

‘Each one teach one’

Visualising Black intellectual life in Handsworth beyond the epistemology ‘white sociology’

Abstract

Handsworth, a suburb in north-west Birmingham, became an important generative epistemic location that produced a number of contested discourses on race and racism in Britain during the 1970s and early 1980s. Using archival sources, this article will focus on Handsworth as an important epistemic space where white sociological studies on ‘race relations’ converged and diverged with the counter-hegemonic political activism of the African Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACSHO). This group of young Black working class Pan-Africanists in Handsworth were the coordinating committee for a national delegation of activists who attended the Sixth Pan African Congress in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1974. Their activism in Handsworth was further captured by the photographer, Vanley Burke. Burke’s photography and archive not only engages with the politics of creating alternative sites of knowledge production, they also enable us to map, trace and reconstruct some of these important sites of Black intellectual life in Britain.

Keywords: Handsworth epistemologies; African Caribbean Self Help Organisation (ACSHO); Sixth Pan-African Congress; race-relations; white sociology; Vanley Burke.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank photographer, artist and archivist Vanley Burke, for his generosity of time, conversation and support in providing the copyrighted images for this article. I would also like to thank Bini Brown, Maa Yemi and Pepukayi Nkrumah, members of the Pan African Congress Movement and the African Caribbean Self Help Organisation, for the legacies of their activism and its contribution to the global pan-African

struggle and specifically for ACSHO's contributions to the Sixth Pan African Congress in Dar-es-Salam.

Introduction

This article will argue that Handsworth, a suburb in north-west Birmingham, became an important generative epistemic location that produced a number of contested discourses on race and racism in Britain during the 1970s and early 1980s. Through archival sources from the Library of Birmingham including newspaper cuttings on 'coloured communities', this essay will examine how within British white sociology, Handsworth had taken on an iconic spatial status for the production of ideas on Black British pathological and 'common-sense' racist imagery of Black community deprivation and criminality. The coloniality of these 'white' sociological discourses not only provided the epistemic frameworks and legitimacy for 'common-sense racism' (Lawrence 1982), they also delineated the rationale for sustaining the colonial relation of power within the 'colony society' (Hall et al. 2013). Handsworth was central to the formation of 'white' British sociological canons on race-relations and policing (Brown 1977, Rex and Tomlinson 1979, Cashmore 1983). However, the article will show how the colonial epistemic relation of British 'race relations' sociology, had further produced alternate consequences for theorising and framing questions of race and racism through Black feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship specifically from the Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall et al 2013, CCCS 1982). Here, the racialised and gendered structures of knowledge pertaining to the 'whiteness' of social theory were explicitly critiqued and named in Hazel Carby's essay, 'White Woman Listen!' and by Errol Lawrence's chapter on the sociology of Black pathology where 'white sociology' was called in to question for being structured both by racism and patriarchy (Lawrence 1982).

However, during the same period, Handsworth was also a site of anti-imperial and anti-colonial self-organised activism and knowledge production. Thus, this article will further examine how the African Caribbean Self Help Organisation and the photographic archive of Vanley Burke were themselves epistemic locations that offer important self-generated critiques of the racialised norms of white sociological epistemologies. Community organisations such as ACSHO placed an emphasis on decolonised knowledge and learning as a communal activity and social responsibility that went beyond the individualistic, instrumental and entrepreneurial methods and approaches that are evident in our current market driven and corporatised higher education system.

The final section of the article will examine how Burke's archive visualises Handsworth's ideological tensions and the discursive anti-colonial borders of Black representation that established the epistemic and counterhegemonic foundations against the 'common-sense' racist narratives of the British press and sociological cannon. Burke's photography and archive not only engages with the politics of creating alternative sites of knowledge production, they enable us to map, trace and reconstruct some of these important sites of Black intellectual life in Britain. This paper will attempt to do some of this interconnecting work by reflecting on the significance of Burke's archival practice that captures these vital public spaces of Black intellectual activism.

Epistemic racism and complicit white sociology



Figure 1 © Vanley Burke

Historically, sociology belongs to an academic tradition that had understood racism as a set of prejudices whilst ignoring or downplaying its structural forms and functions (see Hund in Lentin 2014). Sociology thus acquired the capacity to pursue a sociological imagination that had failed to conceive of analytical frames where racism and whiteness could be understood as having structuralising functions. At the same time, sociology simultaneously decried racism as an exceptional and outrageous dysfunction of white liberal hegemonic democratic societies (Hesse in Hund and Lentin 2014).

Naming racism as an epistemic feature of the white sociological canon has proven problematic for anti-racist scholars in the British academy. The

landmark publication, *The Empire Strikes Back* was seen as ‘politicising’ the field of race-relations, a field that had failed to question the complicity of white sociology in perpetuating the edifices of knowledge production that gave legitimacy to the racialised structures of government policy, most notably in schooling and policing (CCCS 1982). *The Empire Strikes Back* was in many senses, representative of ‘the political struggles that were occurring within Black communities during the 1980s [that] were being echoed in the context of the production of knowledge about racism’ within the academy (Solomos and Back 1996, 11). This incisive observation points to the ideological and contested terrain of racism within wider British society and how racism was further treated inadequately through race relations paradigms within white British sociology. So too were questions of sexism, gender and sexuality as they intersected with race where binary knowledge regimes constructed Blackness through tropes of masculinity and womanhood through tropes of whiteness. Black British feminist discourses such as those produced by Hazel Carby’s (1982) essay, ‘White Woman Listen!’ Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood’ and Pratibah Parmar’s (Carby 1982) ‘Gender, race and class: Asian women in resistance’ provided some of the earliest examples of framing race-relations discourses in the UK through an analysis of gender and sexuality (Solomos and Back 1996). Carby was critical of white socialist feminist theorising and organising that ignored questions of race and racism. Thus, White feminism needed to be revised and modified to take account of specific systems of racism, slavery and colonialism in order to

recognise how they continued to detrimentally impact the lives of Black women in Britain (Carby 1982).

Errol Lawrence's (1982) essay in this landmark volume, 'In the abundance of water the fool is thirsty: Sociology and Black pathology,' mapped out the connections between 'common-sense' racist discourses in British society and how these pathological ideas about race were readily traced and replicated within race-relations sociology. In his previous chapter in the same volume, Lawrence charted the historical development of 'common-sense' racist ideologies and how in that particular moment in 1980s Britain, 'common-sense' racist discourses were being systematically reorganised to form a more comprehensive racist ideology:

One would perhaps be forgiven for hoping that the latter process would have been disrupted by the interventions of the sociologists of race relations and 'ethnicity studies,' who claim to be writing in order to promote a "better understanding" between Black and whites.

Unfortunately, this has not happened (Lawrence in CCCS, 1982, 95).

What Lawrence called, 'the neglected side of the imperialist coin' remains a useful reminder that contemporary forms of racism, specifically in the context of Caribbean and South Asian un/settled communities in areas such as Handsworth, could not be disentangled from the histories of colonialism, slavery and indenture (Lawrence in CCCS, 1982). We can speculate that one of the neglected sides of imperialism, as there are many, is the failure to take a transformative and radical assessment of the racialised epistemic foundations of white Eurocentric traditions of thought as the basis by which localised European knowledge claims became

universalised, standardised and validated. The view that research on race could be studied as being separate and detached from wider social and political struggles of racism remained the dominant prevailing position within the larger body of race-relations research (Solomos 1989). But as Lawrence pointed out, such a position of performative white neutrality and objectivity was a spurious one for race-relations sociologists, in light of their unwillingness to acknowledge the unnamed whiteness of their discipline:

We use the term ‘white sociology’ quite deliberately. This is not simply to register the fact that sociology generally and race ‘race/ethnic-relations’ sociology too, are top heavy with white personnel. Rather it is in recognition of the historical conditions and circumstances within which the various ‘fields’ of sociology have developed ... We have remarked elsewhere about the tendency of white sociologists to obscure the question of their relationship to the Black people they study; a relationship which is structured by racism (Lawrence in CCCS, 1982 133-134).

We can place Lawrence’s analysis within the context of an anti-colonial political agency of the CCCS publication that was willing to name the operational structures of white power which sociology seemed largely and blissfully ignorant of, if not wilfully determined not to question. The consequences of this neglect has fed the discursive machinery of racism that has largely operated from the

circulation of mythological cultural and biological pseudo-scientific falsehoods that have erroneously been mistaken as ‘common-sense’ empirical truths.

Lawrence’s chapter highlighted the obstacles faced by Black communities in Britain as a consequence of the marginalised discourse on racism. He came under significant criticism by race relation sociologists who critiqued his analysis for being misdirected, for making over-generalisations, while claiming that more clarification and verification was need. His chapter was thus accused of being ‘unfair’ in its criticism (see Solomos 1989). However, as Lawrence had pointed out, it was race-relations sociologists who had failed to question the most obvious common-sense racist assumptions found in their own analysis that paralleled the common-sense racism in circulation within British public discourses on race.

Lawrence was referring to the pathological narratives found in the British media and printed press that focused on the so-called failure of the Black family to control their children and to accept their inherited colonial conditions. He cites *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper as persistent offenders of these tropes when one of their correspondents, Gordon Brook-Shepard, a former intelligence officer, blamed ‘left wing aggro-groups’ for exploiting the frustrations of Afro Caribbean youth which in turn erupted the natural order of things in British society

(Lawrence 1982). Using what Lawrence called ‘the improbable use of cricket as a social metaphor’ Shepard wrote:

For a while cricket preserved the illusion that only the pitch had been moved, and that this was still the plantation relationship under more equitable conditions (Brook-Shepard cited in Lawrence 1982, 98).

What can we glean from Brook-Shepard’s observation of Caribbean communities experiencing a more ‘equitable plantation relationship’ on the new ‘pitches’ of Britain’s Black populated cities? This bizarre statement was, as Lawrence observed, evidence of popular colonial nostalgia (Lawrence 1982), a return perhaps to a time where colonial power was imagined and mythologised as being aligned with nature. It can also be read as instructive of a normative and pervasive desire for the colonial configuration and power relation within journalistic, and in particular instances, within academic scholarship on race-relations. And of course, cricket, being the symbol of colonial civility and order becomes a revealing and useful metaphor for projecting the social anxieties of a nation whose declining empire was being ‘hit for six’ by the ‘rioting children’ of colonised commonwealth citizens who, according to Brook-Shepard were, ‘playing a new gruesome version of the game with bricks for balls and plastic police shields for bats (Brook-Shepard in Lawrence 1982, 98). And so, similar evocations of the plantation/colonial relation would in turn be a provocation for multiple forms of Black resistance. An ‘equitable plantation relationship’ is a configuration that

Black populations engaged in self-learning, counterhegemonic organising and social uprisings were not prepared to tolerate nor accept without struggle.

However, the normalising of colonial nostalgia or at least of its ongoing power relations and legacies, might provide us with one explanation as to how it was that the imagery of the colonial/plantation relation within the colony society of Britain's urban centres had received scant critical consideration in white sociology's studies of race-relations during that period. This is in spite of the discipline's complicit role in helping to sustain and maintain the hegemony of the colonial/plantation relation through its largely uncritical production of white perspectives and epistemologies. Not only did white sociology fail to question racism, 'in many ways it is precisely these sorts of images and assumptions which have been theorised' within the discipline (Lawrence 1982, 95).

Some studies had specifically taken Handsworth as their location to conduct a series of sociological investigations with varying and in some instances, conflicting motivations. Handsworth became a focal point for national hysteria concerning 'Rasta muggers' and the racialisation of 'mugging' as a specific social phenomena of Black criminality (Hall et al 2013, Campbell 1985). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law & Order* showed the linkages between the discursive racialised terrain of local and national press coverage of 'mugging' and the ways in which consensual public opinion was given shape and structure by the production of knowledge formed and interpreted between the criminal justice system and the media (Hall et al 2013). *Policing the Crisis* contextualised the link between the economic decline of industrial cities such as Birmingham, the methods and ways in which Black communities created their internal liminal structures of being in the 'colony society', and the policing methods used to

control predominantly Black working class communities in areas such as Handsworth (Hall et al 2013).

Horace Campbell observed that, 'The sociology of race relations *control* replaced colonial *control* as a major problem for the British State' (1985, 191). Arguably, this shift from 'colonial' to 'race relations' was operational at the discursive level rather than being any noticeable material or relational shift between Black urban working class populations and how they were policed and governed in the 'contact zones' of the British state. Rastafari communities in Handsworth were thus constructed as a threat to the British public and to the British way of life. In August 1976, the local Birmingham newspaper, *The Birmingham Evening Mail* ran a 'special report' entitled, 'City probe into mystery 'sect' of squatters.' The article reported how 'the Dread' youth had been arrested in separate police raids and had been charged with serious offences ranging from robbery to wounding. As the mysterious and threatening racialised other, these young 'Rastafarians' were described as styling their hair in long ringlets, wearing pyjama trousers and prone to sleeping late in the morning, the obvious and not so subtle inference being that these racial aliens were lazy and lacked a basic work ethic. The article further inferred that 'the squatters' were effectively abusing and taking advantage of social housing owned by a local housing association. The completion of this process of othering warranted an authoritative investigation into their behaviour which was reportedly being studied by the Jamaican Consulate and a leading housing association.

State monitoring and reporting of Rastafari youth in Handsworth was not unusual to the extent that the activities of Black organisations were under constant surveillance and attack by Special Branch while commissioned academic studies

by white sociologists were being used to fill gaps in knowledge in the gathering of intelligence information (Campbell 1985). Probably the most infamous of these studies was John Brown's *Shades of Grey – Police/West Indian Relations in Handsworth*. Brown's report, seen as discursively 'Powellite' in language and argument (Gilroy 1982 in CCCS), created a picture the 'hard-core' Rastafarian as belonging to a criminalised sub-culture living in Handsworth squats, unemployed and a constant threat to the 'peace of individual citizens Black, brown and white' (Brown cited in CCCS, 160). The question of whose peace was under threat or being disturbed can be understood if we consider that appeals for 'peace' and 'racial harmony' are discursive performative tropes for racially securing and stabilising the hegemony of white social order and governance. It is within this context that Black political organizing can be seen as a disruptive disorderly force and as the source of 'racial disharmony' within white liberal democracies. If Brown's report cemented the image of the violent Rasta, as a 'crazed drug-smoking menace to British society' from a deprived and broken Black family (Campbell 1985, 192), such pathologies were given further traction in Ernest Cashmore's study *Rastaman*. Cashmore, while attempting to distinguish his own analysis from Brown's, still found it necessary to reconfirm Black pathologies. For Cashmore, Rastafari in Handsworth, 'were prone to handbag snatching, pilfering and robberies of a more serious nature' (Cashmore cited in Campbell 1985, 193).

Sociological studies and journalistic reporting functioned as echo chambers within race relation discourses depicting Handsworth as 'Britain's most explosive ghetto' (see Brown 1977 and Humphreys 1977). Indeed the moral panic over Black criminality was equally hyperbolic when it came to newspaper reports on the dangers of

‘Black Power propagandists.’ Black community organisations such as Harambee were not only singled out in race-relations studies for their militancy, they were also a site of epistemic and ideological race-baiting in the national press. *The Sunday Telegraph* accused ‘Black power extremists’ of ‘lingering’ inside school premises to manipulate vulnerable and confused West Indian boys and girls with their ‘Black power’ doctrine. The report went on to say:

In Handsworth, Black Power operates from a small terraced house in one of the better tended streets. It produces its own paper, *Harambee*, which condemns Black prostitution, alleges racial discrimination in the city’s police and welfare services and carries in its latest issue copious reports of the progress of Black “freedom fighters” in Mozambique (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 1972).

The explicit racism and normative Eurocentrism of ‘race-relations’ frameworks re-inscribed the colonial relation within sociological scholarship on race both theoretically and methodologically (Cashmore 1983; Rex and Tomlinson, 1979). Whilst the ‘race relations’ epistemic frames adopted a largely uncritical position on the production of racist discourses, the following section examines how Black constituencies were engaged in creating their own counterhegemonic knowledge structures through sites of global transnational Pan-African organising and self-directed forms of intellectual engagement.

Black counterhegemonic circuits of knowledge in the UK



Figure 2 © Vanley Burke

Black political mobilising offered counterhegemonic sites of knowledge production to the coloniality of epistemic and material structures that white sociology had done well to conceal through repeated traditions of ignoring or wilfully disengaging the racism that sits at the heart of modernity and its knowledge structures (Hund and Lentin 2014; Bhabra 2014; Ladner 1973). Transnational circuits of Black intellectual thought were pursued as a matter of political and epistemic urgency that marked the precariousness of Black existence within the urban enclaves of Britain in the post war decades. These intellectual activities were explicitly aimed at Black audiences and so were often peripheral struggles to the operation of the liberal democratic political machinery (Sudbury 1998). Education and the active pursuit of knowledge were entangled within the colonial relation that had transported and adapted itself from British colonies to the urban industrial economies in cities such as Birmingham. As Stuart Hall (2013) argues, by the 1970s a number of economic and epistemic factors were starting to merge

following post-war migration from former British colonial territories. These included an economic recession and the calculation of welfare cuts that would hit those areas of the country with a high concentration of Black people, especially Black youth; the growing industrial militancy of Black workers; and the politicisation of ethnic consciousness that was becoming more localised in Black areas (Hall 2013).



Figure 3 © Vanley Burke

This rising globalised Black consciousness could be witnessed in Black popular culture through the circuits of a roots reggae music, sound system culture and Rastafari discourses on ‘overstanding’ Babylon ‘shitstym’ (see Campbell 1985, Gilroy 2006, Henry 2006, Palmer 2011). It could also be seen in the counterhegemonic spaces and structures established in Black communities to circulate and distribute Black intellectual resources and materials. The Harriet Tubman Bookshop on Grove Lane in Handsworth, sold radical literature including children’s books as well as operating a legal advice centre. The shop formed part of a network of community organisation including a youth hostel and the Marcus Garvey Day Nursery (Rex and Tomlinson 1979). Elsewhere,

New Beacon Books founded in 1966 in Finsbury Park, North London was established by John La Rose and Sara White. The bookshop served as a community hub and was the first independent Black bookshop and radical publishing house in the UK (George Padmore Institute 2011). Book suppliers such as the Pepukayi Book Distribution Service established by Pepukayi Nkrumah, a founding member of the Pan African Congress Movement in the UK, were vital suppliers of Black literature from the US, Africa and the Caribbean to a number of Black community booksellers across the UK (Personal conversation). Publishers Jessica and Eric Huntley, founders of Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, set out to counter corrosive representations of Blackness within publishing. They established Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications to promote Black radical writing and published texts such as Walter Rodney's (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* as well as books by Linton Kwesi Johnson, Valerie Bloom and Andrew Salkey.

Colin A. Beckles (1998) writing on the political legacy of England's Black bookshops discusses the urgency of Black counterhegemonic discourses as defence mechanisms against the discursive component of Black struggle. The primary aggressor in the discursive battle he argued, 'has been those White institutional structures that disseminate White racist discourse' (Beckles, 1998, 51). Black counterhegemonic discourses functioned to reveal and illuminate the Eurocentric processes of racism, 'that damage Black children, Black families, Black workers; those that lead to the dropouts, the incarceration, and the murder of Black people' (Beckles, 1998, 57). As John LaRose explained, the lack of information on Black contributions to knowledge production was a deliberate factor of the colonial society that produces discontinuity; 'The power to discontinue is there in the hands of the colonial authority. So that each generation comes to the colonial situation, with its long history of struggles' (cited in Beckles 1998, 54).

With the exception of Jessica Huntley, what is obscured in Beckles' account is the gendered and sexualised dimensions of this racialised discursive struggle within the colonial society. While it can be argued that the struggle was waged on behalf and in aid of Black 'children,' 'families' and 'people,' it still remains vitally important to recognise how these all-encompassing terms can perform specific forms of gendered epistemic erasures. Julia Sudbury's (1998) important account of Black women's organising showed how Black lesbian women were proactively involved in Black power organisations in Britain but were too often marginalised and silenced within Black women's and pan-Africanist social movements. Black lesbian groups thus defined and created autonomous activist spaces within a wider hostile right-wing environment as well as operating under a 'don't ask don't tell' policy within Black community organisations, which arguably, has contributed to the epistemic suppression of Black queer histories in Britain.

Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe's (1985) account of the Black British feminist, Olive Morris reveals the ways in which Black women's collective community organising was not separate from their ideological commitments. Morris, who was a founding member of the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD), a member of the Black Panther movement and was also a founding member of Sarbarr Bookshop, the first Black self-help community bookshop in South London. At the same time she also contributed to the formation of the Brixton Black Women's Group (BWG) (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985). Morris was able to synthesise her political perspectives with her social activism to help form the BWG. Here, she developed an ideological coherence based on the needs of ordinary Black people while making clear links to other ant-imperialist struggles as, 'She worked relentlessly to

translate these ideas into practice, and (where) most of her political work was done at grassroots level' (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985, 153). When Morris moved to Manchester, as a university student, she also worked with the Black Women's Mutual Aid Group and the Manchester Black Women's Co-operative, contributing to the establishment of a supplementary school and a Black bookshop in the area (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe 1985, 153).

Access to these self-generated sites of learning must be understood within the context of the white hegemonic racial lens and the inherited gendered, racialised and classed legacies of the colonial relation within what Hall has called 'the colony society' (Hall, 2013). The colony society of the urban ghetto operates as a structure of discursive white epistemic power relations, as much as it is indelibly lived through the brutalising and annihilating mechanisms of racialised policing, poor housing and low waged labour. Hence, the development of Black studies, Black schooling and Black knowledge production within community generated centres of learning, can be read as one way in which the 'extended separateness and marginality' (Hall, 2013, 344) that had developed in and within Black communities gave Black peoples the epistemic means for survival and flourishing through particular forms of cultural and political consciousness.

As LaRose notes above, the colonial authority within the colony society always 'has the power to discontinue.' Within this white supremacist logic of the colony society, Black lives are positioned within an epistemic framework that is never far from death. Thus, the power to 'discontinue' Blackness operates in tandem with epistemic and genocidal endings. Black subjectivities, 'are positioned in the knowledge that we are living in the afterlives of slavery, sitting in the room with history, in a lived and undeclared state of emergency' (Sharpe 2016, 100). However, the internal colony framing through Hall's deployment of the term, also allows us to see that within these

deliberate and intentional spaces of liminality, the inner politics of ‘colony life’ was also a generative space for particular forms of Black epistemologies from Pan-Caribbean forms of Black nationalism, Black feminisms and global Pan-Africanisms to Rastafari livity, Black cosmologies and Black theologies. Hall’s framing of ‘the colony society’ moves us beyond the singular narrative of Black life as being only knowable through the oppressive forces of the colonial state, without ever denying its ruling omnipresence and its inherent structures of violence. As the following section will show, these were the epistemic spaces of negotiated un/settlement (Hesse 2000). Handsworth was both a product and producer of a global Black consciousness that was distinct and powerful.

Handsworth epistemologies



Figure 4 The Long March (Handsworth 1977) © Vanley Burke

A global Pan-African world outlook sustained us as a political organisation because it gave us a wider understanding of the plight of our oppression (Bini Brown interview, 2008).

In June 1974, a group of young Black working class Pan-Africanists from Handsworth, Birmingham organised a national delegation of community activists from Nottingham, London and Manchester to attend the sixth Pan African Congress in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Hosted in the University of Dar-es-Salaam's Nkrumah Hall, they were among fifty-two delegations representing communities and liberation movements in North America, South America and the Pacific alongside representatives from Palestine and recently independent states in Africa and the Caribbean. The conference opening address was presented by the anti-colonial politician and theorist Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere and the Guinean President Sekou Toure with articles by Guyanese scholar activist Walter Rodney and African American poet and writer, Imamu Baraka. Papers were also presented by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FREMILO), The Liberation of the Palestinian People (the PLO), South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), The African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Movement (PAC) (*Resolutions and Selected Speeches from the Sixth Pan African Congress, 1976*).

The British delegation were asked to describe the condition of Black people in Europe. In response, their collective statement was more accurately representative of their experiences of coloniality within British metropolitan centres while acutely drawing attention to the conditions of Black communities in areas such as Handsworth. They decided to use this global Pan-African platform to return their decolonized gaze onto the coloniality of white supremacy in order to 'read' the socio-manipulative functions of racism and its operational, strategic and governmental function within the

British imperial state. The British delegation declared that,

There is of course, nothing accidental about the maintenance of racist oppression, for the conviction of white supremacy represents one of the most important features of the British personality. It is rooted in the medieval dichotomy of white good and Black evil, providing justification for the horrors of African slavery and imperialism. Racism has over the centuries become an indispensable tool in the task of manipulating and controlling the total European population, in which there reside almost 8 million Black people (*Resolutions*, 1976, 58).

The delegation's profound understanding of the condition of their ideological struggle revealed a sophisticated analysis, not only of the apparatus of their own oppression, but how the British nation state persistently utilises racism as a mechanism of social control over white populations in order to preserve white hegemonic political power. The statement's identification of this ideological strategy remains relevant to our contemporary fascistic political climate while being a prescient reminder of the manipulative function of white racial management through the consensual acceptance and normalcy of white supremacy.

The British delegation's statement also paid tribute to those men and women whom they said had, had their anti-imperialist resolve strengthened by their experience of racial hostility in England and America. They named Marcus Garvey, W. E. B Dubois, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, signifying the histories of transnational Black intellectual struggle and activism organised on British soil. They also paid tribute to the men and women who had died since the 5th Pan African Congress in Manchester in 1945 'in the struggle for peace and freedom' (*Resolutions*, 1976, 56). However, what is striking about their tribute is that the delegation's

acknowledgment of African women in the struggle had fallen short of naming any of these Black women. Amy Jacques Garvey and Amy Ashwood Garvey and other anti-colonial feminists had played a pivotal role in advocating for Black liberation and placing questions of gender within the transnational circulation of Black intellectual thought at the Manchester Congress. Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey were both formidable Pan-Africanists and feminists in their own right. Individually, they had developed a Pan-African Black diasporic feminist consciousness concerning the welfare of Africans, and African women in particular, within the transnational context of the 1945 Congress (Taylor 2002; Martin 2008). While the specific focus on Black women's intellectual work is not the singular focus of this essay, these contributions are significant to note as they unveil the intellectual labour of Black women, and the pattern of its subsequent erasure, in the circulation of anti-colonial anti-imperialist political ideas (Taylor 2002; Martin 2008, Blain, Leeds & Taylor 2016).

The delegation had also made specific reference to 'the women of Africa' who they said had borne the burden of slavery and colonialism. They expressed the necessity of transforming the struggle to make full use of African women's talents. However, this progressive position on the gendered and sexualised structures of colonial violence has some caveats. The talents and abilities of women were to be enlisted in building a new Africa and realising a 'new man,' echoing an implicit reference to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. It is unclear if their vision of a 'new man' would have extended to a radical envisioning of a 'new African woman' beyond serving the interest of heteronormative assumptions and ideals of 'the new' decolonised man.

In their statement, the delegation had set out the class conditions of their existence in the UK through economic matters that addressed the over-representation of Black male workers in low paid areas of employment including transport, steel

production, rubber processing and foundry work. Black women, did not fare any better by the concentration of their labour in the low paid division of the NHS and by their experiences as being employed as 'State Enrolled' nurses rather than the better paid roles of 'State Registered' nurses. Indeed, in their statement the group's analysis of the condition of Black people in Britain was rooted in what they called 'scientific socialism,' a method which took the historical materialist conditions of Black working class communities seriously within the context of imperialism, colonialism and the slave to wage labour relation. Racism and class inequalities in the labour market were used to highlight the racialised industrial imperial order of Britain and how this had impacted every facet of Black working class lives. Scientific socialism was used to trace the historic and material conditions of poverty rooted in the transition from slave labour to wage labour. The politics of work and employment was not simply an analysis of discrimination and the lack of integration into the British labour force. Instead, scientific socialism was applied to chart histories of Eurocentric racism and violence where, as the group's statement pointed out, its genealogy could be traced back to the colonial situation before Caribbean mass migration to Britain as well as through the highest development of science and technology employed by fascists to commit genocide on European soil (*Resolutions*, 1976). The delegation's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist statement at 6PAC was an example of how this particular group of community activists were connecting the plight of their oppression to global anti-colonial Pan-African liberation social movements. Their own analysis was in stark contrast to how Black liberation groups were researched in the dominant narratives of white sociology and their populist depictions in the national and local press.



Figure 5 Bini Brown, an Aboriginal activist from Australia with John Rex and Sally Tomlinson observing at the rear, Handsworth. © Vanley Burke

In their much contested study on ‘race-relations,’ *Colonial Immigrants in a British City, A Class Analysis*, John Rex and Sally Tomlinson (1979) described this group of young ‘West Indians’ from the Afro-Caribbean Coordinating Committee, later known as the African Caribbean Self-help Organisation (ACSHO), as ‘the most militant of Handsworth’s Black groups’ (257). Their sociological study noted that ACSHO’s ‘mythological representation of events’ of open race warfare may have been seen as ‘bizarre’ to whites but would make sense if whites understood that the colonial structures of the Black man’s (sic) oppression needed to be transformed and that a Third World Revolution could offer more hope than simplistic European understanding of class struggle or Marxist solutions (Rex and Tomlinson 1979). They further noted how ACSHO had established its own study group to read what they described as ‘Black orientated literature’ and that the group had ‘accepted Pan-Africanism as an ideology’ (Rex and Tomlinson 1979, 257). They even highlighted that ACSHO’s belief that the Black man’s (sic) future was in Africa and not in England, ‘had led to four visits to

Africa by members of this group, and another delivered a paper at the sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar-es-Salaam' (Rex and Tomlinson 1979, 257). ACSHO's role in providing counterhegemonic sites of knowledge production was a clear political strategy against global white supremacy and the epistemic machine of Eurocentric knowledge production that the delegation spoke about in their statement of address at the Sixth Pan African Congress:

Every kind of social scientist has studied us and told us that the areas in which we live are 'socially deprived.' Urban planners, housing experts and architects have studied the areas in which we live and they tell us that we are deprived in terms of housing. But most of all, we are deprived of the political power to initiate positive changes in our conditions and all these 'deprivations' depend upon the original deprivation of job opportunities and decent wages (*Resolutions*, 1976, 60).

In Handsworth, community organising has historically been centred on forms of Black intellectual activism that have been produced, engaged and sustained outside of the institutional walls of the white academy. Black activist groups such as ACSHO and their national body, the Pan African Congress Movement (PACM with branches in London, Manchester, Wolverhampton and Nottingham), have used their own process of knowledge production to defend themselves against the ravages of the British imperialist racist state. Their production of knowledge existed and, at varying points in their histories, thrived outside of the academy beyond the epistemic dominance and validating structures of the 'westernised university' (Grosfoguel, 2013). Black independent bookshops, 'reasoning' or 'groundings' sessions in front rooms, back rooms and church halls, public meetings in schools, clubs, pubs and city parks as well weekly talk shows on Black independent ('pirate') radio stations were all functions of

the self-generated forms of decolonised knowledge production. These spaces were also captured within the photography of Vanley Burke.

Vanley Burke visualising Handsworth



Figure 6 The Long March (Handsworth 1977) © Vanley Burke

So far, I have attempted to discuss the racialised context of the problematic failings of white sociology as it pertained to the development of race relations discourses that obviated, foreclosed or limited their analysis of racism and its intersection with gender and sexuality. At the same time they exhibited the structures and in some cases the desire for the colonial relation as a normative function of social as well as epistemic power. I have also critically engaged the historical context from which Black community activists had organised to produce and establish their own forms of intellectual knowledge structures beyond the academy. I now want to turn our attention to the ways in which the photography of the Birmingham photographer, Vanley Burke,

offers an empathetic insider perspective beyond the imperial lens that is missing from white sociology's readings of the condition of the Black community in Handsworth. It is important that we focus on this struggle over the politics of knowledge to see the continuities and disconnections of this epistemic struggles taking place between 'the street' and the academy. It is also important to see these relations between structures of knowledge and how they are located as being part of a wider political struggle. Burke's epistemic archives and visual genealogies of Black intellectual thought do not sit exclusively in a vacuum beyond the institutional and colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2017). They form part of what Tina M. Campt (2012) has called the *disruptive* and *disorderly* historical account of what can and cannot be said through the visual archive.

Burke's method and practice of documenting primarily, but not exclusively, Birmingham's African Caribbean community can be read through what Walter Rodney referred to as the 'Guerilla intellectual.' In *Walter Rodney Speaks* (1990), Rodney argued that the major and first responsibility of the intellectual is to the struggle over ideas. For Rodney, the purpose of education was to redress the power in-balance of knowledge and so 'the 'guerrilla intellectual' is one who is participating in this whole struggle for transformation within his (sic) own orbit' (Rodney 1990, 113). For Burke, the intellectual struggle and its transformation was taking place in the orbit of Handsworth, the very site in which a whole body of academic knowledge and ideas on race-relations had been produced with detrimental and devastating effects for the governing and policing of Black communities. In this context of knowledge production, Burke's work also represents the struggle over memory and archiving and whose narratives and stories are caught up within or left out of the processes of curation.

Burke started photographing the area of Handsworth in the early 1970s during the period when the moral panic over mugging and Rastafari criminality were

permeating the common-sense racist logics of the sociology of race-relations and the populist racializing discourses of the liberal and right-wing press. Burke's work would also mark an important intellectual juncture where the production of visual imagery and knowledge on Black communities in Britain became a site for intellectual exchange between Black visual artists and Black academics working in the field of cultural studies. In Mike Sealy's (1993) book, *Vanley Burke: A Retrospective*, Stuart Hall's short but incisive introduction wastes no time in locating and contextualising Burke's photography in relation the sociological studies on Handsworth during 1970s. Of Burke he writes,

I first saw his images of Handsworth in the 1970's, but they remain sharply etched into my visual memory. They seemed to mark the first time that an intimate, insiders 'portrait' – as opposed to a sociological study – of a settled Black British colony and its way of life had found its way into print in the form of a memorable set of images (Hall in Sealy, 1993, 12).

Hall's commentary can be understood in the context of the intellectual struggles mapped out earlier in this essay and the problematic relationship that had developed between white sociological researchers and the racist ethics and epistemologies that underpinned their analysis of Black communities in Handsworth. Burke's photography operates from a position of political awareness of the racial regimes and colonial lens of white journalistic, academic and governmental gaze, but not necessarily in ways that dictate a reactionary response within his methods and practice. Chambers (2012) suggests that what distinguishes Burke as a photographer is a reassuring sense of empathy with his subjects. This, he argues, allows Burke to develop sensitive and striking photographs of Black people in Handsworth that encourage us to make meaning

out things that we might not otherwise see. Burke's photographic lens refuses to centre the white gaze and instead engages a conversation of care and attentiveness with his subjects.

Hall's reading of Burke's photography offers an important insight into the ongoing legacy of coloniality in that his deployment of the term, 'a settled Black British colony,' is concerned with how Burke's photographic lens takes us on a voyage into Blackness in its variations and its possibilities within the industrial heart of Britain (Hall in Sealy, 1993). Hall's insightful and rich analysis of Burke's photography, shifts our attention away from the violence of white nostalgia for the stabilising return of the plantation relation. Rather, Burke's photographic journey takes us into the lives of 'Black Brummies' by marking the regional terms of the colony relation from the perspective of those who had moved, settled and who were born in Birmingham. Arguably, the 'settled Black colony' that Hall describes in the final chapter of *Policing the Crisis*, becomes visualised in Burke's imagery through his photo realist documentation of a vibrant Black enclave situated within an 'embattled position at the heart of white society' (Hall 2013, 347). It is, as Lola Young observes, the very ordinariness of Black peoples' lives in the suburb of Handsworth that Burke is engaging:

What it is that constitutes 'ordinariness' for Black people is, of course, extremely diverse depending on who you are: the point is though, that since mainstream images of Black people – outside of a clear set of parameters – do not record our everyday experience unless they are deemed newsworthy, then people from those communities have to intervene to make their own (Young in Sealy, 1993, 80).

Young (1993) suggests that it is precisely because of this visualisation of Black people as curiosities and problems in television, anthropological photography and newspapers that Black photographic representations are critical areas of analysis and struggle for Black people. The subjects of Burke's photographs are seen playing dominos, styling their hair, exchanging kisses and hugs with loved ones, driving dodgem cars at the funfair, on coaches going on day trips to Skegness, playing on bikes and hanging out in the park, placing bets at the local 'Bookies,' walking alone down darky and misty streets, watching a local game of cricket, loving, marrying, mourning and burying their beloveds, praising and worshiping in Black churches and raving in makeshift 'shebeen' clubs. Even an image of Hall himself, talking with a cigarette in hand, captured working in his very orderly office in the School of Contemporary Cultural Studies sits along and within the images of Black life in Britain (Morris 2012; Sealy 1993).



Figure 7 Stuart Hall, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. © Vanley Burke

Alongside these everyday activities that preoccupied their lives in England, Black people in Handsworth are shown confronting the ravages of police violence, pictured visiting Black bookshops, seen mobilising and engaged in forms of self-learning and self-education, protesting and demanding that Africa and Jamaica be freed from imperialism. Much of this public demonstrative community activism was organised by members ASCHO and Harambe who appear through the white gaze as of sociology as engaging Black Power propaganda and extremism. They take on the visual representation of Black British communities doing varying forms of resistant work that is required to find ways to be and to live *their* human existence between the flourishing and the necessary hustle of the ‘colony society.’ As Hall notes, ‘nothing makes one aware of living in a “colony” so much as the permanent presence of an “occupying force”’ (Hall 2013, 347). Thus the descriptor of the occupying force marks the normative hegemonic function of white racial rule as the structuring material and epistemic feature of the ‘colony society.’

Burke’s visual archive of Black life in Britain helps us to pull together the knowledge worlds of Black community activism, anti-racists epistemic struggles inside the academy alongside Burke’s unrelenting and deliberate practice to document, collate and to create an evolving and expanding archive of Black diasporic life. We see the transnational political activism of ACHSO as the co-ordinating committee for the 6PAC delegation transferred to the streets of Handsworth where Burke captures the anti-imperialist messages of the African Liberation Day march in 1977.



Figure 8 The Long March, 1977 © Vanley Burke.

His mode and method of activism is very much wedded to these complex ideological positions and epistemic relations within Handsworth that tell us about the complexity of intellectual struggle. Burke's archive extends beyond the visual to include ephemera, organisational records of community groups as well as documents that would be easily disposed and forgotten but are captured and archived to help us to navigate these knowledge worlds. This form of 'guerrilla archivist' work creates maps and signposts that propose more questions than answers. Indeed, such work needs to be engaged to ask further questions about the knowledge perspectives that are often not articulated, those Black queer voices, gendered, and disabled gaps in knowledge that are too often ignored in historical accounts of community activism. Black queer and Black disabled peoples although marginalised, are always present, but our assumed constructions of 'community' often elides their presence making these constituencies 'unseen' or imagined as out of sight. I read Burke's work as a desire to produce against the force of

erasure, and interpret his construction of knowledge as an archival ambush that is systematically claiming spaces of Blackness as memory within state and regional archives that operate predominantly as stores that preserve and protect Eurocentric perspectives and an a white epistemic historical record. Burke's documentation of Black lives deploys a discursive grammar where these images 'were conceived and born in desire: a desire for the plenitude of Blackness ... the fantasy, if you like, of this 'desire for Blackness' (Hall 1993, 15). Burke's compelling historical archive thus documents these circuits of 'desire' through the everyday lives of Black peoples in Handsworth. His archive opens up spaces of epistemic ambivalence (Campt 2012) that must be further perused to enrich the plenitude of Blackness within our intellectual histories.

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