¹⁶⁰ By calling for black Americans to subscribe to *Pan-Africa*, and to contribute to its broader agenda, Makonnen explicitly situated black America as a core element within the internationalist conception of Africa on which his pan-Africanism was based.

Pan-Africa placed much emphasis on the 'response of our readers,' who they hoped would be stimulated to submit their own pieces for publication in *Pan-Africa*.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ 'Editorial,' *Pan-Africa* February 1947: 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ R. Makonnen to S. C. Drake, n.d. but c. 1947, St Clair Drake Papers, Schomburg Centre, Sc Mg 309, Box 61, Folder 3.

¹⁶¹ 'Editorial,' *Pan-Africa* February 1947: 4.

In fact, the periodical did stimulate some readers to rush into print, though not necessarily in *Pan-Africa* itself, and not necessarily in the manner which the editorial committee might have expected. In 1948, for example, the Scottish-born missionary T. Cullen Young, who had been based in Nyasaland for many years and written numerous anthropological works on Central Africa, published an article the journal of the Royal African Society in which he engaged at length with the contents of *Pan-Africa*.¹⁶² In the brief biographical sketch which preceded his article, it was noted that Cullen Young had ‘just stepped down from the Lutterworth Press, where he was instrumental in publishing several of the literary efforts of the modern generation in Africa.’ He proceeded to explain that he had learned of *Pan-Africa* ‘from a chance meeting with an African student at present in Scotland.’ He also noted that upon reading the periodical, as ‘one of those to whom [the authors in *Pan-Africa*] all refer as the white man,’ he was ‘immediately impressed with the homogeneity of view expressed by the eight main articles; the voice of a continent purporting to be in bondage and determined on freedom.’

Cullen Young proceeded to sketch the history of *Pan-Africa*, emphasising that its roots were in the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress, even quoting one of the resolutions passed thereat. Treating the Congress as the ‘single-handed work’ of W. E. B Du Bois, Cullen Young wrote of the resolution passed at the Congress as if it were an authentic declaration of African desires for freedom, and then, demonstrating his lack of knowledge of the dynamics of pan-African politics in 1940s Britain, asserted that the

¹⁶² For Cullen Young’s anthropological work, see T. C. Young (1935), ‘How far can African ceremonial be incorporated in the Christian system?’ *Africa: Journal of International African Studies* 8:2: 210-217; His article on *Pan-Africa* is T. C. Young (1948), ‘Africa talking,’ *African Affairs* 47: 215-220. All quotes in the proceeding paragraphs come from this article.

words spoken in the Congress declaration were ‘twisted by the colonial politicians, mainly West Indian, like George Padmore and T. R. Makonnen who run *Pan-Africa*.’ Despite the centrality of Padmore and Makonnen to the organisation of the 1945 Congress, Cullen Young depicted them as political radicals somehow separate from the Congress itself. Pressing home the point about radicalism, he noted that *Pan-Africa* had recently been banned in the Congo, but went on to emphasise that he would nevertheless treat it seriously because ‘as a missionary with nearly thirty years’ experience of one area in Africa, I realise that I am listening to voices which might possibly come from Africans whom I have known and respected.’ Whilst he noted that the contents of *Pan-Africa* covered issues which would have been discussed by the Africans he knew in Nyasaland, Cullen Young insisted that he was

nevertheless, disquieted. The tone of voice has changed. Sweeping generalisation has taken the place of isolated local situations. Quiet discussion and explanation as between friends has given place to a sharp note of hostility. It seems such a little time since the emergence of the Trustee and Ward relationship gave us a happier feeling ... But now, as I read these African voices, I have the very unhappy feeling that so far from the Ward being satisfied, he is planning to take the Trustee to Court!

He then proceeded to discuss certain articles from *Pan-Africa* in particular, for example describing Amy Jacques Garvey’s contribution as ‘the voice of the awakened peoples ... apart from certain over-emphases and exaggerations, I found it difficult to rebut.’ Indeed, by and large Cullen Young’s response to much of *Pan-Africa* is a sense of general agreement, coupled with the sentiment that ‘As a Christian one feels burdened

with a sense of duty undone ... How and where have we failed?', although he did describe *Pan-Africa's* dismissal of most previous books about Africa as provoking 'righteous anger since they are heinously untrue.'

However, not all readers gave *Pan-Africa* quite such a sympathetic reading. For example, a different reading altogether was offered in 1949 by Walter Russell Crocker, a former colonial official in Nigeria. Crocker, who had written critically on his time in Nigeria in 1936,¹⁶³ built on his earlier criticisms by authoring a more wide-ranging critique of colonial government in his 1949 book *Self-Government for the Colonies*. The book was styled as an attempt to 'explain the political agitation which is the characteristic feature of the colonial world today', though Crocker betrayed his roots in the colonial services when he emphasised that 'What I am concerned with is the right attitude of mind in the Metropolitan Powers to the dissident movements now growing apace in their respective colonies.'¹⁶⁴ Whilst overall the book asserted that there was a need to begin planning for colonial self-government within a set time frame, Crocker was keen to see government take a lead, rather than allow colonial militants to bring about self-government of their own accord.¹⁶⁵ In line with this position, Crocker took a dim view of *Pan-Africa*. In a chapter entitled 'Factors and forces behind the ferment,' Crocker wrote of what he saw as 'the anti-British feeling, swelling to anti-white feeling and at times to xenophobia among sections of the African as of other colonial nationalists.'¹⁶⁶ Amongst the evidence for this assertion, Crocker cited an article on Lionel Curtis which had been published in the March-April 1948 issue of *Pan-Africa*,

¹⁶³ W. R. Crocker (1936), *Nigeria: A Critique of British Colonial Administration* London: Allen and Unwin.

¹⁶⁴ W. R. Crocker (1949), *Self-Government for the Colonies* London: Allen and Unwin: v.

¹⁶⁵ Crocker, *Self-Government for the Colonies*: 167-172.

¹⁶⁶ Crocker, *Self-Government for the Colonies*: 90.

which he described as ‘a racist journal’.¹⁶⁷ In Curtis’s mind, *Pan-Africa* was a periodical representative of that ‘pathology of wounded self-esteem’ which he diagnosed as afflicting colonial peoples across the globe.¹⁶⁸ Whilst Crocker’s dismissal of the periodical as ‘racist’ demonstrated that he had either not read, or had ignored the earlier editorials in the periodical arguing for multi-racial collaboration, it demonstrates that even those who were in principle sympathetic to some form of colonial self-government found *Pan-Africa* to be too radical for their tastes. For colonial critics such as Crocker, anxious to see Britain take the lead in freeing its colonial possessions, the insurgent writings in *Pan-Africa* risked encouraging colonial people to endeavour to free themselves, and therefore, because of the more fundamental challenge offered to the image of benevolent British imperialism, it had to be denounced.

However, the editors of *Pan-Africa* were unable to respond to Crocker’s criticisms, since the periodical had ceased publication by the middle of 1948. Padmore later claimed that this was due to increased government efforts to suppress the periodical, writing that ‘[t]he journal excited alarm in official quarters and was banned by East African colonial governments as “seditious”’ and that it was therefore ‘forced to close down so as not to jeopardise the liberties of subscribers who were liable to imprisonment if found reading the magazine.’¹⁶⁹ However, this appears mostly to be hyperbole from Padmore, given that in 1948 Makonnen wrote an article in *Pan-Africa* outlining the difficulties it faced, at the head of which he put ‘the limitation of capital made inevitable by the absence of support from any organisation.’ He noted that, in the

¹⁶⁷ Crocker, *Self-Government for the Colonies*: 91; *Pan-Africa* March-April 1948: 6.

¹⁶⁸ Crocker, *Self-Government for the Colonies*: 91.

¹⁶⁹ G. Padmore (1956), *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle For Africa* London: Dennis Dobson: 174.

first year of publication, a total of £400 had been lost in publication, though he stressed that this sum was ‘not excessive considering our operative base, and the extended character of our lines of distribution.’ Noting that readers were based in ‘Continental Africa, the West Indies, the United States, South and Central America,’ Makonnen wrote that such wide geographical dispersion hindered the financing of *Pan-Africa* since it meant that ‘it has taken months for subscriptions and remittances from agents to reach us.’ These difficulties were compounded by ‘the reluctance of bookshops and newsagents to display copies of *Pan-Africa*’ because they feel ‘that they should not encourage a publication of its kind.’¹⁷⁰ The editorial made no mention of the government interference which Padmore later blamed for the end of publication. Only one further issue of *Pan-Africa*, for March-April 1948, was to be published.

Conclusion

Reflecting many years later on the demise of Pan-Africa, Padmore described it as ‘a heavy blow to the voice of Pan-Africanism.’¹⁷¹ *Pan-Africa* had presented itself as a material embodiment of pan-Africanism, a forum in which ideas could be aired and debated. In this sense, the end of *Pan-Africa* was undoubtedly a ‘heavy blow’ to the specific incarnation of pan-African politics that Padmore, Makonnen and others had developed out of the 1945 Manchester Congress. More broadly, and related to the declining fortunes of the LCP’s *News Letter* around the same time, the final issue of *Pan-Africa* represents the terminal point in a long line of black West Indian periodicals to have been published in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s. In the post-war years, new

¹⁷⁰ ‘A word from the editor,’ *Pan-Africa* January-February 1948: 4-6.

¹⁷¹ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?*: 174.

publications would emerge, perhaps most notably the *West Indian Gazette*, but these would be coordinated by different individuals and organisations, predominantly post-war West Indian migrants to Britain.¹⁷² The LCP, the IASB, and the Pan-African Federation had been at the centre of the diverse publishing endeavours of the 1930s and 1940s, and the demise of *Pan-Africa* brought the involvement of these groups to a close.

Brent Edwards has argued that ‘black periodicals were a threat [to imperial governments] above all because of the transnational and anti-imperialist linkages and alliances they practised.’¹⁷³ Whilst Edwards’s account holds true in certain instances, this chapter has demonstrated that amongst the periodicals published by black West Indian groups in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s a far more complex array of perspectives was articulated. These black periodicals cannot be assumed to have articulated anti-imperialist identities simply because they openly showcased transnational alliances and interests. In particular, the LCP openly practised an African diasporic identity, and drew on periodicals, ideas and events from around this diaspora, at the same time as advocating a critical imperial reformism. Their periodicals served as a crucial site for black activists to debate the roles of racism and colonialism in world politics, and to enter into dialogue with imperial politicians, thinkers and the wider press on these matters. As a consequence, LCP periodicals showcased diverse perspectives on a range of issues. Likewise, whilst the IASB and later Pan-African Federation used their periodicals to take a more rigorously anti-imperial standpoint, they nevertheless

¹⁷² For an example of the later initiatives which would follow these periodicals, see B. Schwarz (2003), ‘Claudia Jones and the *West Indian Gazette*’: Reflections on the emergence of post-colonial Britain,’ *Twentieth Century British History*, **14:3**: 264-285.

¹⁷³ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*: 9.

contained within their pages diverse interpretations of what an African diasporic politics should look like, which in turn provoked multiple responses amongst readers.

It is clear that the small community of black West Indians in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s contributed to a vibrant black journalistic public sphere which both engaged with the mainstream British public sphere and acted outside of it, within the international contours of black activism in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁷⁴ However, such periodicals did not simply act within an already defined sphere of political activity. In their own way, they attempted to speak back to certain elements within the imperial establishment, consciously displaying their position in the colonial metropolis and using it in an attempt to alter the tenor and content of public debate on British imperialism. They were intended to play a transformative role, changing British attitudes to race and directly challenging the colour bar, as well as making the colonial world a more pressing concern for metropolitan Britons. By bringing these matters to the fore, in the context of a wider press and public sphere which too often marginalised questions of race and empire, black West Indian periodicals actively sought to initiate and advance the process of creolisation.

This chapter has highlighted some of the many ways in which periodicals enabled black West Indians in Britain to articulate their activism in relation to events taking place around the world, and in doing so to construct their own understandings of diaspora and to interpret the place of black people in the modern world. Whilst the content of periodicals mattered, the focus of this chapter has also fallen on the geographical networks within which these periodicals were produced, circulated and read. It has emphasised that periodicals played an active role in the construction of the wider geographical networks within which these activists were embedded. The narrative

¹⁷⁴ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*.

told here has been focused predominantly on the British end of the networks within which these periodicals were embedded. It has been shown, for example, that the differing perspectives of its editors in London shaped the position taken by *The Keys* on a number of global issues; that periodicals produced by the IASB were advertised within a diverse array of broadly leftist periodicals and sold at political gatherings around London, as well as being discussed in the centres of imperial power such as the Colonial Office and the House of Commons; and that the political message contained within *Pan-Africa* could be differently interpreted by critics of empire based in Britain. Exploring these networks has given an insight into how black West Indian activists used periodicals as a political technology useful to their efforts to map out an African diasporic identity from their location within the heart of the imperial metropolis, and in the process to transform that metropolis itself. These periodicals, global in scope, were nonetheless reliant upon and deeply embedded within the more localised political networks formulated in London by their founding organisations. By discussing at length critical perspectives on colonialism and the global colour line and making direct references to colonial and wider African diasporic newspapers, these periodicals offered a way for colonial ways of thinking to be transmitted into the imperial heartland.

Chapter Six

'White capital has always dominated the islands': Black West Indian activists in Britain and the Caribbean social unrest of the 1930s

Introduction

Earlier chapters of this thesis have charted the engagement of black West Indian activists in Britain with three particular modes of political practice. In this final substantive chapter, the approach and purpose is somewhat different. Instead of centring on one particular mode of political practice, as the earlier chapters have, this chapter focuses on how multiple modes of political practice intertwined in relation to a particular event, namely the response of black West Indian activists in Britain to the social unrest which broke out across the West Indies in the 1930s.

The inter-war Caribbean experienced considerable unrest, primarily as a result of an economic downturn brought on by the effects of the Great Depression in the late-1920s. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 initiated 'an accumulating contraction in world trade'¹ that provoked a global crash in commodity prices. In the Caribbean, where, as one writer at the time put it, 'the production of cash-crops for export has always monopolized attention,'² such a contraction had significant consequences. In the post-emancipation years, increasing proportions of agricultural and commodity production in the Caribbean had fallen into the hands of a smaller number of companies and estates.

¹ R. Hyam (2007), *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 36

² W. M. Macmillan (1938 [1936]), *Warning From the West Indies* Harmondsworth: Penguin: 140.

When coupled with an increased dependence on wage-labour amongst the working classes, this rendered Caribbean economies and societies particularly poorly placed to withstand the effects of the Great Depression, which reduced demand for export crops and produce, lowered prices, and generated ‘an army of unemployed labourers who have neither land nor agricultural tradition’ in the region.³ As a result, as Howard Johnson has written, ‘[s]trikes and disturbances were regular features of the inter-war years, but the labour rebellions of 1934-9, which affected most sectors of the colonial economies, were unprecedented in their scope and scale.’⁴ Serious expressions of labour agitation began in British Honduras (now Belize) in 1934, culminating in a riot there in September. The same year also saw labour disturbances in Trinidad and British Guiana, followed by St Kitts, St Lucia, St Vincent, Jamaica and Trinidad and British Guiana again in 1935. In 1937, Trinidad and Barbados experienced significant outpourings of unrest, and the Bahamas also saw striking. The peak of the disturbances came when striking workers were put down with military force in Jamaica in 1938, resulting in several deaths and numerous injuries. In 1939, another major strike broke out in British Guiana, and strikes also broke out regularly in Antigua.

The causes of these diverse episodes of unrest, as well as their nature, extent and consequences for the Caribbean region are now the subject of an extensive

³ Macmillan, *Warning from the West Indies*: 169; G. K. Lewis (1968), *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* London: MacGibbon and Kee: 69-94; B. Bush (1999), *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945* London: Routledge: 104-114; R. Kiely (1996), *The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad* Kingston: University of West Indies Press: 63-73.

⁴ H. Johnson (1999), ‘The British Caribbean from demobilization to constitutional decolonization,’ in J. Brown, and W. R. Louis, (eds.) *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 604.

historiography.⁵ As such, they will not be the prime focus of this chapter. Instead, the focus here will be on a previously under-studied aspect of the unrest, namely the impact which it had upon the community of black West Indians then based in Britain. The West Indian unrest was amongst ‘the colonial events that aroused most publicity and concern in Britain in the later 1930s,’⁶ yet its full significance is yet to be understood. In particular, little detailed work has been done to examine how these events shaped the actions of West Indian activists in Britain.⁷ One exception to this trend is Stephen Howe’s discussion of the impact of the unrest on the wider British left, which situates the actions of Britain’s black community within the context of broader left wing interest in the West Indies in 1930s Britain.⁸ Whilst this focus usefully contextualises the actions of black West Indians in Britain in response to the unrest in their homelands, it fails to capture the full diversity of responses, nor to examine them in any great detail. Indeed, Howe goes as far as to suggest that most ‘West Indian political figures in

⁵ O. N. Bolland (1995), *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* London: James Currey; O. N. Bolland (2001), *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean: The Social Origins of Authoritarianism and Democracy in the Labour Movement* Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle; K. Post (1978), *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaica Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* London: Martinus Nijhoff; and K. Singh (1994), *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad, 1917-1945* Mona, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press.

⁶ J. Derrick (2008), *Africa’s “Agitators”: Militant Anti-colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939* London: Hurst: 395.

⁷ Though see C. Høgsbjerg (2011), “‘A thorn in the side of Great Britain.’: C. L. R. James and the Caribbean labour rebellions of the 1930s,’ *Small Axe* **35**: 24-42; B. Schwarz (2003), ‘C. L. R. James and George Lamming: The measure of historical time,’ *Small Axe* **14**: 39-70.

⁸ S. Howe (1994), *Anticolonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire, 1918-1964* Oxford: Clarendon Press: 90-105; Ken Post’s account of the unrest in Jamaica devotes attention to what Post calls ‘Jamaica’s many-stranded web of links with British organisations’. Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*: 405.

Britain ... responded to the risings in surprisingly muted fashion,' suggesting that 'nor is this really very remarkable.'⁹ In contrast, it will be argued here that the response of black West Indian activists in Britain was considerably less muted than Howe suggests, and that focusing on diverse modes of political practice enables this to come to the fore.¹⁰

The chapter begins by exploring how black West Indian activists in Britain engaged with events in their homelands through political practices centred on forging connections with the Caribbean. It then turns to explore how the holding of public gatherings West Indian activists to highlight the importance of the West Indian unrest, before exploring how writing in various formats about the unrest served a similar purpose. Finally, it discusses the multiple ways in which black West Indian activists in Britain engaged with government Royal Commission's on events in the West Indies, and closes with some concluding remarks about how a study of the spaces in which black West Indian activists in Britain engaged with events in their homelands, and the networks through which this engagement took place, develops understanding of the process of creolisation in 1930s London.

⁹ Howe, *Anticolonialism and the Left*: 102.

¹⁰ Similarly, Barbara Bush's account of imperial politics in metropolitan Britain donates only two pages to the West Indian unrest, making no mention of the activism of black West Indians in Britain on this matter. Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 254-255.

‘In a state of ferment’: Hospitality, publicity, and networks of connection between Britain and the West Indies

Theophilus Albert Marryshow, an elected official in the legislative council of Grenada, was no stranger to London when he arrived in 1932, having already visited eleven years previously for the 1921 Pan-African Congress. Marryshow owned and wrote prolifically for the Grenadian newspaper the *West Indian*, and had long advocated West Indian unity.¹¹ In 1932, Marryshow travelled to London with fellow Grenadian Mr G. Vernon Edwards in order to offer his contribution to a Government Commission then inquiring into Closer Union in the West Indies. The Commission’s report was released in 1933, and has since been described by historian Gordon Lewis as proposing an ‘ill-advised constitutional scheme ... for the inclusion of the Leewards, along with the Windwards, into one large colony.’¹²

Whilst in London, Marryshow and Edwards developed close links with the League of Coloured Peoples. In October 1932, Marryshow attended an LCP reception for Sir Ransford Slater, the new Governor of Jamaica, and his wife.¹³ Early in 1933, Marryshow and Edwards were themselves hosted at a meeting of the League of Coloured Peoples, at which Marryshow was given seventy five minutes to discuss conditions in the West Indies. This talk predated the emergence of *The Keys* later in 1933, and so the League made no written report themselves. However, it was picked up on by the Jamaican newspaper the *Daily Gleaner*, which reported Marryshow’s talk at

¹¹ J. Sheppard (1987), *Marryshow of Grenada: An Introduction* Barbados: Letchworth; E. Duke (2009), ‘The diasporic dimensions of British Caribbean Federation in the early Twentieth century,’ *New West Indian Guide* **83:3/4**: 219-248.

¹² Lewis, *Growth of the Modern West Indies*: 128.

¹³ ‘The League of Coloured Peoples,’ *West Africa* 22 October 1932: 1110.

length. The *Gleaner* noted that Marryshow told of how the West Indies were ‘in a state of ferment.’ There was, he said, an ‘underlying hatred of Crown Colony government,’ and during his discussions with the Colonial Office he had told them that ‘the time had come when the West Indians were determined to take an effective share in shaping their own destiny.’

For Marryshow, activist organisations established by West Indians in the imperial metropolis were of considerable importance. He noted that there was an ‘absolute ignorance’ in Britain regarding the West Indies, and insisted that the ‘greatest task’ before the LCP was to ‘devise means to break down in Great Britain the wall of ignorance of the West Indies, and to show the real position of the British West Indies on the scheme of Empire.’ He urged the LCP to ‘build up a society capable of ... [taking] care of the West Indies.’ He argued that the LCP should ‘organise for service for the West Indies,’ insisting that this required them to forge strong links with the West Indian people themselves, an effort towards which Marryshow pledged his assistance by offering to establish a West Indian branch of the League on his return to the Caribbean.¹⁴

Marryshow’s status as a West Indian visitor to Britain, rather than somebody intending to stay for a prolonged period, reminds us of the League’s commitment to offering hospitality to colonial visitors whilst in London, discussed in chapter three. At the reception for Marryshow and Edwards, the League provided a space in which the two visitors could mix with fellow black West Indians in Britain, whilst also offering a platform for the visitors to discuss publicly their reasons for visiting Britain and enabling LCP members and associates to hear directly from prominent political figures recently arrived in Britain from the Caribbean.

¹⁴ ‘A meeting in honour of Mr Marryshow,’ *Daily Gleaner* 19 January 1933: 18.

Whilst Marryshow's address was not itself reported in *The Keys*, we can nevertheless closely situate it in relation to other public pronouncements made by members of the LCP in the following months. In the April-June 1934 issue of *The Keys*, C. L. R. James wrote about the final report of the Commission into Closer Union in the West Indies that had drawn Marryshow to London in the first place. James argued that closer unity in the region was important to the development of 'West Indian consciousness.' He suggested that the Colonial government was interested in developing a basic level of unity between West Indian colonies, but that colonial West Indians themselves had pushed much further, for the complete abolition of Crown Colony government in the region. This was precisely the point being made by Marryshow in his talk to the LCP, and had also been a theme in James's own earlier work.¹⁵ To James's mind, the final report of the government commission was reduced, by virtue of its failure to consider the kinds of full constitutional change demanded by Marryshow, to being 'one of the most barren and unstatesmanlike documents ... ever presented to a British Government.'¹⁶

The West Indies were also the subject of discussion at the League's annual conference for 1934, at which Fred Degazon, a member of the LCP's executive committee from St Lucia, spoke to the title of 'West Indian Problems.' Degazon too denounced Crown Colony government in the West Indies, and emphasised the need for closer federation between the colonies. *The Keys* reported that Degazon provoked a 'lively discussion' amongst his audience.¹⁷ However, whilst the conference passed

¹⁵ C. L. R. James (1933), *The Case for West Indian Self-Government* London: Hogarth Press.

¹⁶ C. L. R. James, 'West Indies self government,' *The Keys* April-June 1934: 72, 84.

¹⁷ 'LCP annual conference,' *The Keys* April-June 1934: 74; 'League of Coloured Peoples in conference,' *West Africa* 31 March 1934: 328.

resolutions on the status of women in Africa, and regarding recent events surrounding Liberia, it was not deemed necessary to pass a resolution on the West Indies, despite incidents of labour unrest having recently taken place in Jamaica.¹⁸

In the early 1930s, the LCP had thus begun to turn its attention squarely to questions of West Indian politics. They did so through a network of public events and written statements in *The Keys*, and it is possible to see the relationship between these two spaces – that of speech and of text – as being one of dialogue. Certainly, we can understand James’s article on West Indian self-government as being in dialogue, whether consciously or not, with Marryshow’s earlier spoken critique at a League public gathering, and likewise Degazon’s own address at the LCP annual conference also spoke to similar issues centred on West Indian governance. Each pronouncement offered a critical take on Crown Colony government, and called for an alternative system of rule. Modes of political practice rooted in diverse spaces, from a public meeting in London to an article in *The Keys* and an LCP conference, came together to articulate a shared critique of the particular form of colonial rule then operating in the West Indies.

By 1937, the situation in the Caribbean had become particularly acute. In June, a sit-down strike on the Forest Reserve Oilfield in Trinidad descended into a ‘bloody riot’ after police attempted to arrest the labour leader Uriah Butler.¹⁹ In the aftermath, Trinidad experienced what one historian has referred to as a ‘great labour rebellion.’

¹⁸ ‘Resolutions passed at the conference,’ *The Keys* April-June 1934: 82.

¹⁹ Kiely, *The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad*: 73-74; W. R. Jacobs (1977), ‘The politics of protest in Trinidad: The strikes and disturbances of 1937,’ *Caribbean Studies* 17: 1/2: 5-54.

Even Barbados, usually perceived as amongst the most orderly of West Indian colonies, saw 'a massive riot and several strikes' that year.²⁰

In Britain, West Indian activists worked hard to make contact with the masses of the Caribbean. At one meeting of the IASB, watched over by Special Branch officers, George Padmore appeared clutching copies of the *People of Port of Spain*, a Trinidadian newspaper for which he was reportedly London correspondent, as well as a host of other West Indian newspapers. Padmore discussed the labour unrest in Trinidad, and indicated that he had been in contact with the Indo-Trinidadian labour activist Adrian Cola Rienzi, a figure who would feature prominently in later IASB reports on organised labour in the Caribbean.²¹ Rienzi can thus be added to Marryshow as another direct link between West Indian activists in Britain and leading figures in West Indian politics and the broader labour movement. Reading West Indian newspapers was an important way for West Indian activists in Britain to learn about events in their homelands, and by seeking to contribute to them whenever possible such newspapers also offered conduits for West Indians in Britain to transmit their analyses of events back to the Caribbean.

At the time of the unrest in Trinidad and Barbados, West Indian activists in Britain were also able to make connections to another important West Indian figure then present in Britain. Like Marryshow before him, Grantley Adams, a member of the Barbadian legislature and founder in 1938 of the Barbados Progressive League, had travelled to Britain to lobby the Colonial Office. Whilst in Britain, the LCP hosted a public meeting in the Memorial Hall at which Adams was the main speaker. No doubt

²⁰ Bolland, *On the March*: 82, 111

²¹ Special Branch Report, 17 August 1937, in MEPO/38/91; 'The West Indies labour conference,' *International African Opinion* August 1938: 10-11; K. Singh (1982), 'Adrian Cola Rienzi and the labour movement in Trinidad (1925-1944),' *Journal of Caribbean History* **16**: 11-35.

Adams felt at home in the atmosphere of an LCP meeting, given Bill Schwarz's description of him as 'both militant in his bid to break the emergent power of socialist "hotheads," and a vociferous, unrelenting enemy of the old white oligarchy.'²² Despite his preference for liberalism, Adams had reluctantly forged links with Clement Payne and other leading labour activists in Barbados, and in 1937 he testified to a commission of inquiry established by the Governor of Barbados to inquire into the unrest of 1937, known as the Deane Commission.²³ His talk to the LCP was wide-ranging, covering a variety of West Indian colonies. The full report of Adams's speech, printed in *The Keys*, reads as a damning indictment of British colonial policy in the West Indies, and in particular of the 'dangerous reaction to the expression of discontent' displayed by the imperial government. Yet Adams closed by stressing that 'both the loyalty and the well-being of the West Indies were worth preserving,' and called for a 'forward looking policy on the part of the Colonial Office' rather than complete independence.²⁴ As well as meeting with the LCP, Adams also engaged with the IASB, and in particular George Padmore. Adams's biographer has noted that Padmore introduced him both to IASB members, and to leftists such as Denis Pritt, Stafford Cripps, and Arthur Creech Jones.²⁵

²² Schwarz, 'C. L. R. James and George Lamming': 36; M. Chamberlain (2010), *Empire and Nation-Building in the Caribbean: Barbados, 1937-66* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

²³ Schwarz, 'C. L. R. James and George Lamming': 36.

²⁴ 'Labour disturbances in the West Indies: Report of a speech by G. H. Adams, MCP of Barbados,' *The Keys* January-March 1938: 64-66; 'Recent labour troubles in West Indies discussed,' *Daily Gleaner* 30 December 1937.

²⁵ F. A. Hoyos (1974), *Grantley Adams and the Social Revolution: The Story of the Movement that Changed the Pattern of West Indian Society* London: Macmillan: 67-72.

An article in the *New Leader* also reported that Padmore had taken Adams to meet the leading figures in the Independent Labour Party at their headquarters.²⁶

It was not only through visits by West Indian labour activists and politicians to London that black West Indians in Britain kept in touch with events in their homelands. In December 1937, the IASB forwarded to Labour MP Arthur Creech Jones a copy of a document sent to them by the Trinidad Federated Workers Trade Union, commenting on recent events in Trinidad and focusing in particular on the labour grievances of railway workers.²⁷ Creech Jones took the matter up with the Colonial Secretary, who stated that he was unable to act on any grievance unless he received a petition directly from the workers concerned.²⁸ Despite this failure, the IASB continued to hand information to Creech Jones to assist him in Commons debates. Such material included further documents from the Trinidad Federated Workers Trade Union, as well as clippings from West Indian newspapers such as the *Trinidad Guardian*.²⁹

As well as being important sources of information about the unrest, West Indian newspapers also became important spaces for commentary upon and analysis of the activities of West Indian activists in Britain. In June 1938 Moody led a deputation to the Colonial Office consisting of Labour MP Reginald Bridgeman, Dorothy Woodman of the Union of Democratic Control, Ronald Kidd of the National Council of Civil

²⁶ 'War and fascism in British Empire,' *New Leader* 26 November 1937: 3.

²⁷ Wallace Johnson to Creech Jones, 7 December 1937, Arthur Creech Jones papers, Rhosed House Library, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/5/24-27, 29.

²⁸ Ormsby-Gore to Creech Jones, 14 January 1938; Creech Jones to Wallace Johnson, 18 January 1938, both in MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/5/32-33

²⁹ Wallace Johnson to Creech Jones, 7 March 1938; Wallace Johnson to Creech Jones, 14 March 1938; Wallace Johnson to Creech Jones, 16 March 1938; Padmore to Creech Jones, 29 November 1938, all in MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/5/142-149, 282.

Liberties, and Ben Bradley of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The delegation discussed recent events in Jamaica, where striking labourers on the Frome sugar estate, owned by the British firm Tate and Lyle, had been forcefully suppressed by armed police, with the Colonial Office at length.³⁰ However, it also provoked the ire of an editorial in Jamaica's conservative newspaper the *Daily Gleaner*. The issues raised by the deputation were on the whole, the *Gleaner* asserted, 'a deliberate falsehood' and 'in violent conflict with the truth.' Whilst the deputation had protested against police shooting of protestors, the *Gleaner* declared that '[t]he shooting at Frome was justified,' stressing that the protestors were a violent mob and that the police had given them plenty of warning before firing. Rounding on Moody – and clearly unaware of his avowed pacifism – the editorial asked, 'What would Dr Moody have done if he was in Jamaica and was held responsible for law and order in Westmoreland? Would he not have done what Inspector O'Donoghue did – order seven or eight men to fire into the crowd?'³¹ Not content with this dismissal of Moody's actions, the *Gleaner* returned to a discussion of the deputation at the end of June, this time branding it an attempt to 'poison the wells of public opinion.'³²

The activities of West Indian activists in Britain clearly caught the attention of some in Jamaica. By mid-1938, it had become clear that the Colonial Office was preparing to send a Royal Commission to the West Indies to investigate the wider, pan-Caribbean causes of the unrest, to be chaired by Lord Moyne. In July 1938, the Mayor of Kingston, Dr Oswald Anderson, made the question of a Royal Commission the subject of what the *Gleaner* described as a 'sensational cablegram' to Moody in

³⁰ 'Activities of the League,' *The Keys* July-September 1938: 10.

³¹ 'That protest,' *Daily Gleaner* 13 June 1938.

³² 'Dangerous propaganda here,' *Daily Gleaner* 23 June 1938: 19.

London.³³ Anderson had recently declared himself a supporter of the workers and peasants who were protesting.³⁴ Whilst it is unclear exactly how Anderson knew Moody, Moody's activities in Britain had been mentioned frequently in the *Daily Gleaner*, and Anderson knew former LCP member Una Marson, at this point back in Jamaica, whom he had introduced at a recent conference as a 'Jamaican of whom we are truly proud.'³⁵ Anderson's cable to Moody read as follows:

Situation in Jamaica deplorable. Some officials assume oligarchic role. Many Government Departments, especially the Medical vile; injecting colour discrimination. Race hatred being fostered. Royal Commission can never tell the story and not favourably regarded. Help me in any way you can.³⁶

Moody rushed to the Colonial Office on the morning the telegram arrived. He also passed the material on to Labour MP Arthur Creech Jones,³⁷ and cabled Anderson to request that he 'Send details' because the 'Colonial Office wants to investigate.' As a result, Anderson prepared and posted a three page document cataloguing his concerns in more detail and making the case against a Royal Commission, on the grounds that poverty in the region had already been established by previous Commission's, and that

³³ 'Mayor cables London "Situation Jamaica deplorable",' *Daily Gleaner* 6 July 1938: 1.

³⁴ 'Papers and subjects discussed at Mayor's conference,' *Daily Gleaner* 31 January 1938: 13.

³⁵ 'Papers and subjects discussed at Mayor's conference,' *Daily Gleaner* 31 January 1938: 13.

³⁶ 'Mayor cables London "Situation Jamaica deplorable",' *Daily Gleaner* 6 July 1938: 1.

³⁷ Moody to Creech Jones, 5 July 1938, in Creech Jones papers, Rhodes House, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1/23-24.

what was needed now was immediate action to improve conditions.³⁸ Moody forwarded these documents to the Colonial Office, passed them to Creech Jones for use in the Commons,³⁹ and also received supportive messages from Jamaican labour leaders.⁴⁰ The *Gleaner* denounced Anderson, insisting that a Royal Commission was the correct way to deal with the unrest.⁴¹ Anderson, however, was unwilling to let the matter rest, and resigned from his post as Mayor in protest at a vote of censure passed against him by the City Council.⁴² In London, Moody received news of Anderson's resignation with regret, though he immediately cabled him to request that he continue sending information on Jamaican events, noting that the LCP's lobbying was seeing '[e]ncouraging results.'⁴³

By the time reports of this telegram were printed in the Jamaican press, a Royal Commission to the West Indies had been announced by Malcolm MacDonald Secretary of State for the Colonies, to become known as the Moyne Commission. The IASB immediately dispatched a letter of protest to the *Manchester Guardian* criticising the absence of anybody of African descent, or anybody native to the West Indies, on the

³⁸ 'Mayor cables London "Situation Jamaica deplorable",' *Daily Gleaner* 6 July 1938: 1.

³⁹ Moody to Mr Beckett, 19 July 1938, CO 318/435/2; Moody to Creech Jones, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1/38

⁴⁰ 'Dr Harold Moody backed by Jamaica labour in mission to the Secretary of State,' *Daily Gleaner* 26 August 1938: 1; 'Cables support of Dr Harold Moody,' *Daily Gleaner* 29 August 1938: 13; 'League supports Dr Harold Moody,' *Daily Gleaner* 30 August 1938: 1.

⁴¹ 'Mayor's cable,' *Daily Gleaner* 7 July 1938: 12.

⁴² 'Mayor quits,' *Daily Gleaner* 12 July 1938: 12.

⁴³ 'Jamaicans abroad approve action of Dr Anderson in resigning as Mayor,' *Daily Gleaner* 6 August 1938: 3. The story made headlines across the black world. See, for example, 'Mayor resigns, disgusted, when blacks censure him for fight on color prejudice,' *The Pittsburgh Courier* 23 July 1938: 1.

Committee.⁴⁴ They took their criticism further in *International African Opinion*, noting that W. Arthur Lewis's recent appointment to the post of lecturer at London School of Economics proved that there were black West Indians capable enough of sitting on the commission, and describing the Commission as a 'bluff' designed to mask the need for the only real solution, 'a fully democratic constitution.'⁴⁵ The LCP, too, were critical of the fact that most of the Commission members 'qualify in no particular way for the investigation of labour troubles in the Caribbean,' and also denounced the absence of any remit for discussing political factors as contributory causes of the unrest. Both the IASB and the LCP backed the idea that '[o]nly when economic improvement goes hand in hand with political freedom will the West Indies be freed from the stultification of all progress.'⁴⁶

Moody continued to use the Anderson affair as an opportunity to correspond with the Colonial Office. On 2 September 1938, he was granted an interview with Malcolm Macdonald, at which he took the opportunity to hand over correspondence from Anderson, and to call for improvements in such areas as labour conditions and education for the people of the West Indies, as well as constitutional reform. Macdonald responded that he would act wherever possible, but that he would have to await the report of the Royal Commission.⁴⁷ Other officials treated Moody's lobbying with disdain, describing the letters from Anderson which Moody had forwarded as

⁴⁴ 'Late news from Great Britain received by the 'Gleaner' by Air Mail,' *Daily Gleaner* 16 August 1938: 17.

⁴⁵ 'Stop press,' and 'The West Indian Royal Commission,' *International African Opinion* August 1938: 1, 2.

⁴⁶ 'Editorial,' *The Keys* October-December 1938: 1-2.

⁴⁷ Untitled report of interview between Moody and Macdonald, by Mr Emmens, Colonial Office, 2 September 1938; Anderson to Moody, 16 August 1938, both in CO 318/435/2.

‘extravagant productions,’ and noting that Moody ‘is a busybody and that Dr Anderson is simply out for publicity.’⁴⁸ When Moody passed on documentation from the Jamaica Union of Teachers, officials ignored the memorandum on the grounds that it had not been submitted through the proper channels to the Royal Commission.⁴⁹

Whilst it may have had little impact upon official responses to the unrest in the West Indies, it is clear that making connections with important figures in the West Indies was a central preoccupation of West Indian activists in Britain during the second half of the 1930s. In order to establish and maintain such connections, these activists deployed a diverse set of modes of political practice. Letter writing and the sending of telegraphs, the hosting of visiting West Indians – who were given opportunities to speak publicly and have their speeches printed in periodicals like *The Keys*, as well as being introduced to a wider canvass of political activists in Britain – the reading of colonial newspapers, and getting into print in these same papers, all came together in order to enable links to be forged between activists in Britain and the West Indies themselves.

For visiting West Indians, groups like the IAFA/IASB and LCP offered an important opportunity to engage with the wider range of diasporic West Indian activism, and also to draw the attention of these activists to conditions in particular colonies. These organisations also represented important metropolitan lobbying opportunities for those, like Anderson, based in the Caribbean, far removed from the centres of imperial control. For groups like the LCP and IAFA/IASB, on the other hand, such connections were also beneficial, providing them with a chance to hear first-hand about conditions in the West Indian colonies, and also the opportunity to host public gatherings at which

⁴⁸ Memo by Emmens, Colonial Office, 8 September 1938; Memo by Stevens, 16 November 1938, both in CO 318/435/2.

⁴⁹ Memo by Mr Creasy, 19 September 1938, in CO 318/435/2.

these visitors could be provided with a public platform. Meanwhile, the exchange of correspondence with figures in the Caribbean, and the courting of controversy which resulted in appearances in the West Indian press, gave a wider audience to the activities of West Indian activists in Britain than simply those being lobbied in the metropolis.

‘Mischief mongering’: Labour unrest and public gatherings in London

As was argued in chapter four, one of the modes of political practice most commonly deployed by West Indian activists in 1930s London was the hosting of public gatherings. On 8 August 1937, the IASB hosted a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square at which George Padmore, C. L. R. James, the Barbadian Chris Jones, I. T. A. Wallace Johnson, and the MP Reginald Sorensen all spoke in support of the West Indian protestors. According to a report in the black American newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier* – probably penned by Padmore himself – the meeting drew in ‘thousands of colored [sic] and white people.’ In his speech, Padmore reportedly summarised imperial policy in Africa and the West Indies, arguing that ‘although the rulers of the British Empire may brand us agitators,’ and ‘despite their fascist methods,’ ‘the day is not far distant when the oppressed masses of the British Empire will throw these parasites and exploiters, these oppressors, off their backs.’ James, meanwhile, spoke of the relationship between British imperialism and the West Indies, and ‘called upon British workers to stand shoulder to shoulder with their colored [sic] brothers in united struggle against the British capitalist class.’⁵⁰ The meeting thus corresponded with the broader

⁵⁰ ‘Big mass meeting held in London: British rule indicted as resolution protests attitude towards West Indian strikers,’ *The Pittsburgh Courier* 28 August 1937: 7; This meeting may have taken place on 5 August. ‘Activities of London committee,’ *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 10, in CO 847/11/16.

pattern of IASB activism, injecting radical anti-imperialist arguments into the heart of London and encouraging the British working classes to see a connection between their own struggles and those of the colonial peoples.

On the same day as the Trafalgar Square rally, C. L. R. James and George Padmore had attended another public gathering at which the West Indies took centre stage. The two Trinidadians had travelled to Speakers' Corner to hear Marcus Garvey, now resident in London, discuss the labour unrest and striking in the West Indies, as mentioned in chapter four. The IASB members goaded Garvey into reluctantly discussing the situation of the workers in Trinidad, and he responded by saying that Trinidadians had 'been misled' and that the IASB were 'trying to keep the troubles going.' Following the Hyde Park incident, the enraged Garvey gave an interview to a reporter from the *Trinidad Guardian*, in which he explained his views as follows:

I am, of course, not hostile to the workers of Trinidad, but it grieves me to see them being misled. This organisation called the International African Service Bureau is nothing but a political body, and a Communist one at that, which is using the Trinidad workers for its own end.⁵¹

In Trinidad, Garvey's remarks were treated as reactionary and were roundly criticised by workers' groups, Garvey being seen by many as a 'stooge of the capitalists.'⁵² However, in the London context this incident demonstrates that debate and disagreement were rife amongst London's black West Indian community over the

⁵¹ 'Marcus Garvey on Trinidad strikes: Interview in London,' *Sunday Guardian: Sunday Edition of the Trinidad Guardian* August 29 1937: 1, 3.

⁵² R. Lewis (1988), *Marcus Garvey: Anti-Colonial Champion* Trenton: Africa World Press: 271.

pressing political issues of their day, and that these debates were played out at public gatherings.

Whilst reports of IASB meetings appeared in the black American press, the British security services also took notice. Indeed, the content of the Trafalgar Square speeches were such that one official expressed the belief that ‘it seems possible that the IASB may have had a hand in the outbreak of this epidemic [in Trinidad].’⁵³ Meanwhile, the IASB also continued their efforts to bring events in the West Indies to the attention of the wider British left. Padmore, for example, discussed conditions in the West Indies in a lecture to the Independent Labour Party Summer School of 1938.⁵⁴ His address was reported in the ILP’s paper, the *New Leader*, and was also reported in the *Daily Gleaner* in Jamaica. The *Gleaner* in fact took a keen interest in Padmore’s public pronouncements on the West Indies. On 26 May 1938, the paper reported on its front cover that ‘coloured social welfare societies held meetings in London last night, expressing sympathy with Jamaican labourers in their present trouble,’ and proceeded to quote Padmore as saying that ‘while Tory politicians sang the glory of the Empire on which the sun never sets, scattered millions were being denied certain rights entitled to them as British citizens. For them the sun never rises.’⁵⁵ In its editorial that same day, the *Gleaner* took aim at Padmore, commenting that although his speech ‘will, we have no doubt, be hailed with delight by hot-headed individuals in Jamaica, in common with

⁵³ Memo by C. G. Stevens, 30 August 1937; A. I. Tudor to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 18 August 1937, both in CO 318/427/11. The latter report asserts that only a couple of hundred people attended the gathering, not the ‘thousands’ referred to in *The Pittsburgh Courier*.

⁵⁴ ‘Wages 6d. a day: Why workers of the West Indies revolt,’ *New Leader* 19 August 1938: 5; ‘George Padmore’s recent lecture on West Indies,’ *Daily Gleaner* 31 August 1938: 17.

⁵⁵ ‘London takes Jamaica very seriously,’ *Daily Gleaner* 26 May 1938: 1.

those in the sister colonies,' the unrest in Jamaica had been 'the direct result of mischief mongering' and 'agitators utter[ing] untruths.'⁵⁶

On 28 June 1938, the IASB returned to Trafalgar Square to hold 'a protest meeting ... on behalf of the Jamaican workers.' The meeting was addressed by 'Officers and members of the Executive Committee,' and passed a resolution 'sending greetings of solidarity to the West Indian workers, and calling for the immediate release of recently-imprisoned labour leaders in the Caribbean such as Uriah Butler in Jamaica and Ulric Grant in Barbados.'⁵⁷ The IASB also worked with the ILP to produce an 'anti-empire exhibition,' the West Indian section of which was described by the ILP as being 'particularly striking ... showing the intolerable conditions' in the region.⁵⁸

The LCP also continued to hold meetings about events in the West Indies. In August 1938, they held a meeting ostensibly to bid farewell to Hugh Springer, a prominent League member who was returning to his homeland of Barbados. Hosted at the Moody's home, and attended by, amongst others, George Padmore, Desmond Buckle and Una Marson, newly returned to Britain from Jamaica, talk soon turned to West Indian matters, with Moody reporting on discussions he had recently had with the Colonial Office. The meeting closed by calling for 'close Co-operation between organizations in the West Indies and Great Britain' working on behalf of the West

⁵⁶ 'Future of B. W. I.,' *Daily Gleaner* 26 May 1938: 12. The *Gleaner* continued to attack Padmore over the years, though occasionally his friends wrote in to the paper in his support. 'Concerning George Padmore,' *Daily Gleaner* 15 June 1942.

⁵⁷ *International African Opinion* August 1938: 16.

⁵⁸ 'The "Other" Exhibition,' *New Leader* 12 August 1938; S. Britton (2010), "'Come and see the Empire by the all red route!": Anti-Imperialism and exhibitions in interwar Britain,' *History Workshop Journal* **69**: 68-89.

Indian people.⁵⁹ In September 1938, whilst the members of the Moyne Commission were in Britain, the LCP held a public meeting in the Memorial Hall. The event was billed, on a publicity leaflet distributed by the League, as a chance to ‘Come and hear all about JAMAICA from well-informed JAMAICANS and other West Indians recently arrived.’

By framing the meeting as an opportunity to hear from ‘recently arrived’ Jamaicans, the LCP sought to give the facts presented at their meeting increased credibility, and they thus also wrote to the Moyne Commission, inviting them to attend.⁶⁰ The meeting itself, reportedly ‘well attended by both West Indian and English people,’ was addressed by Lord Olivier and the Bishop of Jamaica, as well as by Una Marson, who gave ‘heartrending description’ of conditions in Jamaica, about which she had reported regularly for the *Jamaica Standard* prior to her recent return to Britain.⁶¹ A resolution was passed welcoming the appointment of a Royal Commission for the West Indies, but regretting that its terms of reference excluded any inquiry into ‘the political aspect’, namely, constitutional questions. It also protested against government use of force, and attempts at suppressing freedom of speech in the region.⁶² Two months after this meeting, Marson lectured to a conference of the British Commonwealth League on the subject of malnutrition in Jamaica, blaming British indifference to its colonial

⁵⁹ ‘The League of Coloured Peoples,’ *Daily Gleaner* 31 August 1938: 17.

⁶⁰ Moody to Lloyd, 12 September 1938; Lloyd to Moody, 13 September 1938, both in CO 950/30. The letter from Moody to Lloyd also includes the publicity leaflet quoted here.

⁶¹ ‘Recent meeting of League of Coloured Peoples in London when living conditions in Jamaica were discussed,’ *Daily Gleaner* 26 September 1938: 21; *Manchester Guardian* September 15 1938; for Marson’s reporting for the *Jamaica Standard*, see Jarrett-Macauley, *The Life of Una Marson*: 137-139.

⁶² See Moody to Lloyd, Colonial Office, 12 September 1938, CO 950/30; Moody to Malcolm MacDonald, 15 September 1938, CO 318/435/2.

possessions.⁶³ Moody, too, ensured that he discussed West Indian events at his own numerous public speaking and preaching gatherings, drawing the attention of audiences and congregations to the poverty and inequality of the West Indies.⁶⁴

Public meetings by black West Indian activists in Britain enabled these activists to make public statements in a variety of locations around London and beyond about the unrest in the West Indies, and to advance their own interpretations of it. They also enabled West Indian activists either to challenge one-another's interpretations of the events in the Caribbean, or to work together in unity. They provided opportunities for West Indian activists to present the arguments and opinions of people recently arrived in Britain from the Caribbean, and to pass resolutions in support of the working people of the West Indies. The audiences for pronouncements made in London lecturing and popular agitating sites were not limited simply to those who attended particular events. Instead, the transcription of such talks into texts and their circulation in colonial newspapers such as the *Daily Gleaner*, enabled the debate from public meetings to reverberate more widely, and to be engaged by a broader constituency of people.

⁶³ 'Callous and appalling indifference of people of Britain to needs of inhabitants of West Indies,' *Daily Gleaner* 28 November 1938: 21.

⁶⁴ For example, 'Dr Harold Moody preaches at Taunton,' *Daily Gleaner* 28 November 1938: 21; 'Urgent need for health, housing and social services in Jamaica, stressed by Chairman of League of Coloured Peoples,' *Daily Gleaner* 31 January 1939: 18.

‘The West Indian labourers ... have raised their cause squarely before the British public’: Textual engagements with the West Indian unrest

As discussed above, the LCP’s earliest writings on the West Indies, around the time of Marryshow’s 1932 visit, had focused on constitutional matters. It was in the July-September 1935 issue of *The Keys*, edited for the first time by W. Arthur Lewis, that the labour unrest in the West Indies made its first direct appearance. In a series of short articles entitled ‘Current Comment’ Lewis discussed recent labour unrest around the British Empire, and particularly in the Caribbean island of St Kitts, alongside the poor treatment of Australian Aborigines, racial politics in Southern Africa and in Britain, and the impending Italian invasion of Abyssinia.⁶⁵ In the same issue, Lewis also wrote a remarkable short story, entitled ‘Alpha and Omega,’ which depicted the relationship between black West Indians in Britain and the events in their homelands in fictional form. In the story, a nameless ‘dark young man,’ sent from the West Indies to Britain by his father to study medicine, struggles to adapt to London life and the overt racism with which he is faced. The newspapers he reads carry stories about ‘upstart negroes [sic]’ frequenting fashionable London cafes and ‘forgetting where they belong.’ The man toils at the bottom end of the social spectrum in London, having been brought up by a father who was ‘a leader of Jamaica society, who moved with Governors.’ One evening, he returns home to find a letter from his father writing about ‘the lower orders’ in Jamaica.

‘Three days ago the boys loading the ships dared to ask for more wages,
and when we refused they rioted. The upstarts. It’s been happening all

⁶⁵ ‘Current comment,’ *The Keys*, July-September 1935: 2-3.

over the West Indies I hear. Strikes in St Kitts, Trinidad and other places.

It's scandalous, they're forgetting where they belong.'

Struck by the parallel between the language of the London press and that of his father, both with their dismissive use of the word 'upstart', the man resists his father's narrative of events. 'His father was all wrong. They should strike if they wanted to. His father didn't know what it was like to be oppressed, insulted, jeered at.' The man becomes agitated by the relationship he perceives between events in the West Indies and colour prejudice in the metropolis. Instead of tramping around London being turned down from hospital jobs on account of his skin colour, he decides to return to Jamaica and 'hold meetings, form societies, make people see they were wrong; he'd organise the poor, build up a workers movement.' Exhausted by this fit of rebellion, the man retires to his bed for the night. When he awakes the next morning, a letter has arrived from 'St Bart's hospital,' offering him employment. Lewis concludes the story by writing that 'When last I heard of him his name was in the honours list; a leading social light in Jamaica, and a prominent member of the Royal Empire Society.'⁶⁶

By bringing together metropolitan colour prejudice and West Indian labour unrest, Lewis's story reshaped the geography of empire and positioned the West Indian migrant in Britain as crucial to forging the link between colonial and metropolitan contexts. It also demonstrated that the League utilised different genres of text in an attempt to articulate the importance of the West Indian unrest. It is unclear whether or not the figure in the story was modelled on a real associate of Lewis's, but the ending reads as a pessimistic take on the potential of both colonial students and the black

⁶⁶ 'Short story: Alpha and Omega,' *The Keys* July-September 1935: 9-10.

bourgeoisie in the metropolis to act on behalf of the poorest people in their home colonies.

Lewis did not edit the next issue of *The Keys*, but when he returned to the job he penned a detailed critique of the exploitative nature of imperial labour relations.⁶⁷ He also published a stinging critique of imperial policy in the West Indies, written by R. O. Thomas. Thomas wrote that the unrest in the region had arisen thanks to ‘the selfishness of the British government in consistently pursuing policies which cause severe distress to the West Indies,’ and concluded that the violent way in which colonial governors had dealt with the unrest threatened to end forever the loyalty of the West Indian people to Britain, since ‘It can never pay a Government to shed the blood of people whom by its own policy it has driven to starvation.’⁶⁸

Whilst Lewis was the driving force behind the LCP’s earliest engagement with the West Indian unrest, his writings also played a significant role in the interest which the wider British left gave to these events. In March 1935, Lewis wrote to the Secretary of the New Fabian Research Bureau, mentioning an advertisement he had seen calling for ‘assistance in research on the future of British Colonial Policy.’⁶⁹ Less than a month after first contacting the Fabians, Lewis provided them with ‘an outline for a pamphlet on the programme of a Socialist Government for the West Indies.’⁷⁰

Lewis’s proposal was well received by leading Fabians. Leonard Woolf, who also sat on the Labour Party’s Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, praised

⁶⁷ ‘Current comment,’ *The Keys* January-March 1936: 29-30.

⁶⁸ R. O. Thomas, ‘Revolt in the West Indies,’ *The Keys* January-March 1936: 37-38.

⁶⁹ Lewis to General Secretary, New Fabian Research Bureau, 12 March 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ/25/1A/8.

⁷⁰ Lewis to General Secretary, New Fabian Research Bureau, 1 April 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A/9-10.

Lewis's outline as 'just what we wanted in the [Labour] Party,' adding that members of the Advisory Committee had met the previous week to discuss the West Indies and collate information which would be of use to MP's in debate in the Commons.⁷¹ By June 1935, Lewis had produced a draft of his pamphlet, entitled simply *The British West Indies*. Beginning with a brief history of the West Indies, the pamphlet proceeded to examine in turn conditions faced by West Indian peoples, the political structure of the region, and a number of economic issues facing these colonies.⁷² No doubt one of the reasons that the pamphlet was so well received amongst Fabians was that it gave British labour leaders a central role in providing 'political freedom' in the West Indies, suggesting that any future Labour Government 'aim at moulding those scattered colonies into a single federated and democratic unit ... taking its equal place in a Commonwealth of free nations.'⁷³

The Fabians made initial tentative efforts to publish Lewis's pamphlet. Labour MP, leading Fabian internationalist, and future Colonial Secretary Arthur Creech Jones wrote to Marryshow, back in London during 1935, enclosing a copy of Lewis's pamphlet and noting that '[w]e should like very much to publish [it], but there is only a very small market for publications about the West Indies in this country, and we have

⁷¹ Woolf to Parker, General Secretary, New Fabian Research Bureau, 5 April 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A/11. On Woolf's role in the Labour Party's foreign policy thinking, and specifically in the Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions, see V. Glendinning (2006), *Leonard Woolf: A Life* London: Simon and Schuster: 233-234.

⁷² W. A. Lewis (1935), *The British West Indies*, unpublished manuscript, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A non-folioed item number 1

⁷³ Lewis, *The British West Indies*: 26. Lewis's argument here was close to the official labour movement position on the unrest. P. Weiler (1984), 'Forming responsible trade unions: The Colonial Office, colonial labour and the Trades Union Congress,' *Radical History Review* **28-30**: 367-392.

no contacts for sale in the West Indies.⁷⁴ Lewis had apparently suggested to Creech Jones that he contact Marryshow, in the hope that the National West India League, of which Marryshow was a member, might take up the offer to act as West Indian distributors for the pamphlet. In the end, no reply appears to have been received to Creech Jones's letter, and without the guarantee of a West Indian distributor the pamphlet remained unpublished.⁷⁵

Marryshow's reappearance here is important. Lewis had arrived in Britain to study at the LSE in 1933, and it is unlikely that he had been a member of the LCP when Marryshow last addressed them.⁷⁶ However, on returning to London Marryshow again addressed the LCP, this time at a meeting held in the Memorial Hall on Farringdon Street. For his topic, Marryshow chose the title 'The Empire's Forgotten Men,' giving some hints towards the nature of his address.⁷⁷ A brief report was carried in the periodical *West Africa*, which noted that Marryshow bemoaned the relative under-representation of African diasporic people compared to other colonials at the recent Royal Jubilee. Africans and West Indians, argued Marryshow, were 'merely treated as sources of economic fodder,' and he called for unity of purpose amongst the diverse black organisations now present in London, asking them to bear in mind the slogan 'co-operate, create, co-ordinate.'⁷⁸ However, on this trip to London the LCP were not the only black activist group to which Marryshow spoke. Padmore later recalled that Marryshow was vice-chairman of the International African Friends of Abyssinia at its

⁷⁴ Creech Jones to Marryshow, 17 June 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A/2.

⁷⁵ A note in pencil at the bottom of Creech Jones's letter indicates that no reply was received.

⁷⁶ On Lewis's arrival in Britain, see Tignor (2006), *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* Princeton: Princeton University Press: 16.

⁷⁷ 'Here and there,' *The Keys* July September 1935: 14.

⁷⁸ 'League of Coloured Peoples,' *West Africa* 20 July 1935: 825.

launch in 1935.⁷⁹ A report in *The Union Messenger*, newspaper of the Workers League in the West Indian island of St Kitts, confirms that Marryshow took pride in being involved with IAFA, using it to make a connection between the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the labour unrest in the Caribbean, and acting as a spokesman for the organisation on his return to the Caribbean. The article, brought to the attention of the Colonial Office by representatives in St Kitts, reports a speech given by Marryshow in that colony at which he said his time in Britain had allowed him ‘the privilege of meeting in conference with Negro people from Great Britain, from America, from Africa and from the West Indies,’ and to launch ‘an association known as the International African Friends of Ethiopia.’⁸⁰ Whilst IAFA focused primarily on the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, Marryshow’s involvement highlights that the Caribbean was central to its wider diasporic world-view from the start.

Despite not being published, Lewis’s pamphlet still found an audience. Mainly, this was within the Fabian Society and the Labour Party. One reader commented that the pamphlet was ‘an excellent piece of work,’ and hoped that Lewis might be persuaded to ‘follow up his work by several shorter and more intensive articles’ examining the specific conditions in particular West Indian colonies.⁸¹ W. M. Macmillan, a leading colonial historian with a specific interest in the West Indies, gave a somewhat more reserved judgement on Lewis’s pamphlet, describing it as ‘good enough to deserve to be better at several points where I thought it either slightly inaccurate or missing a point.’⁸²

⁷⁹ G. Padmore (1956), *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle For Africa* London: Dennis Dobson: 145.

⁸⁰ Undated article from *The Union Messenger*, in CO 318/418/5.

⁸¹ D. Freeman to Parker, 7 July 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A/12-14.

⁸² Macmillan to Parker, 14 July 1935, MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/1A/1.

Aside from working with the Fabians, Lewis continued to engage with leading thinkers and policy makers on the West Indies in the pages of *The Keys*. In April-June 1936, he reviewed W. M. Macmillan's latest publication, prophetically entitled *Warning from the West Indies*. Originally published in 1936 by Faber and Faber, Macmillan's book would be re-issued in 1938 as a Penguin Special, and it had an important impact on the perception of events taking place in the West Indies amongst British intellectuals.⁸³ However, it was originally conceived and written, as Macmillan freely admitted, not with the West Indies in mind but in order to use that region as a guide for the future of Africa.⁸⁴ In his review, Lewis picked up on this, and it perhaps accounts for his belief that the early parts of the book were particularly strong, whereas the concluding sections offered only 'vague and superficial conclusions' that were 'profoundly disappointing.'⁸⁵

In the same month that Lewis reviewed Macmillan's book, the LCP announced that they had 'played an important part in connection with the recent riots in the West Indies, by writing to the Colonial Office protesting against the muzzling of the press, and the arbitrary measures employed in suppressing all information relating to the disturbances.'⁸⁶ Again, the League's actions were picked up on in the Caribbean itself, by the *Daily Gleaner*, which reprinted Moody's letter to the Colonial Office protesting against violence against protestors in St Vincent, and also objecting to a new Seditious Publications Ordinance in the same colony. Moody noted that this bill had been roundly criticised in across the West Indies, and even went as far as to state that it 'avers of a

⁸³ Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*: 255.

⁸⁴ Macmillan, *Warning from the West Indies*: 19.

⁸⁵ 'A forgotten corner of the empire,' *The Keys* April-June 1936: 66-67.

⁸⁶ 'The secretary's report,' *The Keys* April-June 1936: 65; *The Keys* April-June 1936: 61, 70.

dictatorship which is wholly alien to the best traditions of British administrations.’ Alongside Moody’s letter was printed the reply from the Colonial Office, backing the actions of the Governor entirely.⁸⁷ Even though they were unable to alter the decision of the colonial government, the LCP’s actions had gained them publicity in the Jamaican press. Here, the use of two distinct modes of political practice – the writing of letters to the Colonial Office, and the subsequent sending of these letters to the press for inclusion in reports on the LCP’s activities – combined to demonstrate the League’s involvement in events in the Caribbean.

The following month, Lewis penned an examination of a government report into the financial problems facing the Jamaica Banana Producer’s Association, a cooperative venture whose founding in 1929 Lewis described as ‘a landmark in colonial history.’ He criticised the report for ‘bowing the knee to an American monopoly,’ in reference to the American-owned United Fruit Company, and slammed its failure to support cooperative ventures.⁸⁸

With the launch of the IASB in 1937, they too gave an important place to the West Indies in their textual material. In September 1937, the organisation published a special issue of their periodical, *Africa and the World*, focussed entirely on the West Indies. The opening article reported a speech by the Labour MP William Lunn, in which he had drawn attention to the poor conditions of people in the West Indies. Lunn’s speech, the IASB declared, was ‘a warning that was ignored.’ In the aftermath of the speech, the *Sunday Express* had published an article by the journalist Stephen Graham in which he had written in glowing terms about the West Indies, describing them as ‘the

⁸⁷ ‘Meeting of the C. P. League in City of London,’ *Daily Gleaner* 27 April 1936: 24.

⁸⁸ ‘The Jamaica Banana Producer’s Association,’ *The Keys* January-March 1937:40, 42; on Trinidad, Jacobs, ‘The politics of protest in Trinidad’.

happiest place in the British Empire,' in which there were 'no rebellions ... few strikes.' The IASB's retort was to point out that, 'by the irony of fate, on the very day Mr Graham's article appeared in London, the workers in Trinidad declared a general strike.'⁸⁹ The special issue reported the recent speeches of prominent British politicians on the Caribbean,⁹⁰ and summarised the IASB's efforts to raise attention to events in the West Indies, mentioning both the recent meeting in Trafalgar Square and a subsequent memorandum sent to the Colonial Office for the attention of the Royal Commission established to enquire into events in Trinidad. In the case of the latter, the IASB were particularly keen to emphasise that although they were 'acting on behalf of the Trinidad workers,' they were refused an interview by the members of the Royal Commission, whilst groups such as the West India Committee, 'on behalf of the sugar and oil interests in Trinidad,' were granted an interview.⁹¹

Whilst Trinidad took up much of the focus in 1937, in 1938 attention turned more directly to Jamaica, on account of the events at Frome and their aftermath, which saw the island 'convulsed by labour revolt' for the next few weeks.⁹² Padmore penned a piece on Jamaica for the IASB's organ *International African Opinion*, drawing on reports in the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Herald* to proclaim the need for democracy in the West Indies.⁹³ The same issue of *International African Opinion* included extensive material on the West Indies, including an article praising Labour MP Arthur Creech Jones for taking up the case of the recently arrested Barbadian labour

⁸⁹ 'A warning that was ignored,' *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 2.

⁹⁰ 'Duke calls Governor agitator,' *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 12; 'Churchill on the West Indies,' *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 13.

⁹¹ 'Royal Commission for Trinidad,' *Africa and the World* 1 September 1937: 10-12.

⁹² Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*: 281.

⁹³ Padmore, 'Labour unrest in Jamaica,' *International African Opinion* July 1938: 6-7, 13.

leader Ulric Grant in the House of Commons, and using this case to argue that the West Indies as a whole could not be considered democratic given the way they treated protestors, describing their situation as one of ‘colonial fascism’.⁹⁴

By 1938, events in the West Indies had become a significant issue in the wider press, with articles appearing in many national newspapers and periodicals. Perhaps surprisingly, the pages of *The Times* newspaper became one of the primary battlegrounds on which competing interpretations of events in the West Indies jostled for public attention. On 6 May 1938, Lord Olivier, former governor of Jamaica and author of *Jamaica: The Blessed Island* in 1936, penned a letter to *The Times* about the unrest at the Frome estates owned by Tate and Lyle.⁹⁵ Olivier argued that sugar prices were so low that ‘no sugar-labourers can be paid living wages’ in the West Indies, and called for British consumers to accept an increase in prices, insisting that ‘British consumers of sugar are now exploiting their fellow-subjects in sugar-producing colonies.’⁹⁶ However, that same day *The Times* also printed a letter by Leonard Lyle responding to reports of his company’s involvement in the unrest and arguing that ‘the problem of a fair wage for West Indian labour is a complex one’ because ‘the West Indian labourer does not even remotely resemble the English labourer, either in his mode of life or mentality ... It will be a very long time before West Indian labour can be educated up to the English standard.’ Lyle’s racist diatribe, describing events in Jamaica as ‘savage riots,’ could not have been pitched more differently to Olivier’s account.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ ‘Notes on the West Indies,’ *International African Opinion* July 1938: 12-13.

⁹⁵ On Olivier and the West Indies, see F. Lee (1988), *Fabianism and Colonialism: The Life and Political Thought of Lord Sydney Olivier* London: Defiant: 83-134, 198-218; S. Olivier (1936), *Jamaica: The Blessed Island* London: Faber and Faber.

⁹⁶ Olivier, ‘Jamaica’s troubles: A question of sugar prices,’ *The Times* 6 May 1938: 17.

⁹⁷ Lyle, ‘To the editor of *The Times*,’ *The Times* 6 May 1938: 17.

The two men fired letters back and forth at one another, Olivier expressing scepticism of Tate and Lyle's claims to be dramatically improving the lot of West Indian labour;⁹⁸ Lyle replying that 'I cannot believe I was unsound in stating that the West Indian labourer does not even remotely resemble the English labourer,' and blaming the unrest on 'the sinister influences of the Communists.'⁹⁹

On 26 May 1938, Harold Moody stepped directly into this debate. Moody wrote to *The Times* – a newspaper that, as chapter five showed, was an important source for the LCP – seeking to 'remind Sir Leonard Lyle that the culture of Jamaica is essentially English.' He argued against Lyle's criticisms of West Indian labour, asserting that if Communist propaganda was having any influence, this was due primarily to the awful conditions in which Jamaica had been kept by centuries of British rule. Moody, however, was also at pains to emphasise that 'the Jamaican is perhaps the most loyal citizen in the Empire,' and urged Lyle to recognise that they require 'treatment not in any way different from the Englishman.'¹⁰⁰ Moody thus used the pages of *The Times* both to criticise Lyle, and to advance his argument for the acceptance of West Indians into the inner sanctum of Britishness.

Two days later, Lyle responded. His letter demonstrated the core weakness of Moody's own argument, by agreeing that there was no doubting the loyalty of Jamaicans to Britain but insisting that this did not mean that their standard of labour matched that of the English.¹⁰¹ On 30 May, Olivier wrote back, angrily suggesting that Lyle was seeking to avoid facts with constant references to the involvement of

⁹⁸ Olivier, 'Disturbances in Jamaica: The West Indian labourer,' *The Times* 9 May 1938: 10.

⁹⁹ Lyle, 'The troubles in Jamaica: Improving conditions of labour,' *The Times* 10 May 1938: 10; Olivier, 'Troubles in Jamaica,' *The Times* 17 May 1938.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Jamaican,' *The Times* 26 May 1938: 12.

¹⁰¹ 'Troubles in Jamaica: Labour conditions,' *The Times* 28 May 1938: 10.

Communists, and suggesting that neither Moody, himself, nor anybody else who had spent much time in the West Indies 'is likely to desire much instruction from Leonard Lyle about Creole mentality.'¹⁰²

Perhaps encouraged by this debate on its letters pages, *The Times* moved to expand their coverage of West Indian events, printing a series of three articles by the journalist Harold Stannard, recently returned from a trip to the West Indies, in which he discussed the recent unrest in Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica.¹⁰³ In his wide-ranging articles, Stannard argued for land redistribution, increased production of food for domestic consumption, higher salaries for West Indian workers, and increased expenditure by the imperial government in the West Indies. Stannard also urged, in a refrain which could easily have been printed in *The Keys* or the *International African Opinion*, for 'public opinion in this country [Britain]' to become 'properly alive to what is amiss in the West Indian Colonies.'¹⁰⁴ Moody immediately penned a letter of thanks to *The Times* for printing Stannard's 'excellent' articles, using them as a riposte to Lyle because they demonstrated that 'gross neglect of circumstances' had caused unrest in the West Indies.¹⁰⁵ Lyle again responded, saying that both Olivier and Moody ignored

¹⁰² 'Troubles in Jamaica: Mentality of creole labourers,' *The Times* 30 May 1938: 10

¹⁰³ H. Stannard, 'The free West Indies: From slavery to riot: I. Social conditions,' *The Times* 25 May 1938: 17-18; 'The free West Indies II: A basis for culture: Carnival in Trinidad,' *The Times* 26 May 1938: 17-18; 'The free West Indies: Policy without practice: III. Economic needs,' *The Times* 27 May 1938: 17-18.

¹⁰⁴ H. Stannard, 'The free West Indies: Policy without practice: III. Economic needs,' *The Times* 27 May 1938: 18.

¹⁰⁵ 'To the editor of *The Times*,' *The Times* 30 May 1938: 10. Moody's letter was supported by a Mr D. C. Spencer Smith, 'Difficulties in Jamaica: Prices and taxation,' *The Times* 2 June 1938: 10. It was also reprinted in Jamaica. See 'Dr Harold Moody and the W. I. labourer,' *Daily Gleaner* 16 June 1938: 24.

the fact that the work done by one English labourer could be done only by ‘at least five West Indians.’¹⁰⁶ Evidently, Lyle’s persistence frustrated Moody, who shot back his most radical response yet, arguing that ‘It is surprising how easily the English capitalist operating in the colonies will accept, without examination, statements and conditions very damaging to another racial group.’¹⁰⁷

In the aftermath of this debate, Peter Blackman wrote a piece in *The Keys* noting that the LCP had been entirely preoccupied by events in the West Indies, and emphasising that the unrest had ‘reminded the public that all is not well in the West Indian Islands.’ Blackman insisted on the need to understand the events at the West Indian, not merely Jamaican, level, describing the recent actions of the Jamaican people following the Frome incidents as ‘the conscious revolt of human beings against a state of degradation which bids fair unless checked to rob them even of their humanity.’¹⁰⁸ *The Keys* also carried an article by the missionary Leslie Webb, who had spoken at an LCP public meeting, about the West Indies. Even the LCP’s cultural commentary was shaped by West Indian events, with a generally positive review of the poetry of the Grenadian writer Calvin Lambert noting that, at a time when ‘the West Indies are passing through a period of great travail,’ it was ‘disappointing and a little regrettable that a note of social significance should be so conspicuously absent from these poems.’¹⁰⁹

Whilst Moody had engaged with the arguments of Leonard Lyle in the pages of *The Times* itself, other West Indian activists continued the debate elsewhere.

¹⁰⁶ ‘West Indian labour: The disorders in Jamaica,’ *The Times* 1 June 1938: 10.

¹⁰⁷ ‘West Indian labour,’ *The Times* 9 June 1938: 10.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Jamaica,’ *The Keys* July-September 1938: 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ ‘A missionary looks at Jamaica,’ and ‘Review of poems,’ *The Keys* July-September 1938: 6, 8.

International African Opinion described Lyle's criticisms of West Indian labourers as 'antiquated,' proclaiming that 'the West Indian labourers, by their militant activity, have raised their cause squarely before the British public.' It also supported Olivier's contribution to the debate, which showed Lyle's arguments to be 'as good as nonsense.'¹¹⁰ However, whereas Moody had unreservedly praised Harold Stannard's articles on the West Indies in *The Times*, the IASB took a different view. Stannard was held up as primary evidence that 'British imperialism ... is nervous of the situation in the West Indies,' because although he made reference to 'terrible living conditions,' he was also 'typical of the imperialist mentality in the way he disparages the demand for self-government.' Whilst the overall tenor of Stannard's argument was demolished by the IASB, they did however agree with him about an underlying 'divorce between the intellectuals in their political demands and the masses.'¹¹¹

C. L. R. James also picked up on the debate in *The Times*, and used it as the basis for a column in *Fight: Organ of the Revolutionary Socialist League*, of which he was editor. In the opening issue of that periodical, James had written of the goals of the Revolutionary Socialist League, an organisation formed out of the fusion of two London Trotskyist groups. Amongst these aims James had included 'assist the colonial peoples in their task of liberating themselves.'¹¹² In June of 1938, James devoted his regular column on 'The colonial question' to what he called 'British barbarism in Jamaica.' The article began with Lyle's quote about the unsuitability of the West Indian labourer, insisting that where Lyle saw no similarity between West Indian and British labour, 'the real trouble is ... that he resembles the English labourer too much for Mr Capitalist

¹¹⁰ 'Politics and the Negro,' *International African Opinion* July 1938: 8.

¹¹¹ 'Politics and the Negro,' *International African Opinion* July 1938: 8-9.

¹¹² 'Revolutionary Socialist League,' *Fight: Organ of the Revolutionary Socialist League*, April 1938: 3.

Lyle.’ James gave a brief overview of Jamaica, arguing that in the West Indies as a whole ‘white capital has always dominated the islands and continues to do so,’ and he directly linked the unrest in the region to the economic downturn following the Great Crash of 1929, suggesting that after that year British capitalism attempted to ‘squeeze the colonies’ for more profit. James insisted that ‘what the West Indian workers need is a radical change in the whole system of Government,’ taking power away from ‘capitalists and planters’ and allowing universal suffrage and the formation of trade unions.’ He linked events in Jamaica to the ‘magnificent general strike in Trinidad,’ and, taking his inspiration from a group of American sailors who had supported the efforts of striking Jamaicans whilst docked in Kingston, called for ‘true international solidarity,’ urging the British labour movement to ‘press for full democratic rights for the West Indian workers.’

The breadth of debate about Lyle’s comments on West Indian labour, and the involvement of West Indian activists in Britain in this debate, is illustrative of the wider textual networks through which these activists sought to make the West Indian unrest a live issue in British politics. The debate took place across a broad range of publications, ranging from the letters pages of *The Times* to commentaries in the Trotskyist periodical *Fight*, as well as in the pages of black activist periodicals themselves. Activists like Moody and James differed in their arguments, but also differed in the spaces through which they chose to engage the debate. Whilst for Moody, it was of the utmost importance to engage Lyle on his own terms, in the pages of a prominent British newspaper, for James it was more important to ensure that those elements of the labour movement that he was aligned with were aware of these debates about West Indian labour, and were pushed to reject Lyle’s analysis and forge solidarity with West Indian workers. The spaces in which these activists published their responses to Lyle thus

corresponded with the political networks within which they operated, and had an important bearing.

Elsewhere, George Padmore used his vast connections amongst the British, colonial, and black American press to ensure that he published numerous articles on events in the Caribbean. In his columns for black American newspapers, he wrote updates on affairs in Jamaica, taking the opportunity to denounce Marcus Garvey and to suggest that Garvey's 'cloak of leadership' now rested on the shoulders of Jamaican labour leader Alexander Bustamante.¹¹³ He also filed reports on debates which had taken place in the House of Commons and the House of Lords relating to the West Indies.¹¹⁴ Padmore's interest in events in his homeland, however, was not narrowly confined to that region. Instead, he fitted the West Indian labour unrest into a broader narrative of repression against labour throughout the colonial world. For Padmore, the violent treatment of protestors, the enactment of sedition legislation to ban textual material – including Padmore's own books and journals – and the absence of democratic constitutions in many imperial possessions in Africa, the West Indies, and Asia required a specific political categorisation. With Europe preoccupied with the rise of fascism within, and with the colonial world often used as an example of British democracy and good governance, Padmore sought to shift the debate by articulating the notion of 'colonial fascism'. Bill Schwarz has noted that 'Padmore had no inhibitions in drawing on an expansive idea of fascism in order to demonstrate that contemporary colonialism – British colonialism included – was on the point of transmuting into a

¹¹³ 'West Indian leader asks inquiry into Jamaican riot,' *The Chicago Defender* 18 June 1938: 24.

¹¹⁴ 'Lord Olivier denounces British colonial system,' *The Chicago Defender* 25 June 1938: 24; 'Urges survey of conditions in West Indies: Royal Commission probes causes of unrest on British Isles,' *The Chicago Defender* 9 July 1938: 24.

mode of fascism.’¹¹⁵ W. Arthur Lewis attempted something similar in his writings for the LCP, which not only saw him link fascism in Europe to that governance of the Empire, but also to draw connections between examples of labour unrest around the Empire, particularly in Africa and the West Indies, in order to make a broader point about racism and colonial labour relations.¹¹⁶ Undoubtedly, however, it was Padmore and the IASB who most consistently and with the most conviction used their writings to charge European imperialism with being fascist in its methods.

Periodicals and newspapers were not the only forms of text through which black West Indians in Britain engaged with events in their homelands. In 1938 and 1939, two important pamphlets about the unrest in the Caribbean were printed. Building upon his earlier pamphlet, W. Arthur Lewis wrote a longer updated version which the Fabian Society published as *Labour in the West Indies*. The pamphlet carried an introduction by Creech Jones, and argued in favour of widespread political reform, focusing on revising national constitutions and instituting a shift towards government by West Indian Federation. Whilst the pamphlet ended with Lewis’s now-famous remark that ‘[t]he Labour Movement is on the march,’ Lewis was also keen to demonstrate, in true Fabian style, that West Indian trades unions needed to be guided by British Trade Union leaders in order to limit the influence of ‘irresponsible extremists’ and to cultivate ‘trade

¹¹⁵ B. Schwarz (2003), ‘George Padmore,’ in B. Schwarz (ed.) *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* Manchester: Manchester University Press: 141. For Padmore’s notion of colonial fascism, see his ‘Fascism in the colonies,’ *Controversy* February 1938: 94-95; ‘Colonial fascism in the West Indies,’ *New Leader Empire Special Edition*, 1938: vii. The Indian nationalist Jawaharlal Nehru made similar arguments. See S. Pennybacker (2009), *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* Woodstock: Princeton University Press: 199.

¹¹⁶ W. A. Lewis, ‘African economic problems,’ *The Keys* July-September 1937: 15-16, 28; ‘Thoughts on the colour bar,’ *LCP News Notes* March 1940: 1-2.

union discipline.¹¹⁷ Such a framework guided the founding of the Committee on West Indian Affairs, an organisation established at the end of 1938 and praised by Creech Jones in his introduction to Lewis's pamphlet.¹¹⁸ Creech Jones was himself a member of the Committee, which included Labour MP's and extra-Parliamentary people interested in the West Indies. Harold Moody was on the Committee, and Peter Blackman was its secretary. The group developed connections with 'representative people both on the industrial and political side in all the West Indian colonies,' for example receiving materials from Norman Manley, the Jamaican leader of the Peoples National Party.¹¹⁹ They also issued documentation on 'how the trade union movement in Great Britain works,' in the hope that this would help guide Trade Union formation in the West Indies.¹²⁰ When West Indians with connections to labour movements in the region came to Britain, they often met with representatives from the Committee.¹²¹

The other pamphlet to appear was published by the IASB, and entitled *The West Indies Today*. Here, the blame for recent unrest was again laid on political, as well as

¹¹⁷ W. A. Lewis (1977 [1938]), *Labour in the West Indies* London: New Beacon Books: 40, 52. For 'responsible trade unions' in the colonial world, see Weiler, 'Forming responsible Trade Unions.'

¹¹⁸ For minutes of the Committee's first meeting, see Blackman to Creech Jones, 9 December 1938, Fabian Colonial Bureau papers, Rhodes House Library, MSS Brit Emp S. 365 FCB 2/7/23; Creech Jones, 'Preface,' in Lewis, *Labour in the West Indies*: 10.

¹¹⁹ Creech Jones to Lord Olivier, 11 July 1939; Creech Jones to Blackman, 11 July 1939, both in MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/7/63-64. Blackman wrote frequently to West Indian labour leaders, and also convinced Paul Robeson to support the Committee. See Blackman to Creech Jones, n.d. but c. 1938-9, and Creech Jones to Blackman, 26 June 1939, both in MSS Brit Emp S. 365 FCB 2/7/26-27, 144. For a list of contacts in the West Indian labour movement provided to the Committee by Blackman, see Blackman to Creech Jones, n.d. but c. 1938-9, MSS Brit Emp S. 365 FCB 2/6/15-17.

¹²⁰ For example, Creech Jones to Adams, 14 February 1939, in MSS Brit Emp S. 332 ACJ 25/2/13.

¹²¹ Blackman to Creech Jones, 23 June 1939, MSS Brit Emp S. 365 FCB 2/7/142.

economic, causes. Again, the pamphlet called for West Indian federation, new constitutions, and improved representation for labourers and peasants. However, it also made a more strongly anti-capitalist commitment than had Lewis's Fabian pamphlet, insisting that 'the case for taking over the factories [in the West Indies] and running them as co-operative or socialist institutions is quite unchallengeable,' and extending the point to the Trinidadian oilfields, too.¹²² Its vision of political change also differed dramatically from *Labour in the West Indies*, focusing less on the role of British Trade Unions and instead arguing that 'the battle of the West Indian people ... cannot be won in London; it must be fought and won in the West Indies by the people themselves.'¹²³ In order to achieve these aims, the IASB urged that West Indian people form trade unions, and seek to unite with one another across the Caribbean to form an Inter-Colonial Labour Federation.¹²⁴

¹²² IASB (n.d. but 1938 or 1939), *The West Indies Today* London: IASB: 29. The precise publication date of this pamphlet is unclear. However, an advert in the February-March 1939 issue of *International African Opinion* indicates that it was published either in late 1938, or early 1939.

¹²³ IASB, *The West Indies Today*: 38, 40.

¹²⁴ IASB, *The West Indies Today*: 41. In fact, the Caribbean Labour Congress, nascent in the late 1930s, aimed at providing precisely these sorts of links, though it ultimately failed to bridge differences between different national trade unions. See G. Horne (2007), *Cold War in a Hot Zone: The United States Confronts Labor and Independence Struggles in the British West Indies* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.



Fig 6.1. Front cover of the IASB pamphlet, *The West Indies Today*

This message was advanced by the IASB in other writings. In their editorial for May-June 1939 of *International African Opinion*, for example, the IASB issued a three page ‘Open letter to West Indian intellectuals’. Here, the IASB urged the West Indian intelligentsia to offer its support to the workers and peasants leading the unrest, but in doing so to remember that ‘[t]he true Intellectual will realise that while he has much to teach and give to the masses, they have more to teach him and are the basis and motive power of the movement.’¹²⁵ Around the same time, they also issued an ‘Open letter to the workers of the West Indies, British Guiana and British Honduras,’ this time urging the working classes of the Caribbean to take a leadership role in the struggles and to

¹²⁵ ‘Editorial: An open letter to West Indian intellectuals,’ *International African Opinion* May-June 1939: 1-3.

adopt the forms of inter-colonial Trade Union organisation advocated in *The West Indies Today*.¹²⁶ Both documents urged for unity between those of ‘African descent’ and the ‘East Indians’ in the West Indies, noting that they were ‘two racial groups closely allied by a common poverty.’¹²⁷

This section has demonstrated that written texts were an important space within which black West Indian activists in Britain sought to make the West Indian labour unrest a live issue in British and wider global politics. These activists wrote about events in their homelands in a variety of formats and genres, publishing their accounts in multiple places. The aims and scope of such texts differed considerably from one another, and they also made differing arguments about the nature and consequences of the unrest. Texts served to draw attention to the Caribbean, but they also worked to establish links between black West Indian activists and other interested groups in Britain. For W. Arthur Lewis, the opportunity to write enabled him to forge links with members of the Fabian Society and Labour Party interested in colonial, and especially West Indian, issues. Likewise, C. L. R. James was able to use the print outlets of his Trotskyist connections in order to frame his position on the West Indian events. Some activists, especially George Padmore, sought to write for a global network of newspapers and periodicals as well as those based in Britain, in an effort to broaden the significance of the West Indian unrest. The sheer breadth and diversity of writings by West Indian activists in Britain about the unrest in their homelands demonstrates how important this particular episode was to their wider activism.

¹²⁶ IASB, ‘An open letter to the workers of the West Indies, British Guiana and British Honduras,’ n.d. included in collection of *International African Opinion* held at the Schomburg Centre, New York.

¹²⁷ ‘Editorial: An open letter to West Indian intellectuals,’ *International African Opinion* May-June 1939: 3.

‘One of the most disgraceful documents ever issued’: Black West Indian activists in Britain and Royal Commissions to the Caribbean

1938 saw the publication of the report of the Royal Commission that had inquired into the causes of the Trinidadian unrest of 1937. The Commission had, as noted above, refused to speak with the IASB after receiving a memorandum from them, and its report elicited a direct response from black West Indians in Britain. Writing in *The Keys*, Lewis criticised the reports efforts to mask the profitability of Trinidadian oil firms. Quoting figures at length, he demonstrated that the Commission’s findings were based on false estimates of oil company profits, suggesting that the Commission had ‘thus set itself up to champion oil interests even at the cost of inaccuracy,’ and arguing that as such ‘the Commission could not but produce a report in the main useless to the cause of social progress in Trinidad.’ He criticised the Commission’s assumption that the labour leader, Uriah Butler, was no more than a ‘fanatical Negro,’ and damned the Commission’s justifications for the ‘provoke and shoot’ policy adopted by the authorities in dealing with protestors. Finally, Lewis noted of the Commission’s recommendations that ‘few were original,’ dismissing the findings as ‘essentially an employers’ report which ... brought great relief to the oil interests. But to those whose interest is social justice it brought only disappointment.’¹²⁸ Unsurprisingly, George Padmore went even further than Lewis in damning the Commission’s report. Prior to its

¹²⁸ ‘Notes on the Trinidad report,’ *The Keys* April-June 1938: 80-82. The LCP’s AGM of March 1938 also passed resolutions protesting against police reaction to unrest in Barbados, and urging that peaceful Trade Union activity be allowed in Trinidad. See ‘Resolutions passed by the Annual General Meeting,’ *The Keys* April-June 1938: 86.

publication, Padmore had written a piece for the Independent Labour Party's monthly periodical *Controversy* in which he reviewed the history of the Trinidadian events, declaring that they had gotten worse whilst the Commission had been studying the issues due to increased efforts to curb Trade Union activity.¹²⁹ The following month, Padmore used the same periodical to declare that the report itself was 'one of the most disgraceful documents ever issued by a Royal Commission.' He charged the report with 'advocating the mass murder of defenceless citizens,' and asserted that 'it presents a distorted picture of what really occurred.' Returning to the theme of the parallels between British colonial policy and fascism, Padmore wrote that 'the Report would do credit to Mussolini. It is a most bloodthirsty document.' Yet Padmore's faith in the West Indian working class shone through, reassuring readers that 'the Trinidad workers will not stand for this for one moment.'¹³⁰

As well as the report of the Trinidad Commission, 1938 also saw the formation of a broader Royal Commission, the Moyne Commission, whose remit was to investigate the unrest across the British West Indies. As discussed above, black West Indian activists had strongly criticised the failure to appoint a black West Indian onto the Commission. In an attempt to rectify this absence, the LCP and IASB united with the Negro Welfare Association to prepare a co-authored submission to the Moyne Commission. Their memorandum highlighted the awful conditions across the West Indies, calling for wide-ranging social reforms including the establishment of a West Indian University, the building of hospitals, and a programme of housing improvement

¹²⁹ 'Fascism in the colonies,' *Controversy* February 1938: 94-96.

¹³⁰ 'An outrageous report,' *Controversy* March 1938: 103-104; Padmore also criticised the Trinidad report, and linked conditions in Trinidad with those in Barbados, in 'Colonial fascism in the West Indies,' *New Leader* Empire Special Issue, 1938: vii.

and new house-building. The document – publicised in the *Chicago Defender* and in *International African Opinion*¹³¹ – also argued for improved Trades Union rights, and for constitutional political reform, particularly the extension of the voting franchise. The memorandum stated, perhaps surprisingly given the anti-imperialist stance of the IASB and NWA, that the immediate aim for the West Indies ought to be Federation followed by Dominion Status, rather than full independence from Britain.¹³² A letter from Moody to Ras Makonnen of the IASB, intercepted by Special Branch, offers an insight into how the interaction between these different groups operated. Moody wrote that Makonnen was currently dealing with the West Indies memorandum, and noted that he had discussed the proposed memorandum with Labour MP Morgan Jones, particularly as regards the issues raised around land ownership. Moody asked if Makonnen would pass his comments on the matter on to C. L. R. James, suggesting that James might have played an important role in the memorandum, and also demonstrating that Moody still respected his opinion on West Indian matters. Moody closed by requesting Makonnen to invite both Padmore and James to speak at the LCP's next meeting on the West Indies, indicating that he was prepared to go beyond merely collaborating on written documents in order to develop this new alliance. As it was, James would leave for America in early October, and appears not to have addressed the LCP in his final months in Britain.

¹³¹ 'African group wants native rights upheld: George Padmore signs memorandum to Royal Commission,' *The Chicago Defender* 1 October 1938: 24; 'Lord Olivier and the West Indies,' *International African Opinion* October 1938: 7.

¹³² 'Memorandum on the economic, political and social conditions in the West Indies and British Guiana presented by the International African Service Bureau, the League of Coloured Peoples and the Negro Welfare Association,' enclosed with Moody to Lloyd, Colonial Office, 12 September 1938, CO 950/30.

Initially, Lord Moyne felt that it was unnecessary for his Commission to meet with representatives of the LCP, IASB or NWA.¹³³ However, after an intervention from Colonial Office staff suggesting that ‘we will be making the greatest possible mistake if we don’t hear evidence from this group’ because ‘[i]t will be said that we have not cared to hear the evidence of negroes [sic], but only that given by whites,’ this decision was reversed.¹³⁴ It was decided that Moody would speak on the aspects of the memorandum pertaining to education and health, Makonnen on agriculture, housing and land settlement, and Peter Blackman on politics and Trade Unions.¹³⁵ In the end, only Moody and Blackman attended the meeting.¹³⁶ Following the discussions with the Royal Commission representatives, Moody submitted two further memorandums before the Commission departed for the West Indies, one dealing in more detail with the medical services, and the other with questions of land settlement and agriculture.¹³⁷

Other black West Indians in Britain also took the opportunity to engage with the Commission independently. Una Marson, for example, returned to Britain and met with the Commission members on 30 September. In her memorandum submitted in advance to the Commission, Marson focused particularly on social and educational issues, though she also concentrated on the importance of ‘cultural development.’¹³⁸ Speaking in her role as representative of Save the Children for Jamaica, Marson spent much of her

¹³³ Memorandum by Lloyd, 16 September 1938, in CO 950/30.

¹³⁴ Lively to Lloyd, 17 September 1938; and Lloyd to Moody, 20 September 1938, both in CO 950/30.

¹³⁵ Moody to Lloyd, 22 September 1938, in CO 950/30; Moody to Lloyd, 27 September 1938, in CO 950/30.

¹³⁶ See C. A. Moody to Lloyd, 12 October 1938, and enclosed report on ‘West India Royal Commission: Ninth session, 29th September 1938,’ both in CO 950/30.

¹³⁷ See Moody to Lloyd, 8 October 1938, and Moody to Lloyd, 10 October 1938, CO 950/30.

¹³⁸ See Marson to Secretary of the Royal Commission, 15 September 1938, CO 950/36.

interview with the Commission talking about educational issues in her homeland, but also dwelt on relations between men and women, particularly centring on the question of marriage, and the difficulties of ensuring cooperation between black and white people in Jamaica.

W. Arthur Lewis also lobbied the Commission individually. However, having just returned to Britain from a trip to the Caribbean which had included visits to Dominica, St Lucia, Barbados, St Vincent, Grenada, Trinidad and British Guiana, Lewis's submission arrived too late for him to attend an interview.¹³⁹ His written submission, entitled 'A memorandum on social welfare,' described the fundamental problem of West Indian society as being the low prices received for agricultural products, particularly sugar, and thus insisted that the fundamental question for the Commission to address was 'what sacrifice is the British consumer willing to make in the interest of the West Indian peasant?' Alongside this, Lewis called for 'a redistribution of property, especially of land,' as well as for political reform, including new constitutions for the West Indies and an extension of the voting franchise.¹⁴⁰

When the Moyne Commission finally produced its report in 1939, it was deemed so damning that the Government refused to release it for fear of how it might be used as Nazi propaganda against the Empire. Instead, they published a short document outlining the recommendations made by the Royal Commission. Unsurprisingly, the two activists who had so far been most active over events in their homeland both penned responses. W. Arthur Lewis began by noting that everybody who read the

¹³⁹ Lewis to Secretary, Royal Commission, n.d. but 1938, CO 950/56; Lloyd to Lewis, 28 September 1938, CO 950/56.

¹⁴⁰ W. Arthur Lewis, 'Memorandum on social welfare in the British West Indies,' 27 September 1938, CO 950/56.

document ought to pay ‘tribute to the Commission for the generous assistance which it proposes – rather more than a million [pounds] a year for social work, and, at a rough guess, another half a million through the machinery of the sugar duties. The proposal exceeds anything that we had thought likely.’¹⁴¹ George Padmore, on the other hand, described the money as ‘a dole for the slum Empire,’ noting the disparity between the £5 million per year to be spent on this purpose under the new Colonial Development and Welfare Act, and the £7 million a day that he claimed would be spent on fighting the war with Germany. Of the £1 million per year pledged specifically for the West Indies, Padmore wrote that ‘it is rather difficult to see how it will be possible to implement the ambitious programme of slum clearance, rehousing, land settlement etc’ with a budget such as this.¹⁴² However, on other matters to do with the Commission recommendations, Padmore and Lewis were in agreement. After his optimistic beginning, Lewis rounded on the report, saying that it was better at grasping short term problems than long term solutions, criticising its failure to call for increasing industrialisation of the West Indian economy, and bemoaning its failure to take a lead on the question of constitutional reform. Lewis also requested that the government release the entire Commission report, expressing disappointment at having ‘this meagre document fobbed off on us, after all the work that members of the public both in England and the West Indies have put into making the Commission’s investigations successful.’¹⁴³ Padmore, writing at length in *The Crisis*, made similar points, noting that the Government’s failure to release the full Commission report was ‘the gravest

¹⁴¹ ‘West India Royal Commission: A review of its recommendations,’ *LCP News Letter* April 1940: 8-12.

¹⁴² ‘It’s a dole for the slum Empire,’ *New Leader* 8 March 1940: 3.

¹⁴³ ‘West India Royal Commission: A review of its recommendations,’ *LCP News Letter* April 1940: 11-12.

indictment of its imperialist misrule' and noting that the time was now ripe for the West Indies to be given 'full self-determination.'¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

In contrast to Stephen Howe's assertion that West Indian activists in Britain responded to the unrest in their homelands in 'surprisingly muted fashion,' this chapter has shown that members of the LCP and IASB in fact responded vigorously to these events. It has catalogued a diverse array of responses to the unrest, and has demonstrated that these activists aired their analyses of the unrest in a diverse array of spaces. They forged diverse connections with figures in the Caribbean; hosted public gatherings focused on the West Indies, wrote prolifically about events in their homeland, and lobbied government for reforms, as well as producing an extensive body of critical commentary on government responses. In doing so, they combined multiple modes of political activism in order to give maximum publicity to the West Indian labour unrest.

The evidence compiled in this chapter illustrates that black West Indian activists in Britain played a central role in making the labour unrest in the West Indies a significant issue in British politics. The fact that the unrest had to jostle for attention alongside the Spanish Civil War, the rise of Hitlerism and the descent into the Second World War has meant that conventional histories of 1930s Britain have ignored the West Indian labour unrest when considering the relationship between Britain and the global politics of the 1930s.¹⁴⁵ Yet we have seen that these events took up space in

¹⁴⁴ 'England's West Indian slums,' *The Crisis* October 1940: 317-318, 322.

¹⁴⁵ R. Overy (2009), *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* London: Penguin: 5; J. Gardiner (2010), *The Thirties: An Intimate History* London: Harper Collins.

important national newspapers, and were the subject of a particularly extensive debate in the pages of *The Times*.¹⁴⁶ They were discussed in the Houses of Parliament by figures such as Lord Olivier and Arthur Creech Jones, and they were the subject of discussion and debate amongst the broad British labour movement. They were also the subject of public meetings, at which shorter-term West Indian visitors to Britain spoke alongside longer-term colonial residents, as well as British missionaries, politicians, intellectuals and activists with an interest in the Caribbean. In each such instance, black West Indians in Britain played an important role, often being amongst the driving forces behind the introduction of the West Indian events into British political debate, though they also worked extensively with wider networks of British activists, journalists, politicians and others to these ends.

News of the labour unrest in the West Indies was transmitted to Britain through a variety of different spaces, some more public than others. For example, whilst a broad public would have been able to engage with written reports in newspapers or publicly delivered addresses, few would have heard addresses directed at the Moyne Commission, nor read the written submissions delivered to such Royal Commissions. The activities and analyses of black West Indian activists in Britain were, however, transmitted to a potentially spatially extensive audience, both through their own articles written for an international network of newspapers and periodicals, and through reports – often critical – of their own activities in Britain being printed in colonial newspapers, especially in the West Indies themselves.

¹⁴⁶ A wider history of the role of the West Indian unrest in British politics would also discuss the multiple articles appearing in other papers and periodicals, including the *New Statesman and Nation*, *Tribune*, the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, and others, as well as the interest of British-based groups like the West India Committee in events.

Through these multiple modes of political practice, black West Indian activists encountered a broad array of individuals and organisations also interested in West Indian events. The spaces in which these encounters took place became locations for engaging these organisations and individuals in dialogue, debate, and disagreement. They also served an educational purpose, seeking to ensure that the British public – a phrase often repeated – awoke to events taking place in their colonial possessions. By focusing on these sites of engagement and modes of political practice, this chapter has charted some of the broader networks within which black West Indian activists were situated, and has highlighted the fact that any understanding of West Indian activist organisations operating in 1930s and 1940s Britain must be attuned to the diverse networks within which these organisations were situated. Such networks were not nationally bounded, stretching to include writings and reports published in newspapers and periodicals in the USA and the West Indies, as well as the movements of individuals and activists – figures such as T. A. Marryshow and Grantley Adams – across the Atlantic, between colony and metropole. Any understanding of the geographies of West Indian activism in 1930s and 1940s London must therefore draw on an international range of sources, understanding such textual spaces and individual mobilities as important aspects of the history of 1930s and 1940s London.

Such insights help us to think about the role of black West Indian activism in creolising London. Responses to the West Indian unrest are particularly fruitful in this regard, serving to highlight the multiplicity of spaces and diversity of networks within which West Indian matters were introduced into British political life. Despite their constant lobbying of the Colonial Office, there is little evidence to suggest that criticisms of Colonial rule ever registered directly amongst officials. As Frederick Cooper has written, the assertion by Lewis, Padmore and others that the political and

constitutional questions were the central issues in West Indian affairs ‘contrasted with the Colonial Office’s attempt to seize [the initiative] through administration.’¹⁴⁷ As such, for all their efforts, black West Indians in Britain had little impact on the policies adopted by the Colonial Office in response to the unrest. However, the very fact that they developed such diverse critical arguments, and transmitted them to the Colonial Office, to imperial thinkers and activists, and to the wider public, renders them significant. West Indian activists in Britain hosted colonial visitors and provided them with platforms from which to air their views in London and beyond, and circulated material from their West Indian contacts amongst interested parties, including MPs who were able to use such materials in the House of Commons. Such activities certainly did not rouse the British public to overt displays of mass sympathy for colonial peoples, but they did enable critical perspectives on imperial and racial politics centred on the West Indies, connecting metropolitan and colonial contexts, to find an audience. By attempting to put the West Indian labour unrest at the forefront of a global analysis of the politics of race and empire, black West Indian activists in Britain made a significant contribution to the process of creolising Britain.

Finally, the significance of the West Indian unrest for black West Indian activists in Britain also rests on the fact that it arguably drew them closer to the areas they had left behind, reinforcing their own sense of West Indianness from the distant location of the imperial metropolis. Evidence for such a claim is diffuse, but emerges perhaps most forcefully in two letters sent by Harold Moody to the *Daily Gleaner* in Jamaica in 1938 and 1939. In the first, Moody wrote that the recent unrest had ‘done more for Jamaica than all the administrators in the last Century,’ and stated clearly that

¹⁴⁷ F. Cooper (1996), *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 69.

recent events had reminded him that he needed to be ‘a real son of Jamaica, a lover of, and worker for, her toiling masses.’¹⁴⁸ In the second, from 1939, Moody went even further, writing that the unrest had stimulated in him a sense of being ‘more wrapped up in Jamaica and more of a Jamaican than ever I was.’¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ ‘Dr Harold Moody says League will help workers here,’ *Daily Gleaner* 23 September 1938: 3.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Messages from the Motherland,’ *Daily Gleaner* 16 December 1939: 33.

Conclusion: ‘Important advocates at court’

Throughout the preceding pages, the case has been made for the importance of taking a geographical approach to the study of West Indian activists in 1930s and 1940s London. Such an approach foregrounds the spaces in and through which organisations such as the LCP, IAFA, IASB and Pan-African Federation practised their activism, whilst also tracking the complex networks of connection through which such activism was performed. The thesis began by raising a series of research questions relating to the ways in which black West Indian activists negotiated the politics of race and empire in imperial London. In their different ways, each of the intervening chapters has offered answers to some or all of these questions. This section aims to draw these out more directly, and in doing so to emphasise the importance of a spatial study of black West Indian activism in 1930s and 1940s London.

Networked spatialities of imperial criticism in the metropolis

Perhaps the most straightforward question to begin with is that which relates to the modes of political practice deployed by black West Indian activists in order to engage critically with the politics of race and empire. This thesis has catalogued a broad array of such practices and whilst it has been impossible to address all in detail, the focus has been primarily on three broad modes which were of particular importance: firstly, the establishment of spaces in London in which hospitality could be offered to fellow black people and that might represent direct challenges to the racialisation of urban space; secondly, the hosting of and participation in a broad range of public performances and gatherings at which matters relating to colonial or racial politics would be implicitly or

explicitly debated; and thirdly, the production and circulation of texts, particularly periodicals, which served as spaces in which black West Indian activist organisations could make public their perspectives on particular matters relating to the politics of race or empire, engage critically with wider organisations and individuals, and report on and advertise their own events and activities, and which thus functioned as spaces through which a wider public of interested people could encounter black activists in London. However, such a list is not exhaustive and across the chapters, the thesis has also drawn on a number of other such practices. The writing of letters and sending of telegrams, for example, was central to black West Indian activism in London throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Other practices only touched on here, such as the performances of plays such as Una Marson's *At What a Price* and C. L. R. James's *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, the use of radio technology and programmes such as the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme, or even such events as the anti-imperial exhibition co-organised by the IASB and the ILP, were also important practices through which black West Indians in Britain tackled the politics of race and empire.¹

It is thus clear that black West Indian activists brought together a broad array of practices in order to contest the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s London. Treating these practices as the starting point for analysis, rather than as an adjunct to historical events, has enabled new perspectives on black West Indian activism in imperial London to emerge. In chapter six, for example, this focus on political practices

¹ D. Newton (2008), 'Calling the West Indies: The BBC World Service and Caribbean Voices,' *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* **28**:4: 489-497; F. Sweeney (2011), 'The Haitian play: C. L. R. James' *Toussaint Louverture* (1936),' *International Journal of Francophone Studies* **14**:1/2: 143-163; A. Snaith (2008), "Little Brown Girl" in a "White, White City": Una Marson and London,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* **27**:1: 93-114; S. Britton (2010), "'Come and see the Empire by the all red route!": Anti-Imperialism and exhibitions in interwar Britain,' *History Workshop Journal* **69**: 68-89.

produced an account of the involvement of black West Indian activists in Britain that revised previous assessments by suggesting that these individuals and organisations were more preoccupied by the labour unrest in the 1930s Caribbean than has previously been acknowledged.

Such a focus has also enabled answers to the question of the wider political networks that black West Indian activists in 1930s and 1940s Britain were positioned within. This thesis has demonstrated that different organisations, and even different individuals within these organisations, immersed themselves in multiple networks of connection. For example, whilst the LCP engaged with various reformist Christian groups in Britain, such as the Quakers and the Congregationalists, and humanitarian organisations such as the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, in contrast the IAFA, IASB, and Pan-African Federation worked more closely with organisations on the British political left, especially the ILP. Within organisations, different individuals established connections with diverse groups. In the LCP, for example, Moody was closely linked to a broad array of Christian humanitarian groups, W. Arthur Lewis developed contacts with the Fabian Society, and others, such as Peter Blackman, were members of the Communist Party of Great Britain or its subsidiary group, the Negro Welfare Association, whilst also being members of the LCP. Similarly, within the IASB, C. L. R. James's prominent place within British Trotskyism enabled him to forge links with parts of the radical left with which others, such as George Padmore, were less involved. Particular parts of this thesis have tracked specific links across these broader networks. In chapter three, the links between the LCP, the Colonial Office, other black activists and organisations, and elements of the British left such as the LAI and NWA, were explored through a focus on a variety of places in which the LCP attempted to contest the racialisation of urban space in London. Chapter four

demonstrated how the holding of and attendance at an array variety of public gatherings enabled West Indian activist organisations to collaborate with a range of religious, humanitarian and political organisations, and also to challenge the perspectives of both other organisations and one another. Chapter five highlighted the ways in which the publishing of periodicals enabled West Indian activist organisations in London to draw connections rhetorically and materially between themselves and people and events in the colonies, enabling the charting of a broad African diasporic identity. By tracing some of the contributors to the periodicals of the LCP, IASB and Pan-African Federation, as well as their readerships, the chapter also highlighted the role of periodicals in connecting these organisations to a wider public both in Britain and further afield. In chapter six, meanwhile, the thesis contextualised black West Indian activism in London around the Caribbean labour unrest by illustrating the ways that such activists forged diverse connections with the Caribbean, wrote about events and were in turn the subject of articles in a variety of British, colonial, and black American newspapers and periodicals, worked alongside a broad canvass of activists in Britain, and lobbied government.

The argument in the preceding pages has thus focused on what Dave Featherstone terms a ‘multiplicity of networked political practices,’ and has also sought to attend to ‘different movements ... coming together through various networks, rather than ... one singular network.’² Charting the diverse networks through which black West Indians practised their activism in 1930s and 1940s Britain illustrates the complexity of their political engagements, and works to disturb conventional interpretations of political activity. Previous historical work, for example, has

² D. Featherstone (2008), *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-global Networks* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell: 157-158.

positioned the LCP as a conservative organisation which often operated as a ‘stooge’ for the Colonial Office, and thus for imperial rule.³ However, following the diverse networked political practices through which the LCP operated has enabled this thesis to challenge this perception, demonstrating that whilst the LCP did in some instances work with bodies like the Colonial Office, they also repeatedly challenged the racialised underpinnings of colonial rule in potentially radical ways, and also included radical critics of empire, such as C. L. R. James and Peter Blackman, within their membership, in their periodicals, and at their public meetings.

Focusing on these networks of activism works to decentre, though not entirely dismiss, the nation-state in historical accounts of British domestic and imperial politics in the 1930s and 1940s. The history told here has been one in which London as a world city was positioned within a wider imperial social formation, constituted by a ‘multiplicity of trajectories’ through which it came to be a part of an expanded Caribbean region.⁴ Such trajectories were manifested through networks of colonial governance tying West Indian colonial rule to London, but also through press and media networks, networks of correspondence, and rhetorical and discursive connections articulated both in the colonies and the metropole. This thesis has catalogued many such instances of the trajectories through which London and the Caribbean were entangled during the 1930s and 1940s. Whilst the primary focus here has been on the Caribbean, it is important to remember that London was connected to other regions too, both within

³ H. Adi (1998), *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* London: Lawrence and Wishart. This point was made in more detail in chapter 3.

⁴ ‘Multiplicity of trajectories’ comes from D. Massey (2005), *For Space* London: Sage: 119; ‘expanded Caribbean’ from P. Hulme (2009), ‘Expanding the Caribbean,’ in M. Niblett and K. Oloff (eds.), *Perspectives on the ‘Other America’: Comparative Approaches to Caribbean and Latin American Culture* New York: Rodopi: 29-50.

the empire and beyond, and that such relations altered over time. The work of Nicholas Owen and Mrinalini Sinha, amongst others, has drawn out some of the diverse networks through which Britain and India were entangled in this period,⁵ whilst elsewhere in this thesis we have touched on some of the trajectories which connected London and Africa, in such instances as the protests launched by black activists and others over the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, or the involvement of West African governments and press over the establishment of Aggrey House.⁶ These instances work to situate London as a significant location within the wider imperial social formation.

However, the focus here has also emphasised that such trajectories and networks emerged primarily through diverse sets of practices. In this sense, London's position within the expanded Caribbean and the wider imperial social formation was played out, articulated, and contested within a diverse array of locations across the city. Sites such as the headquarters of the LCP, the Memorial Hall, Trafalgar Square, and the pages of newspapers and periodicals were central elements in the production of London's relationship to the Empire and the wider world. Attending to the ways in which particular sites were bound into wider political networks helps to undercut the nation-state, illustrating that the politics of race and empire played out not only at the level of state interactions or Parliamentary debates, but in contexts that were instead simultaneously locally forged in the everyday imperial metropolis, and transnationally connected to diverse parts of the world.

⁵ N. Owen, (2007), *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press; M. Sinha (2006), *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* London: Duke University Press.

⁶ Adi, *West Africans in Britain*; P. Zachernuk (2000), *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* London: University Press of Virginia: esp. 80-124.

Acknowledging this confirms, but also reconceptualises, the notion of an ‘imperial social formation’. For Mrinalini Sinha, the imperial social formation emerges through ‘the process of *rhetorical invention*: the construction of new meanings and categories whereby one discursive frame is substituted by another.’⁷ Whilst much of Sinha’s account rests on questions of narrative and the constitution of discourses, she does acknowledge that ‘the messiness of historical practices’ and the ‘actual processes of “translation” in particular sociohistorical spaces’ play an important role. Such processes, however, seem to rest primarily on ‘choices’ made by historical subjects whose ‘conditions of possibility’ rest in ‘particular historical situations and the specificities of historical conjunctures within a globally articulated imperial structure.’ Sinha describes her approach as an ‘event-centred model of the imperial social formation,’ betraying the implicit prioritisation of temporality within her account.⁸ For Sinha, the spatiality of the imperial social formation is scalar. In her understanding, the imperial social formation works to hold together the ‘macropolitical’ scale of a ‘global and international system,’ and the ‘micropolitical’ scale of ‘discourses ... that transform and change within social practices.’⁹ In contrast to this scalar account, the networked conceptualisation of the imperial social formation adopted here insists that these diverse scales – the macropolitical and the micropolitical, or the global and the local as they are also known – are in fact constitutively interrelated to one another. It is not just that macropolitical events have implications at the micropolitical level, nor that micropolitical interactions have a bearing on macropolitical events, nor that, as Sinha

⁷ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 26.

⁸ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 17-18.

⁹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 26.

puts it, events can ‘[jump] scales’ as they cross from the local to the global.¹⁰ It is rather to insist that, as Doreen Massey has argued, these different scales are deeply constitutive of one another, that the micropolitical and the macropolitical work to produce and reproduce one another. In Massey’s terms, the ‘local is implicated in the production of the global,’ and vice-versa.¹¹ In the present context, this means acknowledging that the globalised process of colonial rule operated in part through the localised monitoring of the activities of anti-imperial or reformist critics of empire in London, and that the politics of race and empire were themselves established and contested at events organised by activist groups, in articles published in their periodicals, and in the everyday practices of resistance through which such groups challenged various aspects of racialised or imperial modes of politics. It also means insisting that the diverse networks of connection forged by colonial activists in the interwar and wartime metropolis, including with other metropolitan activists, with those in the colonies, and with those further afield, such as African diasporic activists in the USA, worked to establish a patchwork field of imperial criticism through which racial politics and the politics of empire were negotiated and contested in ways which stretched beyond and beneath the nation-state.

To date, acknowledgement of the importance of particular sites, spaces and networks to the diverse politics of imperial scepticism has been slight. By taking such spatial features as its central preoccupation, this thesis has sought to illustrate the importance of geographical concepts and analytic frames to the interrogation of the politics of race and empire. Nicholas Owen has suggested that, if we are to conceptualise the imperial metropolis as a ‘junction-box’ for anti-imperialism in which

¹⁰ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 17.

¹¹ Massey, *For Space*: 102.

were forged ‘connections between anti-colonial nationalists ... and metropolitan radicals,’ then it is necessary to highlight how the metropole does ‘not merely provide the location for these encounters, but facilitate[s] them, even if unknowingly.’¹² Owen himself suggests that ‘if London was a junction-box, it seems a poorly-wired one, containing unfastened cabling and loose connections ... a series of often unsatisfactory couplings, none of which delivered the necessary hybridisation.’¹³ Whilst agreeing with Owen’s insistence on ‘loose connections,’ the analysis presented in this thesis offers a different perspective. It suggests that attempting to analyse London itself as an anti-imperial ‘junction-box’ is the wrong strategy. Instead, London in the 1930s and 1940s can be conceptualised as a colonial metropolis connected to diverse parts of the empire by what Frederick Cooper calls ‘the shifting trajectories of historical interaction.’¹⁴ Such trajectories were rarely stable, and all required active maintenance if they were to persist. Thinking of London in these terms suggests that rather than testing whether London was or was not a ‘junction-box’ of anti-imperialism, it is more important to explore the spaces, sites and networks in which and through which the politics of race, empire and imperial criticism coincided and were articulated. Doing so will inevitably produce a blurred picture of the role of the politics of race and empire in London, requiring the broader picture to be pieced together from studies that interrogate particular aspects of the city, particular spaces, places and networks of connection. However, this picture itself will be more faithful to the reality of colonial London, a city constituted by a complex concatenation of trajectories each of which linked together

¹² Owen, *The British Left and India*: 197, 232.

¹³ Owen, *The British Left and India*: 231, 233.

¹⁴ F. Cooper (2005), *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* London: University of California Press: 231.

differing nodes in the imperial social formation with diverse understandings of how the politics of race and empire functioned.

Whilst the analyses brought together in this thesis enhance understanding of the spatialities of the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s London, they also seek to advance geographical understanding itself. James Tyner has suggested that political geographic debates have tended to be ‘woefully ignorant of pan-African nationalism and other African diasporic movements.’¹⁵ The preceding chapters have helped to counter this tendency by foregrounding African diasporic political movements. Exploring specific sets of spatial practices centred on the LCP, IAFA/IASB, and Pan-African Federation has enabled this thesis to bring together work on the racialisation of space and work on the networked spatialities of political movements. Attending to the spatialities through which African diasporic cultures and politics were articulated, and the geographical networks through which African diasporic identities were practised, in 1930s and 1940s London has enabled the thesis to expand upon recent geographical research into the political geographies of social and political movements. By focusing on the spatial practices through which African diasporic political networks were both grounded in London and differentially connected to other parts of the world, the thesis has both provided empirical research into African diasporic political geographies, and has also advanced understanding of the ways in which diasporic politics is enacted by developing Brent Edwards’s notion of diaspora as something requiring consistent practicing and articulation. It has further provided supporting evidence for the argument that transnationally-connected political movements aimed at resisting or reforming globalising and imperialising powers have a longer history than is often assumed in

¹⁵ J. Tyner (2004), ‘Territoriality, social justice and gendered revolutions in the speeches of Malcolm X,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **29**: 343.

accounts of the counter-globalisation movements of the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ Finally, the thesis has demonstrated the importance of attending to the ways in which race and racism impact upon, and are in turn challenged by, the geographies of oppositional political organisations. In these ways, it contributes to the development of research on the political geographies of social movements, both by drawing attention to organisations and individuals heretofore largely ignored by this body of work, and through conceptual attention to the ways in which transnational political networks deployed by black West Indian activists to challenge and contest the politics of race and empire in 1930s and 1940s Britain played out in the imperial metropolis.

Creolising London

As well as the spatial aspects of black West Indian political practices, this thesis also began by raising questions about the role of black West Indian activists in the creolisation of London, and whether or not it was appropriate to conceptualise 1930s and 1940s London as an imperial metropolis undergoing a process of colonisation in reverse. In chapter two, it was suggested that London itself can be conceptualised as a colonial city, an urban environment in which practices that constituted and sustained British imperialism were played out. Developing this perspective, and drawing on the work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite amongst others, it was argued that the process by

¹⁶ Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities*: 22; A. Cumbers and P. Routledge, *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

which London underwent creolisation emerged out of a complex situation whereby a metropolitan polity reacts to internal and external colonial pressures.¹⁷

The arguments brought together across this thesis suggest a number of ways in which black West Indian activists contributed to the wider creolisation of London. The variety of different place-based campaigns against the racialisation of space catalogued in chapter three, for example, suggest that the very process of challenging London's racialised urban spaces, in which whiteness often acted as the normalised category for societal inclusion, contributed significantly to the process of creolisation. Sites such as Aggrey House, the LCP headquarters, and their proposed cultural centre offered a challenge to the racialised identity of imperial London, one which was steeped in the politics of imperial criticism and based upon an appeal for universal inclusion of all races within the category of Britishness. In chapter four, meanwhile, it was shown that the public gatherings that black West Indian activists were involved in worked to foreground diverse perspectives on the politics of race and empire, and offered different strands of anti-imperial and critical imperial thought a platform often lacking in wider British society. Witnessing or partaking in such gatherings could be a disconcerting experience for white metropolitan Britons, particularly if black speakers – and especially black women speakers – were on the platform, and the outspoken challenge offered by colonial activists who insisted on the importance of the politics of race and empire within a society that otherwise often appeared apathetic on these issues was an important contribution to the process of creolisation. The discussion of periodicals offered in chapter five demonstrated that publications such as *The Keys*, *International African Opinion*, and *Pan-Africa* articulated diverse perspectives on the nature and

¹⁷ E. K. Brathwaite (2005 [1978]), *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* Kingston: Ian Randle.

extent of the African diaspora, and produced multiple interpretations of the relationship between the politics of race and empire. It also highlighted the fact that these periodicals were distributed within Britain, and London in particular, and that they had a metropolitan readership, however small it may have been, whilst also circulating in parts of the colonial world. Their efforts to contest or reform the imperial basis of British society, their discussion of events and situations in the colonies that were often otherwise unknown of in Britain, and the way in which they drew together reports compiled from colonial press networks and made them accessible to British audiences all suggest that such periodicals contributed to the internal colonial pressures that were part of the process of creolisation. Finally, the discussion in chapter six of the role played by black West Indian activists in Britain around the unrest in their homelands in the 1930s demonstrates clearly some of the ways in which activists worked to connect themselves to events in the colonies, to transmit news of these events to as wide an audience as possible in Britain, to challenge various arguments made in the metropolis with which they disagreed, and to influence the responses of the imperial government. In doing so, these activists not only contributed to the process of creolisation by directly raising matters of imperial and racial politics at the heart of the empire; they also strengthened and reconfirmed their own identities as colonial West Indians, and in doing so positioned themselves as active agents in the wider process of creolising London.

Such is the evidence that black West Indian activists, and the political practices in which they were engaged, played an important role in the creolisation of London. Returning to the primary research question set out in the introduction to this thesis, it has been shown that the diverse ways in which black West Indian activists understood, interpreted and contested the politics of empire in late imperial London were expressed

through a broad range of political practices which saw them participate in a broader process of creolising the metropolis. This perspective enhances our understanding of the relationship between London and the empire in this period in a number of ways. Firstly, it reaffirms the active role of colonial subjects themselves within the wider movements for imperial criticism and anti-imperialism in 1930s and 1940s London. Secondly, it highlights the fact that the politics of empire were an important aspect of London in this period, if not for everybody then at least for colonial activists and those with whom they came into contact. Thirdly, it demonstrates the close relationship that black West Indian activists and others in the metropolis articulated between the politics of race and the politics of empire, suggesting that, at least for black subjects themselves experiencing daily life in the late imperial metropolis, racism and empire were understood to be closely connected, though often in differing ways dependent upon the perspectives of particular activists. Finally, as discussed above, the approach taken in this thesis suggests that if we are to gain a clearer picture of the relationship between London and the empire then we might do so not by looking for totalising generalisations about the nature of London's place within the empire, the relationship of Londoners en masse to it, or the role of the city as a whole in facilitating imperial criticism, but instead through the examination of the ways in which particular aspects of London, and particular sites within the city, were linked to the political expression of imperialism, to specific colonial practices, and to reformist and anti-imperial networks in diverse ways and through heterogeneous modes of connection that can best be traced through detailed historical work incorporating a multiplicity of sources, including the colonial press and international archival collections.

Colonisation in reverse and the time of decolonisation

The research collected here also enables us to be more specific about Louise Bennett's notion of 'colonization in reverse,' with which the introduction to this thesis closed. It was noted in the introduction that Bennett's poem 'Colonization in reverse' offered a more celebratory perspective of the arrival of black West Indian migrants to Britain than was portrayed by an earlier black female poet in London, Una Marson, in 'Little Brown Girl.' Having surveyed the political practices of black West Indian activists in the 1930s and 1940s, it is now possible to offer some speculations as to the reasons for the different perspectives offered by Marson and Bennett. This thesis has argued that London in the 1930s and 1940s was a colonial city. However, the material collected here suggests the impossibility of extending the notion of 'colonisation in reverse' to this earlier period, suggesting that it may be more specific to the post-war context in which Bennett was writing. Frederick Cooper has argued that decolonisation is best understood not as 'a moment that suddenly produced a generalized post-colonial condition,' but instead as 'a process in which new possibilities for changing institutions and discourses opened up.'¹⁸ The temporal and spatial extent of this process is as yet only beginning to be understood, highlighted by the fact that even the best collection to date on the relationship between British culture and the end of empire takes for granted that this process was largely confined to the post-war era.¹⁹ In contrast, the arguments within this thesis suggest that it may be more appropriate to extend the era in which the process of decolonisation emerged prior to the World War Two. Indeed, Prasenjit Duara's suggestion that 'the circumstances for decolonization' can be traced back at least as far as the years immediately following World War One seems apposite,

¹⁸ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*: 238.

¹⁹ S. Ward (ed.) (2001), *British Culture and the End of Empire* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

enabling the incorporation into the wider process of decolonisation of both the racially motivated rioting in British ports and cities, and its concurrent reverberations around the British Empire whose history has recently been told in detail by Jacqueline Jenkinson, and the ‘Wilsonian moment’ of which Erez Manela has written, during which American President Woodrow Wilson’s calls for global self-determination unwittingly provided the motivation and justification for a global network of anti-colonial nationalists to contest the supremacy of empires.²⁰ Seen as part of this wider trajectory of decolonisation, the 1930s occupy a particularly interesting hinge moment, part of what Sinha has called an inter-war ‘empire-wide restructuring of imperial relations.’²¹ Where imperial historians have looked at the inter-war years, they tend to emphasise both that these years ‘witnessed a deeper penetration of imperial ideals’ amongst the British populace, and also that the descent towards World War Two ‘did much to strengthen the Imperial system.’²² Once again, such assertions place too much on generalisations, and whilst they may largely be true they underplay the important contradictory factors, including those catalogued in this thesis, which demonstrate the processes and practices through which the politics of empire, and its racialised underpinnings, were opened to debate and contestation.

²⁰ P. Duara (ed.) (2004), *Decolonization: Perspectives From Then and Now* London: Routledge: 7; J. Jenkinson (2009), *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* Liverpool University Press; E. Manela (2007), *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*: 28.

²² A. Thompson (2000), *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics, c. 1880-1932* London: Longmann: 184; K. Jeffrey (1999), ‘World War Two’, in J. Brown and W. R. Louis (eds.) *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century* Oxford: Oxford University Press: 306-328.

Yet if the 1930s and 1940s can be understood as playing a role in the broader process of decolonisation, it is nevertheless clear that imperial dynamics at this point differed from those which existed after the formal process of decolonisation had begun, in the era when Bennett penned ‘Colonisation in reverse’. Whilst 1930s and 1940s London was a metropolis imbued with colonial practices, and variously connected to diverse parts of the colonial world, the relationship between imperial power and colonial migrant was markedly different to that in the post-war era. The presence of African diasporic people in Britain remained comparatively small, and had not yet become the object of the kinds of widespread anxiety witnessed in the British press and Parliament in the post-war years.²³ Furthermore, whilst labour unrest around the empire had pushed the imperial government towards reforms such as the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, there was little concurrent loosening of political control by the metropolis. Black West Indian imperial critics in the metropolis were thus, as this thesis has catalogued, routinely ignored by ministers and officials at the Colonial Office, and were able to gain the attention of only a minority of British people. In these ways, black West Indians in London in the 1930s and 1940s had neither the numbers, nor the impetus of the political horizons offered by actually-occurring decolonisation, to fully enact the return colonisation of Britain.

It is in this sense that it seems more appropriate to conceptualise the role of black West Indian activists in the 1930s and 1940s as working to creolise London, rather than to colonise it in reverse. Their efforts served to challenge the racialised underpinnings of British society, and the ways in which these worked to produce British urban areas. They also engaged in a widespread debate on the politics of empire,

²³ K. Paul (1997), *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* New York: Cornell University Press: esp. 111-130.

whereby they advocated various positions that, whilst not always anti-imperial, consistently argued for the need to re-structure British imperial relations, particularly in order to ensure that the empire became more racially inclusive. They insisted that processes of racialisation, and the wider relationship between British society and the empire, were of central significance. Through such activity, the spatial practices catalogued in this thesis became a central part of the pre-history of Louise Bennett's notion of 'colonization in reverse,' insomuch as they contributed to a process of creolisation that attempted to alter both the relationship of the metropolitan society to its empire, and the relationship of colonial migrants themselves to the metropolitan society. Such a process laid the groundwork for the later post-war engagement of people from the colonies and the former colonies with metropolitan inhabitants in London, in a context in which the power dynamics of imperialism were no longer so readily assumed to run only one way.

Writing of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* in 1948, Mike and Trevor Phillips have argued that '[i]t would be impossible to describe the country in which we now live without awarding a role to the Caribbean immigrants.'²⁴ This thesis has sought to extend this insight into the pre-war period of 1930s and 1940s London, and in the process to demonstrate that the modes of political practice through which black West Indian activists operated, and the spaces, places and networks around which such practices were performed, were a central aspect of the process of creolising London, itself an important step towards the post-war possibilities of 'colonisation in reverse' articulated by Bennett. In closing this argument, it seems apt to end with an anecdote from the final years of the 1940s which suitably demonstrates the ways in which black

²⁴ M. Phillips and T. Phillips (1997), *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* London: HarperCollins: 5.

West Indian activist organisations worked to creolise London. In June 1949, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (NAACP) in the US published an article in their periodical, *The Crisis*, by the academic St Clair Drake reflecting on two visits he had made to Britain, one in the summer of 1947 and one in February 1948, on a Julian Rosenwald Fellowship to study the impact of black American troops on British society during and after World War Two. As part of his research, Drake wrote that he had ‘poked in and out of pubs and parson’s parlors, and tried out my brand of Mass Observation and Gallup polling in trams, buses, and on street corners; in high places and low.’ In the course of his research, Drake had forged a close relationship with both the LCP and the Pan-African Federation, and he wrote about both organisations in his article for *The Crisis*, whilst also arguing that ‘one of the most interesting aspects of race relations in post-war Britain is the problem posed by hundreds of West Indians and West Africans who have decided to come to Britain to seek their fortunes – or at least to make a decent living.’ Drake thus explicitly articulated the transitional moment represented by the immediate post-war years, whereby the process of creolisation which had been ongoing for many years rapidly accelerated and altered form with the arrival of the passengers onboard the *Windrush* and their successor ships. Drake described the LCP as being similar in form to the NAACP, the representative of ‘Negroes living in London’ who were working ‘to protect civil-rights and to act as a link between colonial movements and London officialdom.’ The Pan-African Federation, meanwhile, Drake described as ‘attempting to serve the function of an integrating agency for colonial mass protest.’ For Drake, Britain was a country in which ‘black and brown men from everywhere’ were ‘struggling for education, economic opportunity and political independence.’ Yet amidst this hardship he was cheered by these two activist organisations, with their long histories of fighting

racism and pressing for reform of the empire. When describing their functions Drake declared, in a phrase which captures the complex geographies through which these groups had engaged in the creolisation of London, that ‘Both the permanent colored [sic] residents and the colonial masses have two important advocates at court.’²⁵

²⁵ St Clair Drake, ‘A report on the brown Britishers,’ *The Crisis* June 1949: 174, 188-189.

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