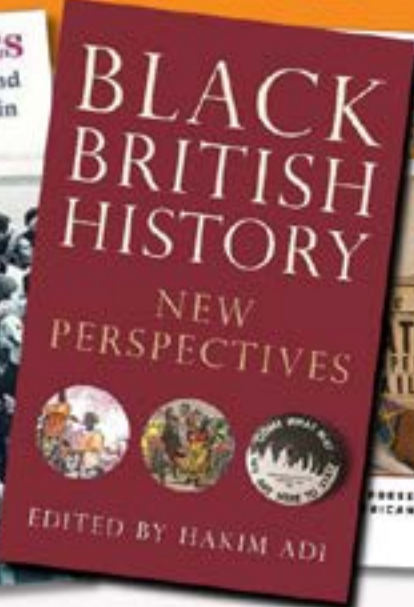


10 YEARS OF



HISTORY

MATTERS



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ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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Welcome to the History Matters Journal
Winter 2024!

We are delighted to be celebrating 10 years
as an organisation!

Message from History Matters founder Professor Hakim Adi

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the History Matters initiative which was launched in the spring of 2014 by a small group of teachers, students and historians. At that time we were concerned about the poor representation of those of African and Caribbean heritage in the field of history and particularly the low numbers of Black postgraduate history students. History Matters initially arose in response to an article in *The Guardian* of March 2014, which reported that the previous year 'only three Black people who want to be history teachers were accepted onto postgraduate teacher training courses.'¹ The *Guardian* also reported that there had only been thirty Black applicants for these courses. We were alarmed at such a situation but even more alarmed that nobody was doing anything about it. HEFCE's Widening Participation Committee even refused to do anything about it. The very basic research that we did, indicated that there were only just over 200 Black people teaching history in schools in this country but even lower numbers of postgraduate history students, and at that time no more than ten PhD students. What is more, at every level of education Black

¹ Daniel Boffey, '[Only three black applicants win places to train as history teachers](#)', 22/03/2014.

students were dropping history. Even those who obtained good grades at GCSE and A Level were very reluctant to study at degree level. Indeed, for undergraduates of African and Caribbean heritage, history was the third most unpopular subject, only agriculture and veterinary science were more unpopular.

It seemed to us that this was a national scandal but when we mentioned it to those organisations claiming an interest in history, or education more generally, they all claimed to be unaware of the problem and nobody was doing anything about it. In these circumstances we decided that we had to act. We convened our own History Matters conference in London in April 2015 with the support of the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society, the Schools History Project and the University of Chichester, which at that time took an interest in such issues. The History Matters conference was mainly addressed by students and teachers of African and Caribbean heritage and aimed to analyse the causes of existing problems and find solutions to them. Its main conclusions were that various forms of Eurocentrism and racism were alienating young people from studying history and in

numerous ways preventing the emergence of historians of African and Caribbean heritage in this country. The conference made several recommendations to overcome these impediments.

The aim since 2015 has been to put these recommendations into practice and to take other appropriate initiatives. Thus, one of the first tasks was to establish the Young Historians Project to involve the young people who had participated in the History Matters conference. In this regard we always remember the contribution of the late Cheryl Phillips, who stepped forward to help develop that important organisation. Aleema Gray, one of YHP's founder members, has since successfully completed a PhD. Today, several members and former members of YHP have studied, or are studying, history at Masters and PhD level.

History Matters established its own online journal from 2020 and has held two subsequent conferences, in 2017 and 2021, to showcase the work of young and emerging historians. Papers presented at these conferences has been published in two ground-breaking books, *Black British History: New Perspectives* (2019) and *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain* (2023).

The History Matters initiative and conference also led directly to the founding of the MRes in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester in 2018. It was one of the recommendations of the conference that such a course should be established to encourage mature students, who had been alienated from studying history, to return to university and train as historians. The attempts of the University of Chichester to terminate this important provision are too infamous to require further comment. On the tenth anniversary of the start of History Matters we can be proud of all we have achieved but always remain conscious of all that remains to be done. We call on everyone concerned to join us.



Professor Hakim Adi at the first History Matters Conference, 2015

Save the MRes Campaign Update:

Press Statement: Students launch discrimination case against the University of Chichester after African History course is axed

A group of students are taking legal action against the University of Chichester alleging discrimination and breach of contract after it terminated a groundbreaking programme in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora while they were part way through their studies.

The 14 students were all studying on the Masters by Research (MRes), History of Africa and the African Diaspora course or conducting research for a PhD. The course was unique in Europe and attracted students from all over the world, as well as many from the UK. It was led by Professor Hakim Adi, one of the UK's pre-eminent historians and the first African-British historian to become a Professor of History in the UK. Professor Adi was shortlisted for the Wolfson History prize in 2023.

Despite the course's highly respected reputation, it was suspended without warning in July 2023 with the University stating that the programme was no longer economically viable. Professor Adi was made redundant shortly afterwards. The move came as a complete shock to the students and staff, as well as fellow historians, teachers, activists, and advocates of the importance of African history. Professor Adi's redundancy is being challenged.

After going through the university's internal complaints procedure and failing to achieve a resolution, the 14 students are now bringing

legal action. Their civil claim alleges that the university discriminated against them and is in breach of contract as a result of both the action and the process.

The students are represented by the law firm Leigh Day which issued a letter before action on the students' behalf on Thursday 15 February.

In a linked case, the Black Equity Organisation is also bringing legal action and issued a Judicial Review of the university's actions, last month.

The students' case has already gained significant national media coverage and seen a motion being tabled in the House of Commons. An online petition gained over 14,000 signatures and an open letter has been signed by more than 300 academics and teaching staff from history courses in the USA and Europe.

In the letter to the University of Chichester lawyers say the rationale appears to be based on the premise that the MRes in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora does not recruit enough students to justify the continued existence of Professor Adi's post. They say no account appears to have been taken of the fact that the university has not adequately marketed the MRes. Furthermore, Professor Adi's employment preceded the development of the MRes and therefore should not be associated with one course. In addition, no account appears to have been taken of the recruitment of PhD students Professor Adi supervises, nor the fact that

many have been recruited directly from the MRes. Finally, the university has never before expressed dissatisfaction with recruitment to the MRes.

The students are represented by Leigh Day's Partner, Jacqueline McKenzie who has instructed Elaine Banton, an employment and discrimination expert, of 7BR Chambers. Ms Banton also represents Professor Adi.

Leigh Day partner Jacqueline McKenzie said:

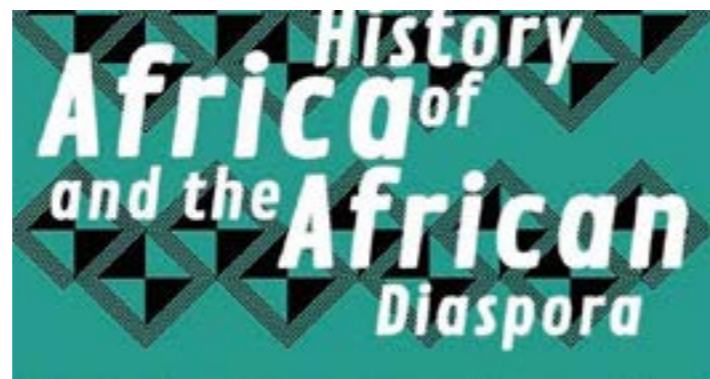
"This sudden decision by the University of Chichester to close down this unique course has stopped our clients' academic careers in their tracks. On top of that, the university has made an eminent and highly respected Black professor of African history in the UK, who was last year nominated for the Wolfson History prize, redundant at short notice. In our clients' view, the University of Chichester has clearly discriminated against them and breached its contract with them in its handling of this process. They are urging it to reverse this decision and ensure sure that they can resume their studies as soon as possible."

Kehinde Adeogun, Director of Legal Service at Black Equity Organisation said:

"The impact of the University's decision is shortsighted and reaches beyond the students on the MRes and those studying for a PhD. The reason for including the course in its postgraduate programme was as an acknowledgement of the lack of teaching, research and learning in the history of Africa and the African Diaspora. Suspending the course without consultation when the issues are still prevalent, decreases the opportunity for change, the aim of which is to see the effective inclusion of Black history into the curriculum that is taught and studied in UK schools, especially in the context of key debates around decolonising the curriculum."

Professor Hakim Adi said:

"As a result of the MRes we encouraged many



more Black students to embark on PhD research. We established one of the largest cohorts of Black postgraduate history students in the country. As a result of the measures taken by the University of Chichester, these students have been left without appropriate supervision and their studies have been completely disrupted."

Jabari Osaze - MRes Student said:

"I am greatly dismayed that the University of Chichester has decided to close the Masters of Research in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora programme. As a student in the United States, I recognize just how unique the programme was. I have spoken to large numbers of African Americans who would have been interested in enrolling in the programme. Chichester University should have focused its efforts on recruiting more students like me but instead it seems they undervalued the programme. They have treated their students and the world-renowned expert historian who ran the programme extremely poorly. They are now offering academic support to MRes students' guidance by scholars who are not trained in the history of Africa and the African Diaspora. It has been painful to be disregarded in this manner."

A student who did not want to be named - PhD student said:

"The removal of Professor Adi as supervisor has caused insurmountable disruption and deep distress to me personally, impacting on other areas of my life."

The students are [crowdfunding](#) for their legal claim.

Call for Papers: History Matters 3rd New Perspectives on African and Caribbean People in Britain Conference

History Matters invites abstracts for the 3rd New Perspectives on African and Caribbean People in Britain conference which will take place 8-9th November 2024 in person in London. Proposals of up to 350 words, including a short bio, are due by 31st March 2024. Proposals covering all fields of 'Black British' History are welcome. History Matters particularly welcomes research papers focusing on historical periods before 1900; on women and gender history; on LGBT+ histories; on

the history of African and Caribbean people in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; on the history of continental African communities and organisations in Britain; and the historical relationships established by those of African and Caribbean heritage in Britain with the African continent and the wider African diaspora.

To submit your proposal, email us at: hismatters@gmail.com



Queer Britain, and representations of Blackness in Queer History

By A.S. Francis

It has been almost two years since Queer Britain opened its doors to the public, in May 2022. Its existence marks a major milestone, as the first national LGBTQ+ museum in the entire UK. The museum itself is located in Granary Square, Kings Cross, and its gallery space is divided across three rooms. The emergence of Queer Britain as the first national LGBTQ+ museum, comes at a time when the fight for Queer people to exist safely and openly is still being waged. Since homosexuality was partially decriminalised in 1967, the road toward Queer liberation has been a complex one. In the immediate aftermath of the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act - which permitted homosexual acts between two consenting adults over the age of 21 - convictions of gay men for gross indecency actually increased, highlighting the accelerated police harassment that Queer communities experienced in contrast to mild advances in written law. Then, as the Queer liberation movement developed from the late 1960s, and was heavily shaped by revolutionary politics, Queer communities began to thrive more openly and take up space in organised forms as the increased presence of community groups, bookshops, cooperatives, nightlife venues, etc demonstrates. Then, in the midst of the HIV/AIDS crisis in 1988, a huge knockback to progress arrived in the form of Section 28, the first anti-gay legislation passed in Britain since 1885. Section 28 banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality in British schools.

Today, we are battling against a myriad of moral panics which include attempts to debate the rights of trans people, and in a similar vein to Section 28, police the educational sphere in relation to trans and Queer topics. The recently drafted government guidance on how English schools should approach trans kids is just one in a long list of examples of the government's attempts to legitimise transphobia. This moral panic has been well coordinated by the mainstream media and government over the last several years, but it is of course connected to a much larger history of such regressive campaigns. For Black Queer people, the struggle has always been a more complicated one, with the intersections of homophobia and racism in the various manifestations acting as a double-edged sword. With this in mind, a space such as Queer Britain, which serves to uplift, celebrate and preserve stories of Queer people in Britain, is needed now more than ever. Queer Britain also offers an opportunity for us to trace the history of Queer liberation projects, and their methods of resistance against transphobia and homophobia. Marc Thompson, activist and co-founder of the digital archive 'Black and Gay Back in the Day', underlined the importance of Queer Britain's existence in this current historic juncture: "We have seen the disappearance of queer space in huge numbers over the past 10 to 15 years - everything from social spaces, where we drink and where we party, to community spaces. So the museum will hopefully be a safe

and inclusive space that we can call our own".¹ Insofar as Black Queer history is concerned, Queer Britain's gallery presents important stories, both well and lesser known, which explore the specific experiences of Black Queer individuals and communities in Britain and beyond. Here I want to use this space to highlight a few relevant pieces on the walls of Queer Britain, which speak to the Black Queer experience.

The Gay Liberation Front:

The first collection of photographs visitors will come across in Queer Britain's gallery are black and white stills from the 1970s depicting the emergence of Gay Pride celebrations. One that caught my eye in particular is from the UK's first Gay Pride march in 1972.² The march began in Trafalgar Square and ended in Hyde Park. The photo features a group of young people standing around a banner representing the 'Gay Liberation Front', the foremost Queer political group in the 1970s and 1980s. Most of the people are standing to the side and behind the banner, and two women are at the front with a microphone, possibly addressing a crowd in front of them. One of the women is visibly Black, with a short afro, and none of the people in the photo are named. I was drawn to this photo for a couple of reasons. First, the majority of people in the crowd are men, yet the speakers are women, which is interesting because certainly during this period in political activism (as reflective of wider society) women were often sidelined. Second, in having priorly researched the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), its crossover with Black liberation politics, and the level of involvement of Black people in the GLF in the early 1970s, I was intrigued by the simultaneous visibility and anonymity of the Black female speaker. The UK GLF was founded in 1970, and its emergence directly linked with the ideals of a rainbow coalition as meaningful solidarity between liberation struggles, a cause which was led in many ways by the US Black

¹ Quoted in Louis Staples, '[Inside the Making of Britain's First Queer Museum](#)', 01/06/2022.

² 'Speakers at Trafalgar Square', Gay Pride 1972, LSE Library



'Speakers at Trafalgar Square', Gay Pride 1972, LSE Library

Panther Party. The organisation wrote extensively about its connections to the broader revolutionary projects in its manifesto:

*'GLF therefore sees itself as part of the wider movement aiming to abolish all forms of social oppression... In particular we see these groups as including: the women's movement... black people and other national minorities... the working class... young people who are rejecting the bourgeois family and all roles and lifestyles offered them by this society... peoples oppressed by imperialism.'*³

According to Lisa Powers, who is a trustee of Queer Britain as well as former member and biographer of the GLF, the interests of the people the group typically attracted included those involved in the anti-Vietnam war movement, Black liberation, women's liberation, Marxism, Maoism, the Communist Party, and more.⁴

³ Gay Liberation Front, 'Gay Liberation Front Manifesto', 1971.

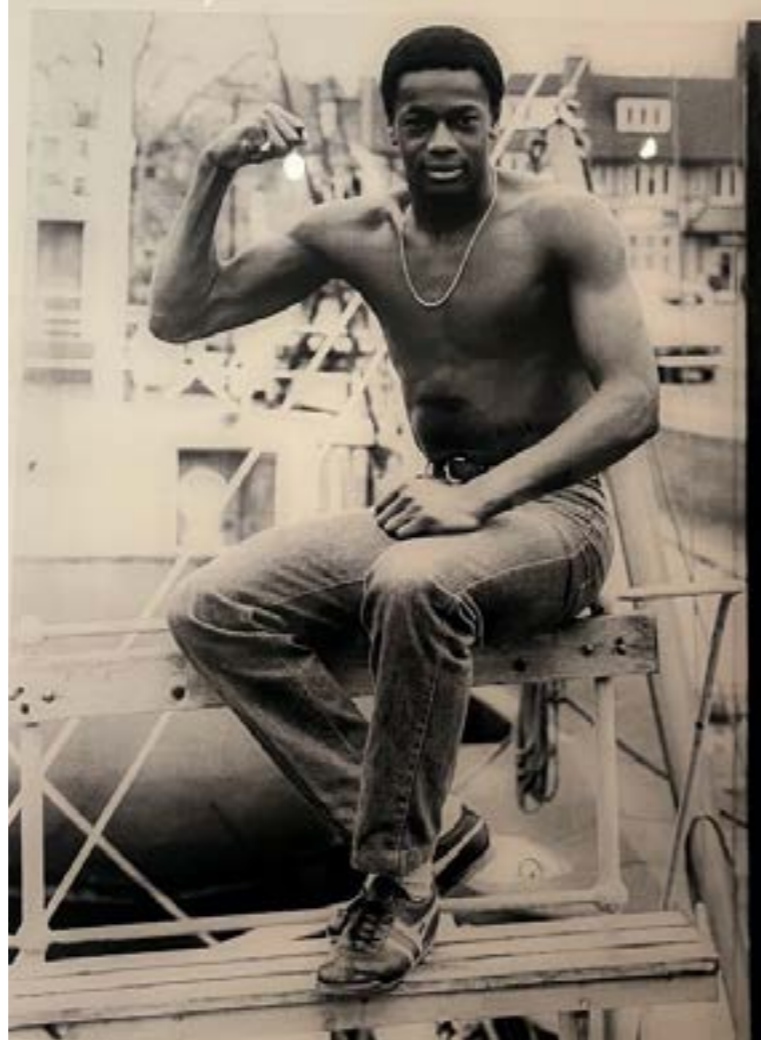
⁴ Lisa Power, *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles: An Oral History of the Gay Liberation Front, 1970-1973*,

Despite its connections with Black Power politics, attendees and members of the group were largely white, as Lisa Power once confirmed to me: 'there were very few Black faces in the GLF, but some allyship in Notting Hill and Brixton across movements.'⁵ This is why it is even more significant that the photograph depicts a Black woman front and centre, seemingly representing the GLF in a speaking capacity. But in the same instance as providing visibility and evidence of Black presence in the UK's first Gay Pride, as well as GLF's activities, this item also highlights the challenges in recovering stories of particular individuals. We cannot get a sense of the woman's own personal story from the photograph, nor the others accompanying her, instead the photograph represents the subjects as a staunch collective, united around a particular organisation and its goal for revolutionary transformation. Her presence, however, is testament to the fact that Black queer people have always played key roles in Queer liberation projects. And the GLF's organisational history speaks to the huge influence that Black liberation movements had and continue to have on the revolutionary political landscape.

Justin Fashanu:

In contrast to the GLF stills, located just opposite them is a striking image depicting a better known, individual story - that of football star Justin Fashanu. The first Black football player - and one of the first footballers generally - to receive a £1 million club transfer fee, Fashanu was also the first football player to come out publicly as gay. Fashanu was born in London in 1961, to a Nigerian barrister father, and a Guyanese mother who worked as a nurse. Upon the separation of his parents, Justin and his younger brother John, who also became a professional football player, were sent to Bernado's children's home and later fostered by an elderly white couple in Norfolk. Fashanu often spoke about his pleasant upbringing in comparison to other Black youth at the time. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), pp. 7-8.

⁵ Lisa Power, email correspondence with the author, 05/06/2022.



Justin Fashanu, Queer Britain Museum

particularly those living in larger towns and cities where racial harassment by police and fascist movements were rife. After having signed his £1 million transfer deal to Nottingham Forest in 1981, Justin stated: 'the thing that spurs me on is the fact that I'm playing for Black people, who maybe have not had as good a life as I've had. Who've been living in ghettos, and who've had prejudices poured out against them all this time.'⁶ Identifiably he saw his presence in British football as an affirming force in the context of structural racism, and something of wider benefit than to just himself, his club or sports.⁷

However, it was his ascent to the limelight, and pressures of the sporting world, that posed great difficulties for Fashanu. The homophobic and racist abuse that he received from his manager at Nottingham Forest Brian Clough, as well as

⁶ Justin Fashanu, quoted in ['One in £1 million: the story of Justin Fashanu'](#).
⁷ For a more in depth analysis of this, see: Samantha N. Sheppard and Travis Vogan ed., *Sporting Realities: Critical readings of the Sports Documentary*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

from tabloids, has been well documented. It was general knowledge within his club that he was gay, but in October of 1990, he was forced to declare this publicly after hearing he was about to be outed by The Sun newspaper. He remains to date, the only top-tier male footballer to come out while still playing in the country. Although he remained a popular player and public figure, he received huge backlash from the sporting world. Even his younger brother John, spoke publicly of his disapproval, stating that 'I wouldn't like to play or even get changed in the vicinity' of a gay player, and later suggested Justin's coming out was an act of attention seeking.⁸ Justin's professional life rapidly declined, due in part to his declaration. After moving to Maryland, US in March 1998 to help set up a football club, Fashanu was accused of sexually assaulting a young man, although he argued that their encounter was consensual and the young man had attempted to blackmail him. It should be stated here, that homosexuality was still illegal in Maryland at the time. Upon finding out a warrant had been issued for his arrest, Fashanu took his own life. His story is one filled with many complexities, but what is interesting about his inclusion in Queer Britain, is that the particular photograph chosen for display, depicts him in his element, filled with youthful confidence. The photograph in isolation highlights the strength and pride evident in Justin's life story. In addition to this, the label which accompanies Justin's portrait makes no mention of his later tragedies in life, nor the circumstances of his passing. Perhaps because his later life was one filled with scandal, often fuelled by a homophobic media, the museum chose instead to frame his story in relation to Queer British history, as someone who took a significant step in being the first football player to state his sexuality publicly.

These two display items I've explored here are by no means the be and end all of Black Historical Stories at Queer Britain, and I was glad to see that in the short amount of time the museum has been open to the public, Black Queer representation

⁸ This statement by John Fashanu is by now infamous, for more context see: Amal Fashanu, ['The Silence Over Gay Footballers'](#), 27/01/2012

has increased. Both items provide a sense of the museum's intentions to represent both the more well-known, celebrity stories, and the lesser-known, community-oriented examples of Queer resistance and quests for liberation. While there have been various research projects around Black Queer histories in Britain, and many projects are indeed ongoing, it is a subject that requires far more attention, support for those engaged in the work, and sufficient resources to make this work accessible and ensure longevity. Despite its relatively small space and newness, Queer Britain promises a deeply inspiring and interactive experience. Even more exciting, is its potential to develop in the coming years. I am optimistic that it will inspire more people to become involved in the necessary expansion of Queer history as a research field and community activity.

Author biography:

A.S. Francis is a PhD student researching women's involvements in Britain's Black radical organisations during the 1960s-1980s, and the development of a Black women's movement. Francis has recently published *Gerlin Bean: Mother of the Movement*, celebrating the longstanding and far reaching activism of Gerlin Bean. Francis is also a consultant to the Young Historians Project, and co-founder of the *History Matters Journal*.

The Landmark Case

By Councillor Michelle Simmons-Safo
The Political Poet

Background:

Michelle Cox, a senior nurse in the Northwest of England, the only black nurse in the employer's region in 2018, has won an Employment Tribunal against NHS England and Improvement (NHSE&I) after the judge heard evidence that her employer had treated her unfavourably because of her race and because she was willing to speak-up. This has been widely reported in the press, for example, in the Health Service Journal.¹ This report notes that 'Michelle Cox, a black woman who was an NHS continuing healthcare manager based in NHS England's North West regional team, was excluded by her manager "at every opportunity"'

Cox, from Liverpool, was employed by NHSE&I commissioning as a Continuing Health Care Manager, based in Manchester. The Tribunal, on 15th February 2023, unanimously found in favour of Ms Cox, that she faced direct discrimination by her manager Gill Paxton she was purposely excluded from several events. Events were scheduled on the day of the Chief Nurses Black minority conference.

This landmark case concluded the racism does

¹ Nick Kituno, '[NHSE wrongly dismissed discrimination claim from black nurse, tribunal finds](#)', 22/02/2023.

not have to be intentional for it to have occurred. Gill Paxton one year on still remains employed by the NHS. Michelle Cox is too traumatised to continue to work for the NHS.

This poem was born out of frustration and pain. I am a daughter of the Windrush, and Black staff have long endured humiliation and been subjected to inhumane hostile and degrading working environments.

How many other Michelle Cox's are there?

The struggle continues!

The Landmark Case:

Landmark Case, What a Disgrace.
Racism on this occasion has lost its pace
And Landed the NHS once more in Disgrace

75 Years of the NHS
They came from the Commonwealth
And Systemic racism gave them pain
1948 Beven Began the Beloved NHS
To tackle inequality
To get Free care and treatment
From the Cradle to the Grave

Only one misdemeanour could prevent the endeavour.



Nurse Michelle Cox speaking at RCN Congress 2023,
Steve Baker/RCN

Staff needed to come so the NHS could run.
The cry for help went out to the
Commonwealth.
The richest of staff were sent
Men and Women in their ultimate strength
The streets of Britain were not paved with Gold.

They had to toil hard.
And half the story has never been told.

The WRES was launched in 2015.
As it was noted Black staff were demeaned
The NHS was not oblivious to their suffering
and pain
They needed to do something to make Black
staff remain.
Their talents were not celebrated their humanity
desecrated.

48 it was the bedpans and slouch.
75 years later Racism was still on the loose
2023 Cox V the NHS exposed racism
harassment and victimisation
It was a detailed appalling revelation

A Landmark case
The NHS had once again succumbed to
disgrace.

Public Funds were used to defend an
indefensible case.
The Employment Tribunal thankfully applied
expertise and grace
They ruled Racism stemmed from purposely
excluding Cox from two events.

Paxton's racism had created a dent.
Cox was not permitted to vent.
She was traumatised by several events.

Paxton violated Cox's privacy.
She discussed her health unreservedly.
With another team member
What a Liberty!

As if that was not enough, to satisfy her lust.
She needed to inflict more pain.
I question what was her gain?

She encouraged the same staff to report Ms Cox

And still that was not enough.
She wanted to curtail her career.
And create an atmosphere of despair.
The ET examined this case in the cold light of
day.
And saw racism was at play.
The Tribunal ruled racism does not have to be
intentional for it to have occurred.
Learn this lesson it's not only for Nerds

There is a lot to learn from in this case.
To dismantle racism and preserve Black staff's
dignity and grace.
White Privilege/ White Fragility/ White
Comfort
Cannot be the order of the day.
We cannot shirk away from controversy.
And play with Black people's lives like the
lottery.

Systemic Racism! Black NHS staff are now
changing their stance.
We will not give you another chance.
We will tackle you to the floor
and kick you out the door.
We will not allow racism to thrive.
Racism will take a nosedive.
Cox V NHS is just the beginning of our
rendition.

We now have a different song to sing.
Listen carefully to the ring!
We will put racism on Blast.
That is our ultimate task.

Author biography:

Michelle Simmons-Safo is an Activist and a Poet. She has a Degree in Psychology, and Masters Degree in Psychiatric Social Work, AMHP accreditation and Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and management from Middlesex University. She has worked 22 years managing mental health services within the NHS. Currently is managing CAMHS in Hackney and is an elected Councillor in her Home ward. Michelle uses her poetry to amplify the voices of the marginalised communities, especially the Black community.

Continued from History Matters Journal Vol. 3, No. 1

Committee for Ethiopian and Eritrean Relief (1990 – 1993): Part Two

By Aleja Tadesse

The Committee for Ethiopian and Eritrean Relief (CEER) was formed in London, at the beginning of 1990 by the Black Liberation Front (BLF), the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

The Black Liberation Front (BLF) was a grassroots black power organisation founded in 1971, by North and West London members of the Black Power Movement. Throughout its existence until 1993, BLF remained grounded in the politics of anti-colonialism, whilst being equally concerned with the pragmatics of survival for black people in Britain. It was chiefly concerned with briefing the black communities in Britain about ongoing liberation struggles in Africa and the Caribbean. It organised annual Africa Liberation Day celebrations, alongside other black organisations, together comprising the Africa Liberation Committee. In addition, it conducted a range of community programmes including supplementary schools, defence committees, Ujima housing association and published its aptly named newspaper, Grassroots, until 1991.

CEER in context of BLF

Although CEER was a product of BLF, in many ways it functioned independently. Whilst many of the CEER members were either in or adjacent to BLF, this was not true of key individuals

such as Hakim Adi and Kobina Mark. Both engaged with areas of BLF's work to varying degrees, although they were not members of BLF themselves (Hakim's status could be described as more ambiguous). Nor did this prevent them from driving forward CEER's work.

For Hakim, SOAS' spirited political atmosphere in the mid-late 1970s was paramount in developing the Marxist politics which led to his alignment with TPLF. At this time, radical politics was de rigueur. Student life featured sit-in protests, union meetings and heated student discussion and debate – according to Adi, “every political trend was there”.¹ This environment was influential on future members of CEER, including Hakim, who first met BLF member and classmate Tee White whilst both studied there. Both Hakim and Tee also encountered Abdul Majid Hussein whilst at SOAS. (A revolutionary figure, Abdul Majid Hussein was a member of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and became Ethiopia's Minister of Telecommunications and Transport between 1997 – 2001. He was also Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations up until his death in 2004). Hakim remembers formative discussions covering a broad span of topics. Some, which introduced him to novel and potent ideas- for instance, Ethiopian politics

¹ Oral History Interview with Hakim Adi, conducted by author, September 2022

and the concept of “Soviet social imperialism”. Such conversations became imprinted in his memory and would ignite important questions that moulded his political thinking. Likewise, Tee recalls exchanges with Hussein as incredibly forward-looking. “Our discussions really were about what this future Africa could and should look like”.² Such questions necessitated analysis of what was required to bring about African liberation and were undoubtedly a significant precursor to CEER. The pragmatism of CEER’s work was driven not only by the urgency of the situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea, but by the will of key members such as Hakim and Tee to support the transformation of both along true socialist principles. These were the principles embodied by the armed struggle. Whilst this support existed in BLF for CEER, a key feature of the organisation was the significance of motivated individuals, some of whom remained outside BLF, who sought to advance its work.

In addition, CEER directed its appeal to BLF’s original base which was the black community in London. However, it also worked with external, non-African groups to achieve its aims- such alliances were key to its success and did not detract from its Pan-Africanist centre. The use of the Turkish and Kurdish Refugees Solidarity Centre to hold one of CEER’s first public meetings, which came about via TPLF’s connections, is one such example.³ The meeting in Stoke Newington evokes Kobina’s memory, of “one particular comrade, who more or less pressganged everybody present to financially contribute to the Ethiopian struggle”.⁴ Thereby, proving this connection was not superficial and inspired action, despite modest means. This marks a shift from the BLF of previous years and also reflects the growing communities of Kurdish, Turkish and Arab refugees who had arrived in Britain following forced displacement and regional conflict, fuelled by foreign intervention and

2 Oral History Interview with Tee White, conducted by author, April 2022

3 CEER flyer for Public Meeting, “Fight the Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea,” undated c. Jan- April 1990

4 Oral History Interview with Kobina Mark, conducted by author, November 2022

the 1991 US invasion of Iraq.⁵ In part due to this shifting population, CEER was characterised by its relationships to groups both within and outside of the black community. The Ethiopian Solidarity Campaign, which CEER joined and worked in, involved myriad organisations including at one time Turkish organisations. According to Kobina, it was through such networks that CEER ‘ended up being a vehicle for meeting lots of other forces’.⁶ As someone who was active in his own community on education, history and culture, Kobina remarks “it was interesting to see the kind of solidarity between different organisations”.⁷ CEER also attracted several African students into its fold- Kobina recalls at least two regular contributors: Yemisi, a SOAS student from Nigeria and another from Gambia.⁸

Not all were receptive to CEER’s message, and it cannot escape mention that unity eluded some sections of the black community. Kobina recalls pushback from a journalist at Britain’s biggest black newspaper, *The Voice* who, he notes, was “quite cynical, about our enthusiasm in supporting these organisations”.⁹ Notably, Ajamu recalls a striking incident involving a young man, presumably an apologist for the Derg. “I remember distinctly giving out leaflets at Notting Hill Carnival one year and gave it out to this one guy...he took it, read it, looked at it and screwed it up and threw it down. I knew what was going on, I knew. He’s probably an Ethiopian brother, probably from the Amhara community, probably from the Amhara elite, whether political or military, or government elite and definitely did not accept this notion, that Ethiopia is multinational, multicultural, multilingual and that the people of those nations and nationalities have the right to affirmation, to independence, up to and including secession if they so wish, including Eritrea”.¹⁰ And

5 Peter Malanczuk, ‘The Kurdish Crisis and Allied Intervention in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War’, *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 1991, pp. 114–132

6 Oral History Interview with Kobina Mark, conducted by author, November 2022

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

10 Oral History Interview with Shaun Ajamu

perhaps more significantly, CEER persevered in the face of such setbacks. Ajamu’s prevailing sense was that the questions affecting Eritrean and Ethiopian revolution were of concrete relevance, irrespective of reactionary thought. He maintains, the analyses that were central to affecting solutions were crucial learning points, “not only, for Ethiopia and Eritrea, in terms of their development, in terms of solving the problems of agriculture, of feeding the people, of developing their societies- yeah, they’re, Ethiopians and Eritreans are trying to solve those problems. But they actually belong to the world in that sense”.¹¹ Kobina echoes this feeling, evoking TPLF’s “perspective that Ethiopian people were insurgent, nothing was going to stop their path to liberating their country”.¹² He attests, “there was a kind of lesson there. Because I mean, one studies other struggles, you know like the Americans dropped three tonnes of bombs for every man, woman, and child in Vietnam, right? But still, they didn’t win that struggle. So, it’s not technology or weapons, you know, that determines whether the struggle is won. It’s the people- whether the people are united and they’ve got good leadership... Marxism-Leninism, I think that was one of the things that gave clarity at that time”.¹³

Further, BLF’s positions faced serious scrutiny as a result of CEER’s political work. TPLF and EPLF’s circumspection in regard to the Soviet Union’s solidified status as a supporter of African liberation remained a source of contention for BLF. Although there is no evidence that these differences came to a head, inevitably, there were frictions. Hakim summarises the contradiction, noting that CEER was “good for BLF in the sense of holding it together, but I think it also in a way contributed to BLF’s demise, in a way, because – that might be overstating it a little bit – but you know, some of the sort of certainties or positions that BLF had before

Hutchinson, conducted by author, November 2022

11 Ibid

12 Oral History Interview with Kobina Mark, conducted by author, November 2022.

13 Ibid

relating to the Soviet Union kind of disintegrated”.¹⁴

Beyond the curtain of the bi-polar divide, there are significant continuities to note between CEER and BLF’s previous support campaigns on African Liberation. Just as the SALT (South African Liberators Tax) and SALSA (Southern African Liberation Support Action) campaigns engaged with Grassroots readers and the spirit of Pan-Africanism driving BLF, CEER followed suit. CEER appeals were unequivocal in their audience, “Brothers and sisters, we call on all those, both individuals and organisations, who are concerned about Africa and the heroic struggles of its people to come forward and join us”.¹⁵ In this way, CEER was an extension of BLF’s ongoing efforts to redirect attention of the black community to liberation struggles in Africa. Further to this, CEER’s editorial line underscores the long-term repercussions of supporting flash-in-the-pan famine relief efforts, noting “in recent years millions of people in this country, and throughout the world, have generously contributed to assist famine relief in the Horn of Africa. Yet, the causes and consequences of famine still threaten millions of people, while relief is hampered by war and the actions and policies of the Ethiopian government”.¹⁶

In addition, some parallels can be drawn between CEER and the Africa Liberation Committee (ALC). Whilst the ALC concentrated its efforts on Africa Liberation Day- in becoming a vehicle for organising the annual event, it brought together black organisations from across Britain. Many of the activities which took place in CEER had a blueprint in ALC. CEER’s fundraisers were able to amass a wealth of organisational experience from BLF members, who through ALC held successful fundraising events routinely, such as one to support the people of Zimbabwe.¹⁷ Public meetings were part and parcel of ALC, as indicated by one Grassroots excerpt which notes that “as part of its continuing work to mobilise the black community to support the struggles being waged by Africans on the continent and abroad, the Africa Liberation

14 Hakim Adi Oral History Interview conducted by author, September 2022.

15 CEER Info sheet, ‘Aims’ 1990

16 CEER Bulletin, Editorial, Vol 1 No.1 1990

17 GPI, NEW/9/28, Grassroots ‘Fundraiser for Zimbabwe’ Mar - Apr 1978



EPLF-Eritrean-women sourced from Freedom Archives

Committee has been organising public meetings and pickets with the community.” Further, they served a purpose of manifesting action on issues, alongside their prerequisite examination: “The purpose of the public meetings is to address the issues which are relevant to the struggle....to inform the Black community as to what practical help we can offer.” Ultimately, Pan Africanism was the umbrella which encompassed a pragmatic, committed form of solidarity which rung throughout both strands of organising. The unifying element was for Africans in the diaspora to contribute chiefly and intentionally to the struggle, for the benefit of continental Africans:

“We hope everyone will be able to make a greater contribution to the struggle of our Brothers and Sisters in Zimbabwe, so that they will be left in no doubt as to the serious intention of the Black community in this country to see Africa liberated and free”¹⁸

CEER: Centring Women and Indigenous

18 Ibid

Organisations in a Grassroots Approach

Within CEER, there was a pronounced focus on women’s liberation which was central to envisioning a future for liberated Africa. Women’s rights and agency appear front and centre of CEER’s bulletins and news reports. Also, the fundamental centrality of women’s rights, to both liberation movements is evident throughout various experiences of CEER members. Hakim recalls a moment during his first visit to Ethiopia, which encapsulated the scale of transformation undertaken by the movement. He shares his recollection of meeting a woman farmer: “...and she explained, obviously before liberation she couldn’t own land, she couldn’t inherit land, she couldn’t plant and she couldn’t plough because all of that was taboo for women, or not permitted for women. I think she was a single woman, but there had been land re-distribution so she had her own land. So she didn’t depend on her husband, father, brother. The government gave her seed and I think there was a rural credit scheme, so

they got seed and probably got some fertiliser as well, and after when it’s harvested they would pay it back. So, she was basically independent. And she expressed it in those terms. So, you could see, literally a revolution for the rights of women, that her life had been completely transformed in the space of a few years”.¹⁹ A later visit entailed visiting the Minister for Women, whose role was to oversee the promotion of women’s issues and rights cross-ministry. Evidently, the prominence of women’s issues permeated beyond the sphere of armed struggle. Moreover, articles devoted to women’s rights appeared in the CEER bulletins. One article titled “News from Eritrea: Women’s Rights in Eritrea”, highlights the role of women in Eritrea’s liberation war, noting “women made up approximately 30% of the fighters, a figure higher than in many other struggles elsewhere”.²⁰ As historian of the EPLF, Roy Pateman, corroborates “women formed a third of the fighters in EPLF”- unmatched in any modern liberation struggle on the continent.²¹ The article, written shortly after the Provisional Government of Eritrea came into effect, describes the activities of the National Union of Women (NUEW), who “continue the fight for defence of the rights of Eritrean women and to protect their equality and ensure their interests are addressed”.²² CEER was unanimously behind such initiatives, advocating in its forward-looking style, that “the attempts being made by Eritrean women to guarantee their own progress in the new society should be supported by all of us”.²³

In addition to women’s rights, CEER was intentional in working with and centring indigenous organisations. Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and Relief Society of Tigray (REST), both with London offices, were at the core of CEER’s fundraising initiatives. Kobina highlights that, ‘a key part of the work was to try and raise funds, so you have a practical contribution. The indigenous relief organisations,

19 Hakim Adi, Oral History Interview conducted by author, September 2022

20 CEER Bulletin, Autumn Issue, 1992, p.6

21 Roy Pateman, Eritrea: Even the Stones are Burning, (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1998) p. 254

22 CEER Bulletin, Autumn Issue, 1992, p.6

23 Ibid.



EPLF-Eritrean-women sourced from ‘History Captured Through a Lens’, Shabait, Ministry of Information, Eritrea

REST, was one of the organisations we raised funds for, Eritrean Relief Association, Ethiopian Relief Organisation...” ERA’s proximity to Eritrean relief efforts was clearly detailed in the communications from CEER, which noted “it is estimated that over 1 million Eritreans will be dependent on ERA for their food supplies”.²⁴ This reiterates CEER’s prioritisation of indigenous organisations. Not only did this contest the mainstream media trope of African dependency on Europe, but also cast light on the fact that indigenous organisations were often solely capable of maintaining the wellbeing of the majority. Evidently, CEER was committed to evolving the relationship building aspect of the work on a continual basis. As one CEER newsletter reports, “moves are underway to develop relationships with the Relief and Rehabilitation Campaign of the Ethiopian Transitional Government”.²⁵ These relationships would come into fruition even after CEER disbanded. Eddy, Hakim and Kobina were some of the CEER members who visited Ethiopia and Eritrea, at various points between 1993 and 2006 (hosted by the government on at least one occasion).²⁶ Once again, in keeping with BLF’s approach of previous years, CEER maintained a line of communication with the liberation movements- something largely made possible through the relationships with ERA and REST. Several bulletins were produced by CEER which present a clear assessment and analysis

24 CEER “Why Are We Collecting?” leaflet

25 CEER Bulletin, Autumn Issue, 1992, p.2

26 Oral History Interview, conducted by author

(Hakim Adi Sep 2022, Kobina Mark Nov 2022).

of the struggles. Again, these were informed directly by the EPLF, ERA, REST and TPLF representatives, who would bring updates from the field and report them back in the monthly meetings. Kobina recalls working for both ERA and REST (and, much later, for the Ethiopian embassy) to assist them with capacity building. In particular, he was instrumental in providing IT services and even recruited additional volunteers from outside of CEER to maximise the effort.²⁷

Imbuing these hands-on tactics in both practical support, awareness raising and direct engagement (propelled by leafletting, canvassing and fly posting), CEER embodied all the elements of grassroots organising which characterised BLF. Rather than mark a clean break from BLF's work, CEER can be best understood as an area of work which simultaneously could "generate the broadening of that [TPLF/EPLF] work" and in doing so, broadened out BLF's politics.²⁸ Critically, it did this by advocating for liberation and self-determination on African people's own terms and not external forces, i.e., the Soviet Union. It created resolute bonds between continental Ethiopians, Eritreans and CEER members. This itself amounted to long-term engagement with issues in Ethiopia and lasting friendships. The longevity of CEER's resulting relationships is apparent, as several members of CEER later visited liberated Ethiopia and post-independence Eritrea. Kobina reflects, "I was lucky later on to actually go to Ethiopia and to meet them on the ground and see some of the projects that we'd supported".²⁹ Such tangible outcomes are also documented in a CEER article, titled "CEER's donation put to good use". The article reports on the jointly raised funds, in this instance on behalf of REST, who were able to "purchase enough food for about 40,000 meals and feed about 250 of our sisters and brothers". It concludes, "REST is playing a vital role in the reconstruction of Tigray and we at CEER have made an important contribution to their work".³⁰

27 Oral History Interview with Kobina Mark, conducted by author, November 2022

28 Oral History Interview with Shaun Ajamu Hutchinson, conducted by author, November 2022

29 Oral History Interview with Kobina Mark, conducted by author, November 2022

30 CEER Bulletin, Autumn Issue, 1992, p.2

On the ground in Britain, strides toward a new world order and the elimination of one world power produced its own crisis within the political economy of black organisations. Having supported the organic liberation struggles produced by the Ethiopian and Eritrean masses, CEER's work ground to a halt. Some of its members, however, rose to a new challenge of growing bespoke forms of activism which could match the contours of a post-Soviet world. These activists went on to form another organisation once BLF dissolved. Hakim reveals, "we set up an organisation called African Caribbean Progressive Study Group (ACPSG), it was an attempt to unite people. Some people were BLF people, some people were not. There were about eight of us...we wanted to really investigate what was going on, BLF has come to an end, the world is changing, what do we need to do, or what is required in these current conditions?"³¹ ACPSG ran from 1994 – 2002, outlasting CEER. It produced its own paper, Progress, which ran to issue 19 in 2002 and considered various questions relevant to the black community in Britain, from Black History Month to Caribbean Garifuna and Zimbabwe's involvement in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Undeniably, CEER was a major turning point for BLF within a global atmosphere marked with tumult. The resulting longevity of ACPSG represents just one outcome of CEER and, in turn, of the BLF's three decades of grassroots, people-centred conception of African futures.

Conclusion

Appearing at the nadir of BLF's trajectory, CEER brought a vital energy to BLF, including a re-evaluation of BLF's traditional pro-Soviet stances. This position was informed by the support which the Soviet Union provided to socialist countries (and countries that claimed to be socialist). BLF's categorical support to the Soviet-backed forces existed as a result of the bi-polar division of the world into Soviet and US camps and was eventually proven to be

31 Oral History Interview with Hakim Adi, conducted by author, September 2022

limited. In this examination, of the political and cultural programmes prepared by CEER, it is apparent that the Committee and its invitation of TPLF and EPLF's democratic, autonomous political thought was the first serious challenge to this status quo. Certainly, this focus refreshed BLF's grassroots, organisational fervour.

CEER coincided with a seismic shift in global political events, most significant of which was the collapse of the Soviet Union. TPLF and EPLF's joint proclamation - "The intervention of the superpowers, the Soviet Union and United States, does not solve the problems of the region but creates and exacerbates them. Their intervention at the present time, especially that of the Soviet Union, should be opposed and condemned"-made a deep impression upon some members of the BLF.³² The lucid, if aloof, condemnation of both the Soviet and US, and ability to rail against their respective roles in Africa, were a shock to the generally binary political fabric of black organisations at this time. The disappearance of the bi-polar framework evidently had a detrimental effect on BLF and as noted, was a contributing factor in its demise. However, CEER demonstrated an aspect of continuity in the BLF. Whilst the liberation movements that BLF worked alongside and supported over the years were numerous, BLF's underlying approach was consistent, despite prevailing divisions in the organisation. This approach was underpinned by grassroots action, raising awareness of the liberation struggles being waged on the continent and providing a platform for liberation organisations to maintain their agency and voice. CEER arguably maintained the approach of the former African Liberation Committee, which also sought a coalition-based participation from its beginning. Throughout their Africa Liberation Day events (1975 – late 1980s) to the incisive public meetings, BLF enabled the direct experiences of groups such as TPLF and EPLF to be shared between and strengthened by sympathetic, African-facing, politically conscious audiences.

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32 [EPLF-TPLF Joint Statement 1988](#).

of Africa and the African Diaspora, and wrote her dissertation on the Black Liberation Front and African Liberation. She hopes to continue working on understudied histories of Africa and the African diaspora in the future. Her current focus is on the development of anti-colonialism and international solidarity within diaspora communities in Britain and elsewhere. Also a writer, her poetry touches on themes of politics, Africa and womanhood.

BLACK AND GAY



IN THE UK

AN ANTHOLOGY

Edited by John R Gordon and Rikki Beadle-Blair

REVIEW:

Black and Gay in the UK: An Anthology - 10 year anniversary

By Hannah Francis

2024 marks the 10 years since the publication of the seminal anthology *Black and Gay in the UK: An Anthology*, chronicling the lives and experiences of Britain's gay Black men and gender non-conforming people. A publication which was a first of its kind in the UK when originally published in 2014, its editors Rikki Beadle-Blair and John. R. Gordon successfully surfaced the complexities, intimacies, sorrows and the joy of the lives of Black gay men in Britain in their selection of autobiographies, poems, letters, activist memoirs, interviews, plays and other bodies of writing. In a groundbreaking presentation of the material, emotional, and physical experiences of its contributors, it is integral we continue to celebrate the contributions of Britain's gay Black community, its interwoven history with Black queer and radical politics, and its legacy within the study of Black British history.

Contributors of predominantly African and Caribbean heritages shape the narratives of Black and gay British life throughout this work, exploring topics of family and friendship, joy, kink and desire, race and class, sexual violence and survival, love and loss. Against a backdrop of the experiences of Black gay men in the 1980s and the 1990s, steeped in narratives of severe racism, homophobia, the threat of the AIDS epidemic and the violently homophobic rhetoric of the British state and its mainstream media surrounding infection rates, mortality

and fear of familial outing, this anthology shines a light on the lives of those whom are rarely historicised nor remembered (not least historicised outside of experiences of racism and state violence), but are still very much present today.¹ Contributions invite us to not merely observe black gay communities as a minority group of the past targeted by discriminatory legislation and social treatment, but a living and thriving presence in Britain who have always been here resisting erasure.

Echoing the sentiments of Jason Okundaye, a researcher and writer focusing on Black British gay men (who has authored his first book *Revolutionary Acts: Love and Brotherhood in Black Gay Britain* which will be published in March 2024), it feels as if the presence of Black British queer figures of social movements are rarely at the centre of attention when it comes to our national recognition of black queer history and its place in Britain, with much of our knowledge centring narratives of African-American queer struggles.² And that is most certainly not to discredit the importance of African American figures such as Marsha P. Johnson, Angela Davis, Storme DeLarverie, James Baldwin and Audre Lorde (just to name a few) as being notable icons

1 M. Cook, '[Archives of Feeling: the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987](#)', *History Workshop Journal* 83 (1), Spring 2017, pp. 51- 52

2 J. Okundaye, '[This Black History Month, I'm uncovering the forgotten stories of queer Black Britain](#)', *The Guardian*, 09/10/2020.

in our collective global memory of Black queer history. But our reduction of their contributions to iconic moments repackaged in liberal think pieces by big business on LinkedIn when it suits their image and strategy is the very problem we face, or one of at least. The second is our national history of nothing less than intolerance, racism, homophobia and stereotyping that silences and demonises the very real, joyful and resilient queer Black community in Britain and its wider connection to Black British history, journalism, community organising and art. Britain is continuing to limit our critical engagement, study and recognition of histories of marginalised people. For example, the recent move by Women and Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch to launch guidance to schools which states institutions have ‘no general duty’ of not allowing trans or gender non-conforming young people to socially transition in schools and her sheer dismissal of the study of the history of empire and migration as “race ideology” that is “morally wrong” and should play no part in our history curriculums.³ However, to return to Okundaye, Britain’s focus on both Black and gay history are siloed in academic and lofty discussions of legislative policy changes and other grey literature. In order to memorialise Britain’s Black gay community and its long-standing presence, we must look to innovative works such as *Black and Gay in the UK* which challenge both traditional and highly mediated discussions of these identities.

As claimed in the preface to the anthology, co-editor John R. Gordon writes that following the publication of the popular African-American queer anthologies *In the Life* and *Brother 2 Brother* in the 1990’s “I remember waiting breathlessly for a black British equivalent to emerge.”⁴ Mentioned previously, our national collective memory of Black queer resistance often hones in on African American figures whose stories are either reduced to equality, diversity

3 Robert Booth, ‘Schools in England ‘face legal risks if they follow new transgender guidance’, *The Guardian*, 21/12/2023
4 J. R. Gordon and R. B-B, *Black and Gay in the UK*, (Team Angelica Publishing: London, 2014), foreword.

and inclusion narratives co-opted in corporate and charity sectors or totally silenced in places of learning like the mainstream classroom. However, reflecting on the changes between now and the year of publication, Gordon emphasises our nation’s growing understanding of sexuality and gender in tandem with race and culture, and the importance of documenting and eulogising the work and art that evidences these ways of being, especially in the face of this history being rewritten to serve Britain’s image of being a ‘progressive’ and ‘first world’ state.

The first stand out text is a play entitled *Yemi and Femi Go Da Chemist*, premiered at the Bush Theatre in London on April 28th 2014 written by co editor and publisher John R. Gordon and the performance was directed by fellow co-editor screenplay writer and producer Rikki Beadle Blair. Casting Nathan Byron as Femi, a black British-born 18 year old of Nigerian heritage, Isaac Ssebandeke as Yemi, Femi’s more feminine confidant and fellow black British-born 18 year old of Nigerian heritage; Urbain Hayo as Mixtape, a 17 year old black mixed race boy, Jaz Deol as Hassaan, a Muslim man of North African descent who owns the chemist Yemi and Femi visit, and Valentine Hanson as Salim, a handsome man of North African heritage, Gordon’s play sold out its first performance.

This play is a further development of Gordon’s already existing cartoon characters Yemi and Femi- two black and gay clubkids and best friends who first appeared in the graphic novel *Yemi & Femi’s Fun Night Out* (2015) which explores themes of HIV, safe sex, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) in prose laced with comedy, wit and ebonics making these relatively serious themes much more approachable for younger queer audiences. A Portsmouth native, Gordon is a gay white man, friend and long-time collaborator of *Black and Gay in the UK* co-editor Beadle-Blair, both of whom founded theatre, film and publishing company Team Angelica — who specialise in sharing the stories of outsiders and mavericks — in 2009. Beadle-Blair is a gay black man who, raised by a lesbian mother in Bermondsey

in the 60s and 70s, attended the experimental Bermondsey Lamp Post Free School, where he could study any subject he liked, and focused on theatre and film making. By the age of 3 he had learned to read and by aged 7 he had written his first play. At the Lamp Post Free School, Beadle-Blair was 12 years old when he directed his first play (video footage can be found [here](#) thanks to Team Angelica).

Yemi and Femi go da chemist follows the eponymous protagonists in their last night excursion to get Femi PEP for HIV (a preventative treatment for exposure to a pathogen to stop the spread of infection) after a hot and heavy night out and rendezvous with a go-go dancer at the club. Both the young men and their friend Mixtape appear seemingly defensive when they learn their chemist, Hassaan, is a Muslim man who they stereotypically assume to be homophobic and begin to berate him when he tells them the treatment they are after is out of stock. The play ends with Salim, who the audience can now only assume to be Hassaan’s partner, requesting the chemist return to their bed following Hassaan’s instruction to the duo and their young comrade Mixtape: “You need to go [to] Accident and Emergency, no chemist stocks it... A and E will sort you out, inshallah.”⁵ Even in the face of judgement, Hassaan overcomes and prays for the safety of the young black men that visited his chemist after their wild night out at the club. Various worlds, cultures and experiences seem to exist at once in this play, indicating how our perceptions of what it is to be Black, African, Muslim or gay should be far removed from the stereotypes stamped into us by the dominance of Eurocentric ideations of these identities.

The second standout text was entitled *Dear Father* by a[n], otherwise anonymous, writer and artist named ‘Danse Macabre.’ In an ‘open’ letter to his estranged father, the author’s opening line reads “I am involved in the most beautiful self-loathing”, setting the tone for the author’s exploration of race, selfhood and identity. This text serves as an ode to a self that denies the prescriptions of character, physicality

5 Ibid, pp. 68- 69.

and sensuality Britain and its colonial history has placed upon black men. To begin, danse macabre immediately identifies how the white male’s “own narcissistic gaze transfixes him” noting the inherent connection to the violence with which black men are prescribed labels of aggression, sexual deviance and desire and the insecurity of the white man’s superiority being splintered.⁶ Here, the author echoes the sentiments of Fanon in that the black man is culturally feared by white men and that this fear is “figured in the psychic trembling of Western sexuality.”⁷ The author describes as “a kind of psychic collapse initiated by constant cultural alienation”, it is suggested that the author’s own queerness and experiences of attraction to white men, and his hatred of seeing his physical self as an extension of his estranged father is a form of self loathing he has been reconciling with in their 18 years of no contact.⁸ This letter, an almost-but-not-quite olive branch, to his father serves as a record of his shared understanding of the alienation his father experienced as a black man in the eyes of a White and highly masculinised Britain, but a deeply insecure Britain too: racist narratives of sexual deviancy and violence were prescribed to Black men as a weak sheath for the archetypal colonial white man’s entirely projected sexual inferiority, which we can trace back to early British colonisation of the African continent. Referencing the likes of British journalist of Barbadian descent Gary Younge (*Who are We?* 2010) and anti-colonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (*Wretched of the Earth*, 1961), the author identifies that Britain has projected its insecurity of character and control onto how we imagine black men, and black people in Britain in general, and how any disruption to this image acts as a splinter to the gate kept superiority of whiteness. In a moving recollection of seeing his father, anxiously at first, swimming in the ocean- a disruption to a deeply racist and childish stereotype- the author suggests how moments like these are integral to our sense of self. Recognising how “I meet

6 Ibid, p. 91

7 Emma Dabiri, ‘False prophets are peddling conspiracy theories about Ireland’s history. Here’s the truth’, *the Guardian*, 13/02/2024.

8 *Black and Gay in the UK*, p. 92

the world and how it rejects or accepts me in my many identities, as a man, a son, a black person, a (mercifully briefly) country dweller, a homosexual, a student at an elite institution, a human being” the author achieves a kind of transgression of how Britain’s history has finitely controlled, degraded, and pathologised what it is to be a black and how thus blackness relates- or cannot relate- to other ways of being.⁹ The impossibility of adjacency and assimilation, of equal footing to the deeply narcissistic and insecure white man is rejected by the author. Full of personal anecdotes and explorations of art, film, and poetry, danse macabre’s Dear Father is a refusal of Eurocentric historical archetype, in search of “new landscape to inhabit and seas in which to swim.”¹⁰

The final standout text is by non-binary writer and performance artist Travis Alabanza, entitled I am. The poem begins with a subheading that reads ‘a collection of things you’ve told me’ before a liturgy of names, insults, and presumptions of black queer people that are often hurled without shame to their faces, in private, in whispers and behind their backs.¹¹ However, and returning to my earlier discussion of joy and resistance, Alabanza ends this poem with the following lines:

“I am not cursed.
I am proud.
And I am, from this point on, going to remain
the complex,
 multifaceted,
 dark
 queer
 rainbow creature I was
 born to be - and say:

I am strong.”

At the date of publication, Alabanza would only have been 18 or 19 years old. Capturing the complexity of existing within both the realms of blackness and queerness in a deeply

⁹ Ibid, p. 115.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 116.

¹¹ Ibid, 116.

racist, homophobic and transphobic society, Alabanza’s poem is a refusal to engage with the often contradictory and fearful prescriptions placed upon them. Similarly to the other earlier-identified stand out texts, themes of resistance and transcendence of Eurocentric and specifically British perceptions of black and gay men, and queer gender non conforming people indicates that these identities are not chosen, nor should the premise of these identities be a site of socio-political degradation, but in fact identify the very opposite: existence as ever-moving resistance. And specifically, resistance to understanding blackness and queerness, and specifically transness, as solely associated with physical and social pain- with death, as a double negation, but blackness as animated by queerness.¹² To remain “complex, multifaceted, dark queer” is to understand that gender remains as a racialised category that can never be fixed.

Black and Gay in the UK invites us as an audience to question how we memorialise the lives of our Black community in Britain and the intricacies of their personal lives: desires, ambitions, lovers, friends, family, chosen families, death, class, racism, colourism and more. We are invited into the most intimate parts of contributors’ lives as a means to learn what it is to toe the line of identity and culture, in a country which historically has attempted to erase both for our black and queer communities. We see how anthologies such as this go on to influence the creation of further groundbreaking works illuminating the presence of black queer Britons and members of the diaspora residing here. The editors of Black and Gay in the UK went on to publish an adaptation of their anthology, publishing Sista! An anthology of writings by Same Gender Loving Women of African/Caribbean descent

¹² C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: a Racial History of Trans Identity*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) here, I have paraphrased C. Riley Snorton’s challenge to the conceptualisation of blackness and transness as systems of fixed social valuation, adopting a “transversal approach to history” underpinning that “difference” such as race and gender can take “transitive form, expressed in shifting modalities of time and meaning from within the abyss.”), p. 10

with a UK connection. In 2018. Co-edited by Phyll Opuku-Gyimah — founder of UK Black Pride and activist — Sista! Is the younger sibling and companion volume of Black and Gay in the UK, featuring writings from 31 black queer, non-binary, bi and lesbian women on what it means to love black women. The anecdotes, taking many forms, from contributors emphasise the spirit of those that invited us to witness their personal connections over race and identity, gender and sexuality. With further works such as Travis Alabanza’s None of the Above: Life Beyond the Binary - an autobiographical work exploring: what does it mean to fall outside the periphery of gender - to Jason Okundaye’s previously mentioned debut work Revolutionary Acts, we are witnessing not a revival, but an evolution of the way in which we memorialise queer Black Britain.

In addition to this evolution, we cannot forget the writers, filmmakers and artists that laid the foundations. In 1983, a Hear and Now film was aired by the British Film Institute, focusing on the Gay Black Group.¹³ The Gay Black Group, formed in 1981 in *Gay’s the Word!* — a bookshop based in Bloomsbury, London — is an evident foreshadowing of the kinds of spaces that black queer Britain has carved for itself and have documented. Reporter Paula Ahluwalia interviews a group of Black and South Asian queer young people on what it is like to be Black and gay, the White fetishisation of queer Black people, the complexities of the highly liberalised concept of ‘coming out’ to Black, immigrant and mixed heritage families and the racism of white, middle class queer spaces. Featuring then St. Martin’s student award-winning filmmaker Isaac Julien, the film echoes the narratives of this anthology, decentralising academic thinkpieces and writings on policy, and interrogating the historic experiences, memories and feelings of Black LGBT+ people in Britain. Black and Gay in the UK is a unique window into the multiplicity and dynamism of the intimate lives and relationships — romantic, platonic, familial and otherwise — of Britain’s black gay men and stands on the shoulders of black men, women

¹³ [Gay Black Group](#), 1983.

and people like William and Eleanor Craft (two fugitive slaves from Georgia who escaped in 1848 and arrived in the UK in 1851- Eleanor subverted both race and gender categories by pretending to be a white male planter, a critical piece of history that asks us to interrogate the politics of ‘passing’ and racist systems of social valuation),¹⁴ Pearl Alcock (Jamaican artist who ran underground gay bars and spaces for Britain’s queer black community in 20th century London), Oscar Lumley Watson (Director at the Old Vic Bristol and playwright, known for his 1987 stage production QUICK, PHYLLIS: GRAB A DYKE AND DANCE YOUR WAY OUT: -IT’S A RAID!!), Ted Browne (one of few black members of the Gay Liberation Front, who led the historic mass kiss-in at the UK’s first Gay Pride march), Gerlin Bean (Jamaican feminist activist who was a member of the Brixton Black Women’s Group and regular attendee of Gay Liberation Front meetings and events) and others. For without them, the intimacies of queer black life in Britain may have never been able to be celebrated and remembered today. Black and Gay in the UK was recorded to have been read by only 107 people on goodreads in the year of 2023, and although my library copy is very much overdue- I urge more of us to grant this one of a kind anthology the flowers it deserves.

Author biography:

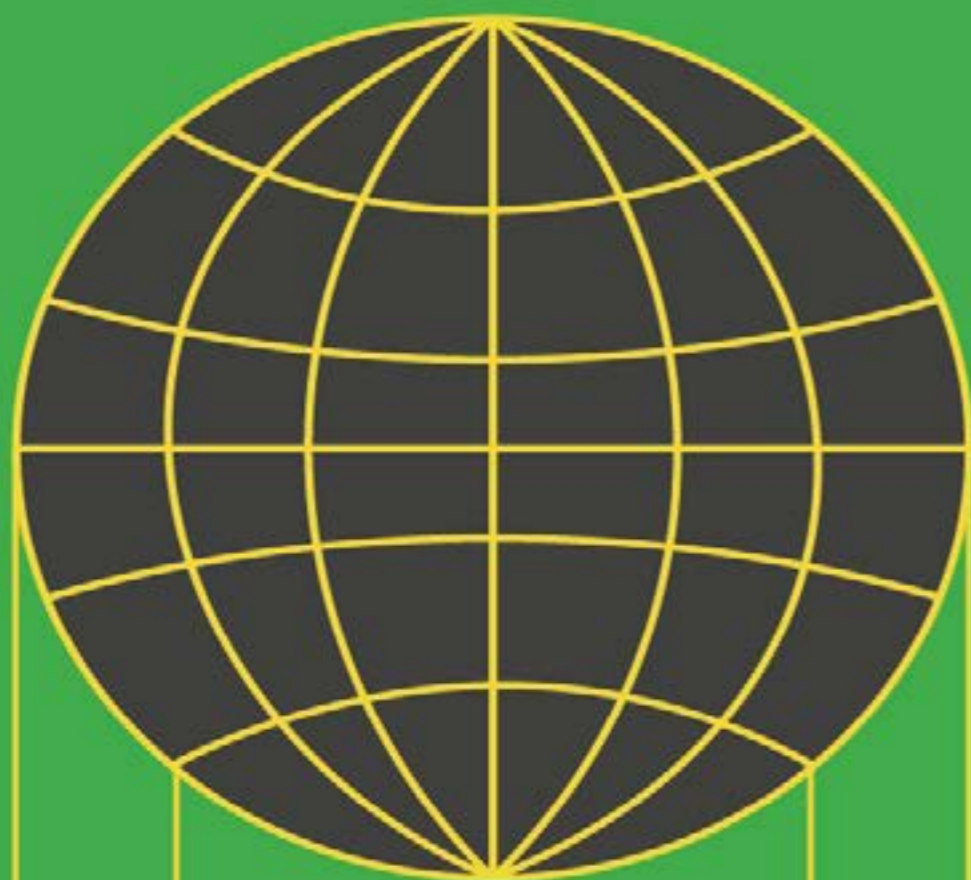
Hannah Francis is a Masters of Research graduate, who studied the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester. Francis’s research has been published as, ‘The Black Parents’ Movement’, a chapter in *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*. Alongside this, Francis is also a member of the Young Historians Project and History Matters.

¹⁴ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, p. 59

A.S. Francis

Gerlin Bean

Mother of the movement



#2

Radical Black Women Series

REVIEW:

Gerlin Bean: Mother of the Movement

By Perry Blankson

A.S. Francis' groundbreaking work, *Gerlin Bean: Mother of the Movement*, is an overdue contribution to the history of the Black liberation struggle in Britain. Published in October 2023, the meticulously researched *Mother of the Movement* rightfully places Gerlin Bean at the heart of intersecting struggles in Britain and beyond, and manages to successfully spotlight a figure long overlooked in recent historiography.

Born in Jamaica in 1939, Bean emigrated to England to train as a nurse in 1958, where she would soon become immersed in the burgeoning Black revolutionary struggle that swept through America, the Caribbean and Britain in the mid-twentieth century. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Gerlin Bean established herself as one of the major Black feminist theorists of the decade, operating as part of the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) and Black liberation Front (BLF). Bean was also a prime mover of the Black women's movement, as she was a founding member of both the Brixton Black Women's Group (BBWG) in 1973 and the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) in 1978. *Mother of the Movement* brilliantly contextualises Bean's activism amid the backdrop of rapid socio-economic upheaval. From the growing women and gay liberation movements through to the civil rights movements in the US and anti-colonial movements in Africa, A.S. Francis places Bean at the centre of a vast and vibrant

political network.

A.S. Francis' accessible work phenomenally brings the story of Gerlin Bean to life. Each chapter opens with a quote from Bean which broadly encapsulates its theme. Owing to the painstaking research that has gone into producing this work, *Mother of the Movement* also features excerpts from radical Black literature and interviews with Bean's contemporaries, which serve to supplement each chapter. Francis also provides the reader with an insight into the oral history-making process and Bean not just as a historical figure, but an oral history subject. Reference to Bean's "humbleness, humour and light heartedness" further helps to establish a relationship between the reader, Bean and Francis themselves. Francis' reference to themselves in the first-person and constant reference to the work deployed to uncover source material gives the reader the sense that they are part of the procedure - the curtain is pulled back on the process of history-making. This intimate style makes *Mother of the Movement* an incredibly accessible book for all readers and an enjoyable read throughout.

From Bean's migration to Britain and career in nursing, Francis traces Bean's involvement in enrichment initiatives for the Black working class youth of London. Rather than Bean standing alone as an interview subject, the author expends great effort in providing the surrounding context for Bean's activism and

placing her within a vibrant network of activists including Jessica and Eric Huntley, Gus John, Ansel Wong, to name a few. Bean's journey into youth work starts with her work at the Seventies Coffee Bar, a youth club in Paddington, before moving on to assist in setting up the Gresham Project in Brixton in 1973. An initiative led by Black parents, the project aimed to provide supplementary development for young Black children outside of the highly discriminatory environment of the British education system which classified Black youths as "Educationally Subnormal." Bean's involvement is described by the author as practical rather than rhetorical, which earned her the respect of the community and helped her establish strong relationships with the young people she nurtured. The police consistently appear as antagonists during Bean's involvement in youth activism, raiding the Coffee Bar multiple times and harassing Black youths in Brixton. Bean is often portrayed as a mediator between the young people and the police, with her and Wong described as frequently de-escalating altercations between police and young people. Francis uses an interview with former Gresham attendee Janet Morris to provide further detail about how Bean and Wong were able to empower their community - these interviews with those affected by Bean's activism are another running theme of the book which serve to highlight the scale of her impact. Francis seamlessly ties Bean's activity in the Gresham Project with her involvement with other notable female revolutionaries at the time. Notably Olive Morris and Zainab Abbas are featured, described as meeting with Bean during the course of the project. Bean's youth activism also continues as Francis describes her movement into more radical politics with the Black Liberation Front before delving into the organisation in further detail in the subsequent chapter.

Francis spends great attention on Bean's involvement in the burgeoning British Black Power movement which took root in the latter half of the 1960s. Bean's first contact with Black Power came through the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA), founded by Nigerian playwright Obi Egbuna. Throughout



Gerlin Bean, Shrew Magazine 1971

the chapter Francis makes reference to several of the pamphlets and newsletters published by Black Power organisations, beginning with an example from the UCPA entitled, 'Black Nurses Unite!' The inclusion of this material is useful as Francis admits that little documentation exists revealing the extent of Bean's involvement in the organisation, however this evidence provides us with examples of some activities that UCPA members engaged in. What begins as history of Bean's interaction with Black Power in Britain develops into a smaller history of the movement as a whole, charting the ebb and flow of the movement as organisations were established, declined and new groups rose in their place. Out of the ashes of the UCPA rose the Black Freedom and Unity Party (BUFP) - faced with a plethora of revolutionary organisations, Francis notes that Bean described the BUFP as reflecting her own ideals of "the socialist perspective rather than just a Black nationalist perspective." During her time with the BUFP Bean was a significant proponent of tying women's liberation to the core of the organisation, which culminated in the Black Women's Action Committee (BWAC),

of which Bean is currently the only known member. Francis continues to trace Bean's political development to her involvement with the BLF, where issues with Bean's recollection muddle the timeline somewhat (as stated by the author). Notwithstanding this issue, impressive deductive reasoning from Francis leads to the hypothesis that the BLF's practices were more in line with Bean's principles than that of the BUFP. As the organisation was subject to surveillance and frequent police raids, little documentation was kept on its membership, however Francis deduces that her involvement in the organisation lasted from 197-1974.

Alongside the Black Power movement simultaneously rose the 'second wave' of the women's liberation movement, which Bean became immersed in. Francis describes Bean's foray into women's liberation organising through her involvement in the National Women's Liberation Conference which was held in early 1970. This would provide the launching pad for Bean to found the BWAC and BLF women's caucuses, lamenting the neglect of Black women in traditional white, middle-class feminist spaces. A full chapter is devoted to Bean's activity as part of the Black women's movement. Building on work done in the BUFP and BLF, Francis charts Bean's role as the heartbeat of Brixton Black Women's Group, whereby the revolutionary begins to truly become the 'Mother of the Movement' by mentoring young revolutionaries such as Zainab Abbas. This is another episode in Bean's life left somewhat patchy by the lack of documentation such as meeting minutes or membership records, however Francis does an excellent job of piecing together the puzzle through oral history interviews with surviving members of the organisation. These interviews with women such as Melba Wilson work well to paint the image of Bean as a matriarchal figure who took younger women under her wing and supported them. Francis once again zooms out and provides further context surrounding the growing Black women's movement, including information about groups outside of London such as the Manchester Black Women's collective, which was established in the same year as the

BBWG. The dedication to providing external context prevents Mother of the Movement from being a London-centric work, a theme which narratives concerning Black Power can sometimes follow.

As well as being a crucial contribution to the historiography of Black and women's liberation movements Mother of the Movement is also a key entry in an under-researched area of disability history. Significant attention is devoted to Bean's work with 3D Projects in Jamaica, where she would become managing director in 2002. Alongside this, Bean organised community workshops aimed at correcting misconceptions around disability and challenging ableism - such efforts made Bean a pioneering disability activist as the subject was (and is still today) largely misunderstood. Faced with significant adversity in terms of funding, Bean and the 3D Projects team fundraised for a day-center to disabled children, culminating in the establishment of the 3D Childhood Centre for Children with Disabilities. Bean's legacy in this field continues through 3D projects, today known as Community Based Rehabilitation Jamaica (CBRJ).

Another largely under-studied field that Mother of the Movement does excellently to highlight is the Gay liberation movement, which was heavily linked with the Black Power movement during the 1960s. As a result of their rigorous research, A.S. Francis was able to discover the sole piece of primary source material linking Bean to the movement for Gay liberation. In 1971, Bean featured for Shrew magazine, a move which Francis regards as uncharacteristic as it was a rare occasion in which the revolutionary divulged intimate details about her private life. In the interview, Bean personally describes herself as bisexual and part of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Francis subsequently provides the reader with a brief history of the organisation and its context as part of wider liberation struggles during the late 1960s. Due to the scant evidence available, Mother of the Movement is unable to uncover the full extent of Bean's involvement in the GLF. Despite this, Francis does great work



Launch of Mother of the Movement, Black Cultural Archives October 2023, photo by Ella Frost

in interrogating this particular area. The work of GLF biographer Lisa Power notes that amongst Brixton-based GLF members, none were able to recall Bean, however email correspondence between Francis and former GLF member Nettie Pollard reveals appearances at local GLF meetings. The intertwined nature of various revolutionary movements at the time is an explanation offered by Francis for this seemingly conflicting information, and the author provides further historical detail about the plurality of countercultures that populated Brixton.

Ultimately, Mother of the Movement is a timely celebration of the history of an oft-overlooked figure. Diligently scaffolded by original archival research and interviews conducted by the author, the book makes for essential reading. It was a testament to the impact of Gerlin Bean's activism that the launch of Mother of the Movement, hosted at the Black Cultural Archives, was attended by a full house - many of whom were eager to share stories about Bean's impact on

their lives. What began as a Q&A session ended with testimony after testimony from comrades, loved ones and friends highlighting the selfless, tireless and unwavering activism of a woman whose story has finally been told in great detail by A.S. Francis.

Author biography:

Perry Blankson completed his MA in Modern History at the University of Leeds and has a historical interest in the 'radical' Black British anti-imperialist and 'British Black Power' movements of the post-war period and beyond, with a particular historical focus in the response of the state to such organising. In connection with this, Blankson published a chapter in the recent publication, *Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain*, entitled "The Black Power Desk: The Response of the State to the British Black Power Movement". Blankson is also a Project Coordinator at the Young Historians Project.

MANY STRUGGLES

New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain

Edited by Hakim Adi



REVIEW:

Many Struggles: New Histories of African and Caribbean People in Britain

By Aleja Taddesse

Many Struggles is an exciting presentation of histories that encompasses both breadth and thought-provoking continuities. It showcases the most recent work by historians of African and Caribbean people in Britain, from 1700 to the last century. The range of contributors- from established and emerging voices in the field, life-long activists, scholars and writers- is a standout feature in itself. The result is a rich multitude of narratives. As they must, these works combine to successfully challenge state-coopted versions of events that would reduce the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain to a single jump-off, or even inflection, point. Contrary to this exact claim is Duse Mohamed Ali, whose life in Britain and complex, multi-national connections are unpacked by Rey Bowen.

One thing to note is a continuous thread throughout the book, of resurfacing the roles of Black women in the face of ubiquitous erasure. Aleema Gray's chapter seeks to redress the patent gender imbalances in history, by shining light on Rastafari women as active agents of the highly influential Rastafari movement in Britain. Gray confronts the patriarchal assumptions underlying academic discourses of the movement. It is a striking corrective which compels us to think about the significance of language in the construction of historical realities which decentre whiteness.

Chapter one by Montaz Marche focuses on Anne Sancho, wife of the renowned Ignatius

Sancho. Marche examines aspects of Anne's life by drawing on 158 published letters of Ignatius Sancho. This is a fascinating chapter, illuminating a marginalised character, whilst exploring wider themes such as childbirth, motherhood and the assimilation and integration of Black women in eighteenth-century London. After reading Marche's discussion of letters as source material, I could not help but reflect on the historian's shared struggle- one of sourcing evidence for underrepresented figures whose lives require this kind of careful study to uncover.

Despite major gaps in the archives, researching the presence of Black people in Britain remains of the utmost significance. This often means rewriting existing histories, as Kate Bernstock urges in, "Chasing Shadows". Most interestingly, Bernstock offers a critique of the typical, reductive presentations of history found in "Archives", whose "imperialist, prejudiced systems of thought" trap African subjects in a limited, "othering" narrative.¹

The argument for more rigorous, nuanced approaches to history accompanies a point demonstrated throughout this book- the interconnectedness of Black history to the overall "hegemonic" narrative of Britain. As serious historians, we should indeed ask questions that place Black people "outside the boundaries of

¹ Kate Bernstock, 'Chasing Shadows', *Many Struggles*, (London: Pluto Press, 2023), p.45

imperial fact."²

The chapters which follow mostly look at the 1960s – 1970s, a period of time which gave rise to widespread radical, Black politics and were decidedly a significant era for Black Britain. Whilst this ties in with the focus of my own interests, it is useful reading for anyone interested in community and people's histories.

First to illustrate this era is A.S. Francis, who examines Black women in Manchester as drivers of progress in their communities. Taking us from the women's' personal struggles to the collective, the chapter begins by introducing us to Elouise Edwards and sisters Kath Locke, Coca Clarke, Ada Phillips and their generation of "tight-knit, Black women activists."³ The chapter is interwoven with significant landmark moments for Black radical movements, such as the founding of the UCPA and 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress. We learn of the challenges faced by Black, working-class women in Manchester and the dynamic forms of "autonomous activism" which they led. The story of the Abasindi Co-operative contains important insights on the role of "perseverance, reflection and renewal" within Black women's struggle.⁴ Unmissable lessons can be extracted from this work, for readers themselves immersed in ongoing struggles for liberation.

Claudia Tomlinson unearths another angle of 20th century struggle- the intersection of immigrant activism and student organising. Her exploration of the West Indian Students Centre charts its evolution from a social space, into a vehicle for cooperation and versatile resistance. Tomlinson brings to life the multi-faceted centre through the people connected to it. Among them, era-defining activists such as Jessica Huntley, CLR James and, Stokely Carmichael. Using excerpts of the 1968 speech Carmichael gave at WISC, we are given insight to how this raised consciousness amongst students.

² Ibid, p.46.

³ A.S. Francis, 'A Luta Continua: The Political Journey of Manchester's Black Activists, 1945-80', p.108

⁴ Ibid, p.123

Threading together interviews and organisational materials, Tomlinson creates a robust account. Set against "the growing assaults on the freedom and rights of black people in Britain," we venture into how WISC was linked to wider struggles against racist injustices of the time.⁵ This history foreshadows the grassroots activities that would be the dominant mode for young Black organising in Britain.

Mollie Hunte's chapter is a meditation on sources, helping us to rethink how community archives build our knowledge of educational struggles fronted by Black women. The range of sources consulted in *Many Struggles* constitute an extensive and ever-growing body and equips historians with a plethora of material to keep building upon. As we see in chapter nine, where Perry Blankson unveils the extent of surveillance, tab-keeping and harassment foisted on Black activists. "The Black Power Desk" brings us a cross-examination of files from the National Archives and previously classified files. By exploring the milestones of Black Power in Britain through the lens of the state's response, Jackson traces the history of Black radicalism in Britain to much earlier roots than the correlating movement in the US. For students of the Black Power era, this adds valuable context. It steers us away from accepting the dangerous claim that the history of Black activism in Britain occurred in disconnected fragments. The role of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) in propelling Black Power of course still stands. But, as with all collective struggles, we are reminded it is not one individual, but the organised and consistent efforts of numerous, that matter most.

Blankson also gives one of the most damning examples of how the British legal system can be turned against those who speak up on behalf of the oppressed. In the case of the late Roy Sawh, a key Black Power activist and organiser, Blankson tells us how, "the content of his speeches would be used in court to prosecute

⁵ Claudia Tomlinson, 'How West Indian Students and Migrants Cooperated in Fighting Racialised Injustices in Britain, 1950s-1970s', p.137

him under section 6.1 of the 1965 Race Relations Act: incitement to racial hatred”.⁶

We need only look today at the curtailing of protest through questionable “law enforcement” and rapid censoring of pro-Palestine, pro-liberation discourse, to see how these repressive tactics live on. It begs us to answer the questions, what exactly the legal system was devised to uphold and whether it can ever serve as an instrument of justice in collective struggle.

Olivia Wyatt’s chapter on the Chapeltown News Collective details how a local paper became the site of disputes between “radical elements” and locals with “moderate political views” during the height of Black radicalism in Britain.⁷ It posits a fresh perspective on the era, mostly made possible through oral histories gathered by Wyatt. It invited me to reflect on the potential held by oral histories, to revive the work of rewriting histories accurately.

Chapter thirteen explores the Black Parents Movement, which the author restores to its rightful place as a prime example of Black-led educational activism. It is a history that necessarily intersects with Britain’s history of racial violence. Hannah Francis takes us from the movement’s focal point of North London, through to several national outposts of the campaign, its youth section, and the “Bookshop Joint Action Committee”.⁸ The latter looks at how Black communities rallied actions in response to the appalling terrorisation of Black communities (contrasted with the suspect inertia of the State). As someone who grew up in West London and lived seconds from the original premises of the Bogle Louverture bookshop, I am grateful for this work and opportunity to reflect on these experiences in-depth.

6 Perry Blankson, “The Black Power Desk: The Response of the State to the British Power Movement”, p.143.

7 Olivia Wyatt, “The Enemy in our Midst’: Caribbean Women and the Protection of Community in Leeds”, pp.177-197.

8 Hannah Francis, ‘The Black Parents’ Movement’, pp.215-231.

The final chapter provides the reader with memoir-based accounts from Zainab Abbas, Ansel Wong, and Tony Soares. They recount their life experiences as Black people in Britain and as former members of the Black Liberation Front (BLF).

One benefit to history told by the subjects in this unmediated manner, is that it presents us with lucid depictions of the social and political realities which they faced. Their stories take us on a journey through the formations of initiatives, by and for the community- Prisoners’ Scheme, Ujima Housing Association, the Grassroots newspaper and more. Telling us not just that they responded to the immediate, collective needs of Black people in London, but what motivated them to. From each life story, we see conditions where inequity abounded, and young people rejected the status quo. This was expressed in their move from mobilising around instances of systematic injustice to launching solidarity campaigns and being part of much-needed organisations such as the BBWG.

As a researcher of BLF’s history, it was a pleasure to find this chapter is suffused with lesser-known details (such as backstory to the monikers adopted by contributors to Grassroots newspaper). This offers added perspective for the more familiar, and rich dimension for those encountering these histories for the first time.

This chapter holds crucial insights for contributors to the joined-up political struggles which characterise our present times. We continue to struggle on all fronts. Presently, we are fighting yet another institutional attack on our right to continue this vital work. It is more crucial and pertinent now, than ever, to consider seriously the lessons within the various “struggles that have been waged by our predecessors”.⁹

Many Struggles is a timely reminder to actively take stock of our collective struggles and which require our constant, critical attention. A work of both continuity and resistance, it calls us to assess

9 Zainab Abbas et al, “Black Footprints’: A Trio of Experiences’, pp. 243-256.

history through the lens of interconnectedness. In this vein, the tenth chapter, “Black Power in Britain and the Caribbean” testifies to one of the strengths of Black activism in Britain- its fervent transnationalism and ability to plug in to global networks of activists in anti-imperialist struggle.

Above all, it is a salient reminder of the giant task before people-centred historians. To do it well, we must continue to think about the context in which history operates: the constant battle to counter the propaganda of those in power, and to strive towards progress for the many, whose contributions and existence continue to shape and reshape the parameters of struggle. In this resource, generations to come have the privilege of accessing an enduring reference point for collective liberation.

Author biography:

Aleja Taddesse is a graduate of the MRes History of Africa and the African Diaspora, and wrote her dissertation on the Black Liberation Front and African Liberation. She hopes to continue working on understudied histories of Africa and the African diaspora in the future. Her current focus is on the development of anti-colonialism and international solidarity within diaspora communities in Britain and elsewhere. Also a writer, her poetry touches on themes of politics, Africa and womanhood.