

‘Writers in a common cause’? Militant Pan-Africanist Print Culture in Imperial Britain

Christian Høgsbjerg

In 1963, in the appendix to the revised edition of his classic 1938 history of the Haitian Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, C.L.R. James wrote:

Today the emancipation of Africa is one of the outstanding events of the contemporary history. Between the wars when this emancipation was being prepared, the unquestioned leaders of the movement in every public sphere, in Africa itself, in Europe and in the United States, were not Africans but West Indians.

James paid particular tribute to the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) and James’s compatriot and boyhood friend from Trinidad, George Padmore (1903-1959), both of whom, ‘using the ink of Negritude wrote their names imperishably on the front pages of the history of our time’ (James 2001: 309-310).¹

The role played by Garvey as founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in ‘building a mass movement’ among black people, particularly in America but across the entire African diaspora, was, James noted, ‘one of the propagandist miracles of this century’. ‘Garvey found the cause of Africans and of people of African descent not so much neglected as unworthy of consideration. In little more than half of ten years he had made it a part of the political consciousness of the world’ (James 2001: 309-310; the UNIA even had branches in South Wales during the 1920s, see Williams 2012: 257).

Jomo Kenyatta has related to this writer how in 1921 Kenyan nationalists, unable to read, would gather round a reader of Garvey’s newspaper, the *Negro World*, and listen

to an article two or three times. Then they would run various ways through the forest, carefully to repeat the whole, which they had memorised, to Africans hungry for some doctrine which lifted them from the servile consciousness in which Africans lived (James 2001: 309-310; see also Ewing 2014).²

Of George Padmore, who had recently passed away in 1959, James noted that ‘he preached and taught Pan-Africanism and organised an African Bureau’, the International African Service Bureau for the Defence of Africans and People of African Descent (IASB), set up in London in May 1937. James, who himself served as editor of the IASB journal *International African Opinion* during 1938, suggested ‘Padmore’s African Bureau’ was ‘the most striking West Indian creation between the wars’ (James 2001: 309-310; see also Høgsbjerg 2017).

Though this essay is going to focus on the IASB, the importance of Garveyism when thinking about militant Pan-Africanist print culture and black transnational public spheres in the interwar period cannot be overstated, even when restricted to Britain. Even after the UNIA was a mere shadow of its former self, and its paper, the *Negro World*, had folded in 1933, Garvey, who would himself move to London in 1935, founded *The Black Man*, a journal which lasted up until a year before Garvey’s death in 1940. As Padmore commented in 1946 to another towering figure of Pan-Africanism, W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘I have always in my mind the fate of Garvey’s organisation, and the situation it left when it failed’ (James 2015: 118).

The IASB stood in the best traditions of the militant Pan-Africanism established by Garvey (and which Garvey himself had begun to retreat from by the late 1930s) with its campaigning for self-determination and African emancipation. This militant approach also marked its publications out from some of the pioneering but ‘respectable’ early journals of ‘black Britain’ such as the *African Times and Orient Review* (founded in 1912), the *African*

Telegraph (founded in 1918 and linked to the short-lived Society of Peoples of African Origin), as well as later longer and more contemporary publications in Britain such as the *Wasu*, journal of the West African Students' Union (from 1925 onwards), and *The Keys*, journal of the League for Coloured Peoples, founded by the Jamaican Harold Moody in 1931. In the first issue of its monthly newsletter, *Africa and the World*, in June 1937, the IASB clearly declared its aims and objectives.

The International African Service Bureau is an organisation representing the progressive and enlightened public opinion among Africans and peoples of African descent. It supports the demands of Africans and other colonial peoples for democratic rights, civil liberties and self-determination (*Africa and the World* 1937).

Inspired by the growth of Indian nationalism and the work of the India League around Krishna Menon in London, the IASB's uncompromising anti-colonialism meant, as James wrote in 1963, in Britain 'between the wars it was the only African organisation of its kind in existence', though paradoxically 'of the seven members of the committee, five were West Indians, and they ran the organisation' (James 2001: 310).

It is worth perhaps outlining briefly who these seven leading IASB members were. The central figure, as already mentioned, was Padmore, who as IASB chair, provided experience, clear ideological and agitational leadership and a tremendous range of contacts from his time as a leading black figure in the Communist International in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when he was once head of the Profintern's International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUC-NW) and editor of the *Negro Worker* (for more on the ITUC-NW, see Adi, 2013; Weiss, 2013). As Leslie James has noted, Padmore was a 'truly transnational figure'

who had been a key political organiser active in the United States, Europe and parts of Africa and was part of ‘an anti-colonial ideological laboratory that has become of increasing interest to scholars in the last decade’ (James 2015: 1, 3; see also Schwarz 2003).

Yet the actual official ‘organising secretary’ of the IASB itself was another former Communist activist, the Barbadian seafarer and socialist Chris Braithwaite (1885-1944). Braithwaite used the pseudonym ‘Chris Jones’ and as a trade-unionist had helped found and lead the Colonial Seamen’s Association from 1935 (Høgsbjerg 2014a). Also helping cement the IASB together was its Vice-President, the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Amy Ashwood Garvey (1897-1969), former wife of Marcus Garvey and a founding UNIA member (Martin, 2007). Together with the Trinidadian Marxist, historian, journalist and writer C.L.R. James (1901-1989), Amy Ashwood Garvey had set up the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) in Britain in 1935 to rally solidarity with the people of Ethiopia amidst Mussolini’s war – a key moment in catalysing the development of militant Pan-Africanism in Britain. ‘No race has been so noble in forgiving, but now the hour has struck for our complete emancipation. We will not tolerate the invasion of Abyssinia’, Amy Ashwood Garvey declared in August 1935 at an IAFA rally (*Daily Herald* 1935). James took on the role of editing the IASB publications *Africa and the World* and then later *International African Opinion* (Høgsbjerg 2014b). The IASB’s executive secretary and chief fundraiser was George Thomas Nathaniel Griffith, who adopted the name T. Ras Makonnen (1900-1983) during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, a publisher and later restaurateur from British Guiana (Guyana) (Makonnen 1973; Hughes 2020; McLeod 2002).

While these five black West Indians then, according to James, ‘ran the organisation’, they would not have had half the impact they did do had they not attracted to them leading African activists then based in Britain. After all, as James recalled, ‘of them, only Padmore had ever

visited Africa', but they crucially won the support of one of 'the most remarkable Africans of this or any other time', the Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta (1894-1978), 'a simmering volcano of African nationalism' (James 2001: 310-11). Kenyatta had already worked closely with James and Amy Ashwood Garvey in the IAFA and would now become a IASB founder member (Maloba 2018). A catalyst for the actual launching of the IASB came with the arrival in Britain in spring 1937 of Isaac Theophilus Akuna Wallace-Johnson (1894-1965), secretary of the West African Youth League (WAYL) and a leading trade-unionist originally from Sierra Leone, who became General Secretary of the IASB. Wallace-Johnson had been the editor of a paper called *West African Sentinel* and now in Britain, in October 1937, launched *African Sentinel* for the IASB, 'A Journal devoted to the interest of Africans and peoples of African descent, all over the world'. The initial idea seems to have been that it would accompany the newsletter *Africa and the World* which James had helped edit, but *African Sentinel* soon replaced the earlier bulletin (before itself folding with Wallace-Johnson's return to Sierra Leone in April 1938) (Spitzer and Denzer 1973).

James's statement about the West Indian leadership of the IASB however needs qualification, for a whole host of African activists gravitated towards this organisation in London (Matera 2015: 82). Many played critical contributions, such as the veteran West African Robert Broadhurst, who had been involved in previous Pan-African Congresses organised in London and who became IASB treasurer (Sherwood 2004: 734-735). Nonetheless, we can accept James's statement about the IASB being a 'West Indian creation' in the sense that without Padmore's experience and dynamism, it is simply unthinkable that such an organisation would have ever emerged and made the international impact it did. The very first editorial of *International African Opinion* in July 1938 explicitly acknowledged however that 'we know our limitations'.

We know that we cannot liberate the millions of Africans and peoples of African descent from their servitude and oppression. That task no one can do but the black people themselves. But we can help to stimulate the growing consciousness of the blacks, to give them the benefit of our daily contact with the European movement, to learn from the black masses the lessons of the profound experiences that they accumulate in their daily toil, to point out certain pitfalls that may be avoided, to co-ordinate information and organization, to do an incessant propaganda in every quarter of Britain, exposing evils, pressing for such remedies as are possible, and mobilizing whatever assistance there is to be found in Europe for the cause of African emancipation (*International African Opinion* 1938a).

James remembers therefore their ‘main weapon was propaganda’, and through publishing journals, pamphlets and books, holding public meetings, composing resolutions and statements, pressurising MPs and firing off letters to the British press, they ‘prevented anyone being able to say that people were “satisfied” with the colonial situation or “apathetic”’. By 1938, the IASB, thanks to the fundraising talents of Makonnen, had also managed to raise the necessary money to rent a new base at 12a Westbourne Grove, ‘the upper floor of a large building where we held meetings and had rooms for strangers visiting London’ (James 1992: 292-293). The IASB also organised large regular agitational public rallies in Trafalgar Square in solidarity with the Caribbean labour rebellions and other Pan-African liberation struggles (Hooker 1967: 53; see also Høgsbjerg 2011; Geiss 1974; Derrick 2008; Pennybacker 2009, and Adi 2018).

The work of the IASB laid the basis for the historic Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in October 1945, which marked the moment when Pan-Africanism became an idea whose time had come. The Second World War had led to an almost universal feeling

among Africans and people of African descent that colonial liberation was the order of the day, and this struggle would be achieved by force if necessary. The conference reflected the new militant leadership in Africa who would make the fine words of the Congress a reality, though delegates from French-speaking territories were absent. While the delegates included future leaders of African nations like Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya) and Dr. Hastings Banda (Malawi), as the Pan-African Congress Chair, W.E.B. Du Bois, remembered, ‘George Padmore was the organising spirit of that congress’ (Adi and Sherwood 1995; Høgsbjerg 2015). Thanks to his mentoring of a younger generation of anti-colonial activists from Africa, above all Nkrumah, Padmore assumes critical importance in the historic drama of the decline and fall of the British Empire (Sherwood 2019).

The IASB against the odds forged an anti-imperialist print culture of periodicals such as *International African Opinion* as well as an impressive range of books (and pamphlets such as *Hands off the Protectorates* and *The West Indies Today*) in order to help build the Pan-Africanist movement in the heart of the British Empire during the inter-war period. Scholars such as Brent Hayes Edwards (2003), Carol Polsgrove (2009), Minkah Makalani (2011), Marc Matera (2015) and Priyamvada Gopal (2019) have rightly contextualised the publishing and self-publishing efforts of this tiny group of militant Pan-Africanists in late imperial Britain within a wider transnational public sphere and a discourse of ‘black internationalism’ amid the wider process of decolonisation in Africa. This essay will in particular critically engage with Carol Polsgrove’s evocative argument these black radicals were first and foremost a community of ‘writers in a common cause’. It will try and demonstrate how these militant Pan-Africanists were first and foremost political activists, often part of wider political movements and in dialogue with a wide range of activists and intellectuals on the British radical Left, and suggest that these connections can usefully help

illuminate some of the influences shaping their impressive record of publishing and self-publishing.

Pan-Africanist publishing

The points of view which we seek to present in a hostile white world have to be put forward at psychological moments, so when one can get a publisher receptive to the idea of presenting our manuscripts, one has to put all other matters aside and seize the opportunity (Polsgrove 2009: 80).

So wrote Padmore, a veritable grandmaster when it came to sensing and exploiting moments of psychological weakness in the ‘official mind’ of those wielding imperial power, to Du Bois in 1946. Leslie James has researched Padmore’s prolific journalism for a number of African American, Caribbean, African and British papers, which give us an important sense of his politics. This for example is the fiery young Communist Padmore writing for the *Negro Champion*, paper of the American Negro Labour Congress, in 1928:

The time has come for Negro youth, students and workers ... to take a more definite and active interest in world problems ... we have seen our brothers massacred on foreign battlefields in defence of the very imperialist social order that today crushes them to earth ... let us join with the masses of the rising colonial peoples and militant class conscious workers to struggle for the establishment of a free and equitable world order ... The New Negro has to realise that the salvation and emancipation of any oppressed group can only be achieved by those who in the face of great odds have the

courage to raise the standard of revolt. For he who dares to be free, must himself strike a blow for freedom (James 2015: 74).

Throughout the Second World War, amid difficulties of state censorship in Britain, Leslie James notes how Padmore ‘subtly linked, for his colonial readers, British profit and colonial development’ in a 1945 article about the world’s largest diamond which had been discovered in Sierra Leone by African miners being paid 2 shillings per day while the Sierra Leone Selection Trust were estimated to profit £75,000 after the stone had been cut. As Padmore commented,

Ask any British colonial expert – which I have often done – why Africa is backward, he invariably replies that Africa is poor. Pursue your inquiry further and ask why Africa is poor, the “brilliant” answer is because Africa is backward. But behind all this official sophistry the truth is Africa is one of the richest continents in the world. The natives are poor and backward because the various imperial powers who own and control this vast continent have been exploiting it not in the interest of the Africans, but for the great mining companies and monopolistic trusts, cartels and syndicates (James 2015: 87).

As well as his early booklet *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931), from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, Padmore wrote or co-wrote an impressive number of full length works over a twenty year period, including *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936), *Africa and World Peace* (1937), *The White Man's Duty* (with Nancy Cunard, 1942), *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* (with Dorothy Pizer, 1946), *Africa: Britain's Third Empire* (1949), *The Gold Coast Revolution* (1953) and *Pan-Africanism or Communism? The*

Coming Struggle for Africa (1956). That Padmore had the drive to produce the number of full-length and often highly original works as he did on top of his other commitments indeed remains remarkable, and Polsgrove is undoubtedly right to stress how for these activists ‘writing was itself a political act’, and indeed ‘politics served their writing as well as the other way round’ (Polsgrove 2009: 168).

No less remarkable was the fact that, for the most part, such devastatingly powerful critiques of colonial power, which were more often than not subject to draconian state censorship outside Britain in colonial Africa and the Caribbean, managed to find publishers in the ‘dark heart’ of the British Empire itself. Indeed, the British state inevitably kept tabs on what the likes of James and Padmore were writing. Special Branch surveillance on 19 September 1938 noted that in August 1938 James ‘was collaborating with Dr. R. L. Worrall [an Australian-born Trotskyist active in James’s Marxist Group during the 1930s] in writing a book entitled “African and West Indian History”’ (Security Service Record 1938). Polsgrove makes clear just how dependent the often inherently frustrating process of trying to get published was on the contingencies of the personal and political relationships between the Pan-Africanists and the individual British publishers. The latter obviously had to keep one eye on the likely market for such works in Britain itself, but it is noteworthy that the Pan-Africanists themselves were insistent that such a market did exist, as seems clear from one book review in 1936 by James of a work by the Ugandan Prince of the Toro Kingdom, Akiki Hosea Nyabongo (1907-1975), who was completing a thesis on Ugandan religious customs at Queen’s College, Oxford.

Africa Answers Back, by Prince Nyabongo (Routledge, 7s. 6d.), himself an African educated at Yale and Oxford, describes the native life of an East African tribe. The book, authoritative and written with disarming simplicity, is a powerful satire on the imperialist claim that it ‘civilises’ Africa. It was an enormous success in America, and will be here also (James 1936).

James’s confidence perhaps resulted from the fact that the years 1936-1938 were something of a golden age for those Pan-Africanist radicals aiming to get published in Britain. The Communist International’s side-lining of anti-colonialism during the turn to the ‘Popular Front’ (together with other specific betrayals such as the Soviet Union’s selling of oil to Fascist Italy at the time of Mussolini’s war in Ethiopia) meant that IASB members (which included many former Communists such as Padmore, Kenyatta and Braithwaite) tended to work closely with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) instead, helping in the process as Priyamvada Gopal has shown in *Insurgent Empire*, to turn the ILP into a clearly anti-imperialist and anti-racist organisation (Gopal 2019; see also Gasteuil, 2021). Yet despite the fact that their criticisms of the ‘Popular Front’ meant that the Left Book Club in this period was never going to publish the likes of Padmore and James, through the ILP they had successfully managed to locate one sympathetic radical publisher, Fredric Warburg, of the new firm Secker & Warburg. Accordingly, as Polsgrove notes, in just three years leading IASB members ‘had written and published six books – Padmore’s *How Britain Rules Africa* and *Africa and World Peace*, James’s *World Revolution*, *The Black Jacobins*, and *A History of Negro Revolt*, and Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* – and James had translated a seventh, Boris Souvarine’s *Stalin*’ (Polsgrove 2009: 42).

However, as the war clouds gathered ever closer in late 1938, even Warburg, despite having just proudly published *The Black Jacobins*, seems to have drawn back from the Pan-

Africanists, perhaps sensing a rising popular sentiment of British nationalism. Accordingly, when James's former student and compatriot Eric Williams – a fellow traveller of the IASB - presented Warburg with the manuscript of his 1938 Oxford University doctoral thesis on 'The Economic Aspect of the Abolition of the West Indian Slave Trade and Slavery', he was given short shrift. 'Mr. Williams, are you trying to tell me that the slave trade and slavery were abolished for economic and not humanitarian reasons? I would never publish such a book, for it would be contrary to the British tradition' (Williams 1969: 52-53).³ When Padmore himself offered a manuscript entitled 'The Black Man's Burden in Africa' – the title a nod to E.D. Morel's *The Black Man's Burden* (1920) - to the publishers George Allen and Unwin in 1939, one reader's comments were equally dismissive. 'Whether it is wise or even practicable to publish what is in effect anti-British propaganda at the present time seems to me more than doubtful; Mr. Padmore should have spoken earlier – or hereafter; there would have been a time for such a word. But now?' (Polsgrove 2009: 47).

Polsgrove's account of the trials and tribulations faced by Pan-Africanists hoping to get published is therefore itself inherently illuminating about how the likes of Padmore came to realise the importance of taking advantage of those rare 'psychological moments' of opportunity to raise the case for black self-determination and self-government created by the contours of world history and concurrent shifts in imperial British identity. Yet as Priyamvada Gopal notes in *Insurgent Empire*, 'authorship ensured a hard-won authority; James himself noted that speakers from the bureau often spoke at public meetings where there were more whites than blacks, and "the fact that we had published books gave us a sort of status"' (Gopal 2019: 333).

A 'Writers Community'?

Polsgrove's concern to portray the Pan-Africanists around Padmore as primarily concerned with 'asserting themselves as writers', albeit 'political writers', is however perhaps problematic. As she suggests at one point, 'let us at least consider the possibility that they spent so much time and energy on writing not only in the hope that it would have its effect but also because they wanted, simply, to write and be published' (Polsgrove 2009: 168-169). Polgrove's suggestion invites potentially useful parallels between the IASB and such contemporaneous anti-colonialist 'writers' communities' such as the Francophone founders of Negritude in Paris, or perhaps the All-India Progressive Writers' Movement in South Asia (for more on these groups, see Wilder 2005; Høgsbjerg 2020; Ahmed 2009). It would certainly be a rich comparative project to explore such parallels further, yet there were perhaps some differences too. In 1938, James concluded *The Black Jacobins* with a rather dismissive, polemical comment about the likes of Aimé Césaire and other 'dabblers in *surréalisme*', these 'isolated blacks' at the Sorbonne, who he felt would not be leading any coming revolution against French imperialism (James 2001: 304; see also Rosemont and Kelley 2009). Almost two decades later, amidst the fever and fret of the Algerian Revolution, Polsgrove records George Padmore's private frustrations at the new grouping in Paris around the journal *Présence Africaine*. 'While the Arabs fight these boys spend their time in café talking culture' (Polsgrove 2009: 150). In 1974, James himself suggested that the IASB's 'imposing list of publications which brought the case for freedom for the colonized peoples was the less important part of our work', with its most important instead being 'to present a resolution, to make a statement, and to oppose our enemies' (James 1974: 161).

This is not to say the group of Pan-Africanists in Britain around James and Padmore could be accused of dismissing the importance of culture. *International African Opinion* discussed cultural matters, with columns on 'the Literary Scene' and 'Negro Life and Letters' and carried a poem from Langston Hughes on the Scottsboro Boys (Hughes 1938). However

an understanding of them as a ‘writers’ community’ potentially risks missing the importance for black colonial subjects of developing their own alternative ‘counter-culture’ of resistance in the imperial metropolis, one that went far wider than publishing and self-publishing. For example, James wrote an anti-imperialist play on the Haitian Revolution, *Toussaint Louverture: The story of the only successful slave revolt in history*, which starred Paul Robeson in the title role when it was performed at the Westminster Theatre in London in March 1936. Amy Ashwood Garvey was also a playwright (and indeed also a theatre producer) who had taken her shows across America and the Caribbean in the 1920s. Since moving to London, she and her partner, the Trinidadian musician and actor Sam Manning, together with the Guyanese clarinettist Rudolph Dunbar, opened the Florence Mills Social Parlour in London’s Carnaby Street, named in tribute to the black American artiste, and offering food and live music. Delia Jarrett-Macauley has given a vivid sense of the importance of this centre in 1930s London, noting ‘a steady stream of black artists was trickling into Britain’. ‘They brought jazz, they brought blues ... in the evenings artists, activists, students drank and supped and kept their spirits high at Amy Ashwood Garvey’s West End restaurant.’ James himself recalled that Amy Ashwood, the first wife of Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, was ‘a wonderful cook’ and ‘if you were lucky, the 78s of Trinidadian calypsonian Sam Manning, Amy’s partner, spun late into the night’ (Jarrett-Macauley 1998: 84; Derrick 2008: 407).

Yet while there were of course those close to Padmore at various moments like South African novelist Peter Abrahams and (at further remove) the black American Richard Wright who were certainly writers first and foremost, it seems doubtful many others in Padmore’s ‘community’ would have recognised or identified themselves as such. While Padmore himself was certainly raised in a West Indian intellectual tradition which venerated literature, as an agitator, organiser and theoretician, the idea that through his prolific writing and

journalism he was trying to satisfy an innate desire to be ‘published’ or make any sort of literary career for himself in the manner of Abrahams would surely have baffled him. Polsgrove quotes Padmore stressing his writing had ‘no literary disguise’, while in a private letter to Wright in 1954, Padmore rather sourly noted of Peter Abrahams and the great Barbadian novelist and poet George Lamming that ‘I avoid these pretentious upstarts like the plague’ (Polsgrove 2009: 133, 139).

For Padmore as a journalist, as for Wallace-Johnson and James, a clearer inspiration was surely the longer history of revolutionary politics, and Vladimir Lenin’s stress on the need for a revolutionary paper in *What is to be done?* After editing the *Negro Worker*, Padmore contributed regularly to the ILP’s *New Leader*, acting as a kind of colonial correspondent for this socialist weekly even once *International African Opinion* folded with James’s move to the US in 1938. As Selma James – who knew Padmore in the 1950s – once put it, he always ‘thought organisationally’ (James 2015: 11).

As for James, he was indeed, as Polsgrove notes, ‘a man who loved literature and wrote an early novel’, *Minty Alley*, though it was surely not the case that he ‘found his earliest success in the political history *Black Jacobins*’ (Polsgrove 2009: 168). Rather, James had found his earliest success while in colonial Trinidad as a writer of short stories, and surely could have carved out a conventional literary career for himself in Britain had he wanted to. Indeed, before his ‘voyage in’ to imperial Britain in 1932, James had already been a member of an implicitly anti-colonialist ‘writers’ community’, the Beacon Group, which had revolted against the wretched bourgeois ‘philistinism’ and hypocrisy they saw all around them. However, on leaving Trinidad and witnessing first-hand the alarming rise of fascism in Europe amidst the mass unemployment caused by the Great Depression, James like many modern young intellectuals underwent a profound political radicalisation. James famously recalled how ‘fiction-writing drained out of me and was replaced by politics’, and his new

found commitment to revolutionary socialism and militant Pan-Africanism saw him for example wanting to go and fight first against Mussolini in Ethiopia and then Franco in the Spanish Civil War (James 1969: 149; Høgsbjerg 2014b).

James later recounted how during the late 1930s, ‘my publisher’s wife’, Pamela De Bayou, ‘a wonderful woman...begged me almost with tears to settle down and write’. ‘I said NO ... a fine sight I would have been with two or three books or a play or two to my credit and hanging around the political world, as all these other writers do, treating as amateurs, what is the most serious business in the world today’ (Grimshaw 1990: 104-105). How serious James took politics can be seen from when he took on more responsibility for IASB affairs when in April 1938, Wallace-Johnson returned to Sierra Leone. Alongside his editing of *Fight*, the Trotskyist paper of the Marxist Group of which he was a leading member, James now took on editing what had been the *African Sentinel* but was now re-launched as *International African Opinion*, with the motto ‘Educate, Co-operate, Emancipate: Neutral in nothing affecting the African Peoples’ (Fryer 1984: 346; see also Edwards 2003: 299-305; Quest 2009, and Gopal 2019). James’s envisioned it not as a ‘literary journal or giver of advice from the mountain-tops’ but ‘a journal of action’, which aimed to be ‘a living weapon in the struggle’ and his editorials gave it and the IASB a much more militant ‘class-struggle’ outlook.

We base ourselves upon the great masses of the people. The individual achievements of a few black men do not and cannot solve the problems of the blacks. One of our most important tasks is to make clear to the black intellectuals and other members of the middle class, that in the present state of world affairs there is no way out for them by seeking crumbs from the

tables of their imperialist masters. They must identify themselves with the struggle of the masses ... (*International African Opinion* 1938a).

As Brent Hayes Edwards notes, James's editorials recalled 'earlier work such as Kouyaté's "Vox Africae" and Padmore's editorial stance in the *Negro Worker* in its effort at a theoretical articulation of the complex relations between radical intellectual work in the metropole and black mass resistance in the colonies themselves' (Edwards 2003: 300).

The British authorities certainly regarded IASB publications such as *International African Opinion* as 'inflammatory' and suppressed them from open sale across the Empire. The first issue of *African Sentinel* reported for example that *Africa and the World* had been banned in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast under the 'sedition laws' (*African Sentinel* 1937). James remembers they 'tried all ways' to get IASB material into the colonial world and 'we had one or two people who worked on the waterfront. They gave the pamphlets to seamen and people in boats' (Bush 1999: 223; Socialist Platform 1987: 6). While Makonnen would later remember that in the early stages, 'like many papers' of its kind, 'we would sometimes concoct letters purporting to come from the Congo and many other places', the experience and contacts of Padmore and Braithwaite, and the network around Wallace-Johnson, meant *International African Opinion* soon began to circulate among Africans (Makonnen 1973: 120). In the Anglophone Caribbean, as Kesewa John has shown, progressive newspapers like *The People* in Trinidad, founded in 1933, and the *Barbados Observer*, carried syndicated IASB material and press releases in their publications (John 2019: 83-84).

James's last editorial for the journal before he left for America in October 1938, which noted 'War Springs From Capitalist Rivalry' and 'Only African Freedom Ensures Lasting Peace', gives a flavour of the kind of revolutionary politics this Marxist historian of the Haitian Revolution and Communist International was trying to inject into the IASB.

If we must fight, then Africans and peoples of African descent will fight for themselves, confident that in taking this course we, like the Blacks of San Domingo, will be playing an historical role in liberating not only ourselves but other sections of oppressed humanity ... Peace and Empire are irreconcilable. Imperialism must be destroyed (*International African Opinion* 1938b).

As the anti-war pamphlet the IASB put out in September 1938 stressed, 'Europe's Difficulty is Africa's Opportunity' (Hooker 1967: 53).

Indeed, to see the Pan-Africanists in Britain as above all a 'writers' community' risks implicitly side-lining those activists who were not such prolific writers, such as T. Ras Makonnen and Amy Ashwood Garvey, and especially those more rank and file activists more involved in the trade union movement, such as Chris Braithwaite, or his compatriot, Arnold Ward, founder of the Negro Welfare Association and a IASB activist. Braithwaite did contribute a regular column to *International African Opinion* ('Seaman's Notes'), but was above all an organiser, and the key link with the radical networks of black colonial seafarers who would distribute IASB material into colonial Africa and the Caribbean. As for Amy Ashwood Garvey, it seems she played a critical role behind the scenes in among other things shaping the design and content of *International African Opinion*, given its striking cover of a black woman, very different from the more masculine imagery of say *The Negro Worker* (Adi and Ramamurthy 2006).

FIGURE [can be $\frac{3}{4}$ size of page]

Caption: *International African Opinion*, 1:1 (July 1938), The National Archives, Kew, CO 323/1610/2.

Indeed, we should also acknowledge that role played by often white English women socialists around the IASB in the process of writing and publishing. One of the strengths of Polsgrove's work are the miniature portraits she gives us of a host of neglected figures such as Dorothy Pizer (1906-1964), Dinah Stock (1902-1988) and Louise Cripps (1904-2001) in supporting the writing of Padmore, Kenyatta and James respectively (Polsgrove, 2009: 25, 29, 39). Indeed, Pizer, Padmore's partner, also helped type James's *World Revolution* and reviewed *The Black Jacobins* (Pizer 1939). Nancy Cunard, editor of the remarkable *Negro Anthology* (1934) was a patron of the IASB and also contributed to *African Sentinel* (Cunard 1937).

Critically, Padmore, James and Braithwaite took the anti-colonial fight not simply to the British parliamentary liberal and Labour Left, but into the British working class movement. The work of the IASB strengthened the resolve of the small but significant anti-imperialist British left around the ILP – for example, shaping the thinking of George Orwell, Fenner Brockway and Ethel Mannin - and helped build a small but significant anti-racist current in the British labour movement, educating hundreds and thousands of British socialists and trade unionists about the realities of racism and British imperialism. As C.A. Smith, editor of *Controversy*, a socialist journal with strong links to the ILP, put it succinctly in June 1938, the British Empire was a 'colossal heap of swag collected by murder' (Smith 1938). Edward Said once compared *The Black Jacobins* to another anti-imperialist classic published in London the same year, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (Hamish Hamilton, 1938) by the Lebanese-born George Antonius (Said 1993: 299). The following year the British writer J.M.N. Jeffries penned another pioneering anti-

imperialist work on the Middle East, *Palestine: The Reality* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1939). There was then, in the words of one writer at the time, Anthony Ludovici, who explicitly credits the work of Padmore, ‘the nucleus of a library on Empire’ slowly emerging in Britain itself during the 1930s (Reynolds 1956: 203).

Indeed, understanding how the Pan-Africanists were not only a ‘political community’ but part of a wider ‘political community’ in dialogue with a wide range of anti-colonial activists and intellectuals, often on the British and international radical Left, is important to illuminate some of the other influences shaping their impressive record of publishing and self-publishing. For example, the title of the British anarchist publication *Spain and the World* perhaps inspired the title of *Africa and the World*. Both journals used the same Jewish anarchist printing press, Narod, in Bedford Street, Whitechapel in the East End of London, and James personally knew Vernon Richards, the editor of *Spain and the World* (Høgsbjerg 2017: 148). The title at least of Padmore’s mammoth 400 page *How Britain Rules Africa* perhaps owes something to a 1929 pamphlet written by the British Communist Robin Page Arnot, *How Britain Rules India*. More speculatively, one wonders if *The White Sahibs in India* by the ILP writer and British anti-imperialist Reginald Reynolds (published by Secker & Warburg in 1937) may have influenced James as he settled on the title of *The Black Jacobins* (Secker and Warburg, 1938).

This is not to say there were not political tensions as well here. The story of the publication history of Padmore’s *How Britain Rules Africa* in 1936 for example raises an issue related to the rise of Stalinism and how it shaped the newly formed Communist Party publisher Lawrence and Wishart. After breaking from the Communist International, Padmore had been accused by Communists of being ‘a disruptive element and an agent of British Imperialism’ and so, as he later related to Reginald Reynolds, ‘in order to answer this

slander, my colleagues suggested I should write an indictment of British imperialism in Africa'. The then independent left-wing publisher Wishart, who thanks to Edgell Rickword had published Cunard's *Negro Anthology*, 'had undertaken to publish this book before the amalgamation with Martin Lawrence. He [Wishart] had already issued his publisher's announcement, which, as one would expect, was highly favourable to the book', noting it was 'very thoroughly documented' and 'should take its place as the standard work on African conditions'. Once the book appeared however, an anonymous reviewer in Lawrence and Wishart's publication, *The Eye*, described *How Britain Rules Africa*, despite it being a Wishart publication, as a 'harmful and reactionary book' and 'an apology for British Imperialism' (Reynolds 1937; see also Challinor 2011: 42).

Despite such difficulties, Padmore would nonetheless later recall that 'the years immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War' were 'one of the most stimulating and constructive in the history of Pan-Africanism' (Padmore 1956: 151). This essay has aimed to contextualise militant Pan-Africanist print culture within a wider anti-imperialist print culture in Britain in this period, and examined some of the material aspects of the production and circulation of *International African Opinion*, suggesting that the tiny network of militant Pan-Africanists did not see themselves first and foremost as 'writers', but as political activists in dialogue and to a degree interdependent with the wider British and international radical Left, a matter that deserves more critical attention from historians.

References

Adi, H, and Ramamurthy, A. (2006), 'Fragments in the history of the visual culture of anti-colonial struggle' in S. Faulkner and A. Ramamurthy (eds) *Visual Culture and Decolonisation in Britain*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Adi, H. (2018), *Pan-Africanism: A History*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Adi, H. (2013), *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora 1919-1939*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Adi, H, and Sherwood, M., eds. (1995), *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*. London: New Beacon Books.

Africa and the World. (1937), 1:1, June.

African Sentinel. (1937), 1:1, October-November.

Ahmed, T. (2009), *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Episode in South Asia, 1932-56*, London: Routledge.

Bush, B. (1999), *Imperialism, Race and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919–1945*, New York: Routledge.

Challinor, R. (2011), *The Struggle for Hearts and Minds: Essays on the Second World War*, London: Unkant.

Cunard, N. (1937), 'Only a Black', *African Sentinel*, 1:2 (November-December).

Daily Herald. (1935), 26 August.

Derrick, J. (2008), *Africa's 'Agitators': Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939*, London: Hurst.

Edwards, B. H. (2003), *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Ewing, A. (2014) *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fryer, P. (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London: Pluto.

Gasteuil, Q. (2021), 'A Comparative and Transnational Approach to Socialist Anti-Colonialism: The Fenner Brockway-Marceau Pivert Connection, 1930s-1950s' in Y. Bélliard and N. Kirk (eds) *Workers of the Empire, Unite: Radical and Popular Challenges to British Imperialism, 1910s-1960s*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Geiss, I. (1974), *The Pan-African Movement*, London: Methuen.

- Gopal, P. (2019), *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, London: Verso.
- Grimshaw, A., ed. (1990), *Special Delivery: The letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2017), ‘A “Bohemian Freelancer”? C.L.R. James, His Early Relationship to Anarchism and the Intellectual Origins of Autonomism’, in A. Prichard, R. Kinna, S. Pinta, and D. Berry (eds), *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red*, Oakland: PM Press.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2011), ‘“A Thorn in the Side of Great Britain”: C.L.R. James and the Caribbean Labour Rebellions of the 1930s’, *Small Axe*, 35.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2014a), *Chris Braithwaite: Mariner, Renegade and Castaway* (London: Redwords).
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2014b), *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2020), ‘Globalising the Haitian Revolution in Black Paris: C.L.R. James, Metropolitan Anti-imperialism in Interwar France and the Writing of *The Black Jacobins*’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 48:3.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2015), ‘Remembering the Fifth Pan-African Congress’, *Leeds African Studies Bulletin*, 77.
- Høgsbjerg, C. (2017), ‘“The most striking West Indian creation between the wars”: C.L.R. James, the International African Service Bureau and militant pan-Africanism in imperial Britain’ in S.J. Pantin and J. Teelucksingh (eds), *Ideology, Regionalism, and Society in Caribbean History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hooker, J.R. (1967), *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore’s Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism*, London: Pall Mall.
- Hughes, L. (1938), ‘August 19th: Scottsboro death date (a poem for Clarence Norris)’, *International African Opinion*, 1:2 (August).
- Hughes, L. (2020), ‘T. Ras Makonnen: Pan-Africanism in Practice’, Unpublished MRes, Sheffield Hallam University.
- International African Opinion*. (1938a), 1:1, July.
- International African Opinion*. (1938b), 1:4, October.
- James, C.L.R. (1969), *Beyond a Boundary*, London: Hutchinson.
- James, C.L.R. (1974), ‘Black Intellectuals in Britain’, in B. Parekh (ed) *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, London: George Allen & Unwin.

James, C.L.R. (1936), “‘Civilising’ the ‘Blacks’: Why Britain Needs to Maintain Her African Possessions”, *New Leader*, 29 May. Available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1936/civilising-blacks.htm> (accessed 29 June 2022).

James, C.L.R. (1992), ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore’, in A. Grimshaw (ed), *The C.L.R. James Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.

James, C.L.R. (2001), *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, London: Penguin.

James, L. (2015), *George Padmore and Decolonisation from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War and the End of Empire*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jarrett-Macauley, D. (1998), *The Life of Una Marson, 1905-1965*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

John, K. (2019), “‘You ask for bread, they give you hot lead’: When Caribbean radicals protested against conscription for colonial subjects’ in H. Adi (ed), *Black British History: New Perspectives*, London: Zed Books.

Makalani, M. (2011), *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Makonnen, R. (1973), *Pan-Africanism From Within*, London: Oxford University Press.

Maloba, W.O. (2018), *Kenyatta and Britain: An Account of Political Transformation, 1929-1963*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Matera, M. (2015), *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, Oakland: University of California Press.

McLeod, J. (2002), ‘A Night at the Cosmopolitan: Axes of Transnational Encounter in the 1930s and 1940s’, *International Journal of Post-Colonial Studies*, 4:1.

Martin, T. (2007), *Amy Ashwood Garvey*, Dover: The Majority Press.

Padmore, G. (1956), *Pan-Africanism or Communism?: The coming struggle for Africa*, London: Dennis Dobson.

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

Pizer, D. (1939), ‘A Lesson in Revolution’, *Controversy* 28, January.

Polsgrove, C. (2009), *Ending British rule in Africa: Writers in a common cause*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Quest, M. (2009), 'George Padmore's and C.L.R. James's *International African Opinion*', in F. Baptiste and R. Lewis (eds), *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, Kingston: Ian Randle.
- Reynolds, R. (1937), 'A Publisher's Acrobatics', *Controversy*, 1:10, July.
- Reynolds, R. (1956), *My Life and Crimes*, London: Jarrolds.
- Rosemont, F. and Kelley, R.D.G., eds. (2009), *Black, Brown and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Said, E. (1993), *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Schwarz, B. (2003), 'George Padmore' in B. Schwarz (ed), *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Security Service Record (1938), KV/2/1824, The National Archives [UK], 19 September.
- Sherwood, M. (2004), 'Broadhurst, Robert (1859/60-1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 7, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sherwood, M. (2019), *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War: The West African Secretariat (1945-48)*, London: Pluto.
- Smith, C.A. (1938), 'Editorial Notes', *Controversy*, 21, June.
- Socialist Platform. (1987), *C.L.R. James and British Trotskyism: An Interview*, London: Socialist Platform.
- Spitzer, L. and Denzer, L. (1973), 'I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6:3.
- Weiss, H. (2013), *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, Leiden: Brill.
- Wilder, G. (2005), *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*, London: Chicago University Press.
- Williams, D. G. (2012), *Black Skins, Blue Books: African Americans and Wales 1845-1945*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Williams, E. (1969), *Inward Hunger: The Education of a Prime Minister*, London: Deutsch.

Endnotes

¹ With many thanks to Marika Sherwood for allowing me access to her personal archive of Pan-Africanist material back in 2007 on which I have drawn here, as well as all those who have supported my work on James more generally. I am also grateful to have had the opportunity to present my research in this area at the ‘Networks of Media and Print in the Age of Imperialism’ conference, University of Warwick, 2015.

² For more on Garvey and Garveyism see Robert A. Hill’s edited volumes *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, published by University of California Press from 1983-2006 and then Duke University Press since 2011.

³ A revised version of Williams’s thesis would be published in the USA in 1944 as *Capitalism and Slavery*, but this classic work would not find a British publisher until 1964, twenty years later. In 2022, *Capitalism and Slavery* was published as a Penguin Modern Classic.