



Sociology in the Archives: Black and Asian activism by and for young people
One-day workshop on the 18th November 2019, 09:30 – 18:00
British Library Knowledge Centre, London

Keynotes

Dr Anandi Ramamurthy, *Reader in Post-Colonial Cultures at Sheffield Hallam University.*

Abstract: Narrating and Archiving South Asian histories of resistance

In 2003 I established an internet archive of materials relating to the Asian Youth Movements in order to challenge the frame through which South Asian youth, in particular, were being framed by the dominant media and mainstream academic discourse. The AYMs were independent anti-racist organisations established in a variety of towns and cities during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period which saw increasing resistance to racism as a result of discrimination on the street, in schools and in the workplace. This paper will explore my experience of setting up an internet archive of public documents relating to the movements which were active in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It will reflect on the lessons we can learn about collecting, remembering and writing such histories for activists. It will hold Tuhiwai Smith's assertion that "Research for social justice expands and improves the conditions for justice; it is an intellectual, cognitive and moral project, often fraught, never complete, but worthwhile" (Tuhiwai Smith). It will also recognise the tension that impacts such work since 'from the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism' (Tuhiwai Smith). It will therefore also consider the ways in which researching into this history of the Asian Youth Movements was perceived/received within various sections of the academic community in the hope of empowering other researchers collecting and writing histories of anti-racist activism.

Biography:

Dr Anandi Ramamurthy is a Reader in Post/Colonial Cultures at Sheffield Hallam University. She is the founder of www.tandana.org, a digital archive of materials relating to the Asian Youth Movements. She is the author of *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asian in British Advertising* (MUP 2003) and *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements* (Pluto 2013). She is co-investigator on the AHRC funded project *Creative Interruptions* which seeks to explore the ways in which disenfranchised groups use the arts to challenge hegemonies www.creativeinterruptions.com.

Dr John Narayan, *Lecturer in European and International Studies at King's College London.*

Abstract: When the Borderline meets the Colourline: British Black Power and the 1971 Immigration Act

The history of anti-racism in Britain can be read as the confrontation of state racism by what Sivanandan called 'communities of resistance'. This confrontation is normally remembered through visceral encounters between the state and new commonwealth communities: protests, demonstrations and violent clashes. Within this paper, I will try to add to this history by showing the often forgotten intellectual thought at the heart of such communities of resistance. To achieve this, this paper will examine British Black Power's reaction and campaigns against the British state's racist 1971 Immigration Act. I will reflect on how such opposition and the associated material generated (pamphlets, leaflets and newspapers) offered theoretical narrations of racial capitalism, re-expanded the idea of British-ness and examined the place of race and racism in Britain's entrance into Europe. Indeed, what I will try to show is that these communities of resistance were fundamentally also intellectual communities of resistance. The paper will conclude with some reflection on how such an intellectual inheritance can be utilised today in confronting our own era of state racism.



Biography:

Dr John Narayan is a Lecturer in European and International Studies at King's College London. His most recent research has focused on the understudied transnationalism of Black Power and political theory created by groups such as The Black Panther Party. This project has sought to retrieve this history and highlight how the global politics of Black Power provides lessons about the link between anti-racism and democratic politics in an age of resurgent nativism in Europe and the USA. John has published the results of this research in journals such as *Third World Quarterly*, *Theory, Culture and Society*, *Current Sociology*, and *The Sociological Review*.

Presenters

Stephen Ashe, Researcher at the University of Manchester

Abstract: Rethinking race and class in Brexit Britain: Why the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain archival collection in Birmingham is so important!

In the current organic crisis that is Brexit, the archival collection of the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain (IWA-GB), held at the Library of Birmingham, is of critical importance. The IWA-GB archive provides an important counter-weight to academic, political and media narratives that focus on an imagined, homogenous 'white working class' that have been 'left behind'. What is more, the IWA-GB archive punctures contemporary forms of left-wing race-blind melancholia which yearns for a return to post-war welfare capitalism (1945-1965) and a bipartisan commitment to the 'National Health Service, full employment and the guarantee of effective trade union rights' (Virdee, 2014: 98). Drawing on research attending to hidden histories in the anti-racist struggle for civil rights and social justice in Britain during the 1960s, this paper will focus on the industrial action undertaken by the IWA-GB and their allies in the West Midlands during the 1960s. In doing so, I will stress the importance of archives housing Black and Asian histories of activism to challenging the aforementioned race-blind narratives which abound in the present. Thus, I will challenge accounts which whitewash this key moment in British history by demonstrating that racism was a powerful structuring force at a time when the Conservative Prime Minister of the day, Harold Macmillan, claimed that 'most of our people have never had it so good'. Not only this, I will demonstrate that racism was integral to the 'tripartite alliance' that once existed between the state, employers and labour aristocracy at the time, as well as highlighting the role played by racism creating a racialized sub-stratum within the working class in this country. I will also provide an overview of the action-repertoires, ideational perspectives and alliances that were forged in an unwavering commitment to challenging the racism of the 'tripartite alliance' and democratize the British trade union movement. By focussing on the anti-racist, anti-imperialist industrial militancy of Black and Asian workers and their organisations in the Midlands during the 1960s, I will outline an alternative race-attentive history that can inform both our visions for the future and contemporary struggles against racism and racial inequality in a political climate infused by post-colonial melancholia, white nativism and socialist nationalism.

Biography:

Stephen Ashe is a Researcher at the University of Manchester. His primary areas of research included racism, the far right, anti-racism and anti-fascism, institutional whiteness and racial inequality in higher education and workplace racism. His recent publications include *Reframing the 'Left Behind': Race and Class in Post-Brexit Oldham* (co-authored with James Rhodes and Sivamohan Valluvan) and *Racism Ruins Lives: An Analysis of the 2016-2017 Trade Union Congress Racism at Work Survey* (co-authored with Magda Borkowska and James Nazroo). Stephen is currently working towards completing a monograph on, *The Rise and Fall of the British National Party: A Sociological Perspective*,



for the Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right Series, based on his doctoral research. Stephen also has journal articles forthcoming in 2020:

- 'It's the internationalism of the British working class that is on trial': Racism, Class and the industrial insurgency of the Indian Workers Association of Great Britain, 1960-1969 (With Satnam Virdee; and
- Racism, work, hegemony: The racial contract in Brexit Britain.

Amelia Francis, *PhD research at the University of Chichester*

Abstract: "Committed. Black. Woman": A History of Britain's Black Women Radicals from 1965-1985

From 1965 to 1967, a new phase of Black militancy began to emerge in Britain. The call for 'Black Power' mobilised African, Caribbean and Asian youth in Britain to unite and mobilise against the second-class citizenship they experienced. Narratives of the developmental stages of Black Power elude mention of women as key instigators. Further, the 1970 National Women's Liberation Conference in Oxford is regarded as the beginning of the British-based Women's Liberation Movement, yet for those few Black women in attendance, including youth worker and Black activist Gerlin Bean, it was a reminder of the shortfalls of white middle-class, single-issue conceptions of women's liberation. From then onwards, Bean and others began to develop women's caucuses within Black radical organisations.

While there are several works regarding the Black women's movement, it's oftentimes taken out of the context of the wider Black radical movement in which it was entwined. I aim to contribute to the growing body of works regarding Black radical organising in Britain by illuminating the contributions to Black Power, and the development of Black women's autonomous organising, by a generation of politically active women between 1965-85. As I seek to establish a timeline of women's contributions and experiences to Black radical organising across Britain, I am concerned with providing a regionally-balanced study. Therefore, my investigation draws from archived collections of Black radical groups's documents and newsletters housed in archives across Britain. Such material enables a greater understanding of the political climate in which Black women radicals were organising through their own written words. I am also conducting oral history interviews with women who were active in mixed gender Black radical organisations, and/or autonomous Black women's groups. These interviews are vital to establishing the contributions of women who have thus far been under-represented by existent historical work.

Biography:

Amelia Francis is a historian of Black British radical history, currently undertaking PhD research at the University of Chichester on Black women activists in the late Twentieth century in Britain, and Project Coordinator for the Young Historians Project (YHP)

Sue Lemos and Olivia Wyatt, *Young Historians Project (YHP)*

Abstract: Young Historians Project (YHP)

YHP is a non-profit organisation formed by young people of African and Caribbean descent, who aim to encourage the development of young black historians in Britain by producing dynamic, creative projects documenting underrepresented aspects of Black British History.



Our first project documented the history of British-based Black Power group, the Black Liberation Front (BLF). Our members conducted oral history interviews with former BLF members, and carried out extensive research. The result was a documentary film and accompanying exhibition which was toured around schools, youth centres and universities. The interviews and other materials produced during this project were deposited to the Black Cultural Archives.

Our current project is entitled 'A Hidden History: African women and the British Health Service, 1930-2000'. As current narratives on black women in the British health service tend to focus on 'Windrush generation' Caribbean contributions, this project will cover new ground and expand the understanding of this history. YHP is not only exploring African women's contributions within the health sector's workforce, but also their wider experiences and activities in British society. We anticipate producing a short film, an online exhibition, a commemorative mural at Charing Cross hospital, an ebook and podcast series to document our history in the making.

We envision our work as an organisation will inspire more young people of African and Caribbean to undertake history as an academic endeavour, within the community and as a personal hobby.

Biography:

Sue Lemos is member of the Young Historians Project and an ESRC-funded Masters and PhD candidate at the University of Warwick. Her main research interests focus on transnational black radical politics and the politics of race, gender, class and sexuality in twentieth century Britain. Her postgraduate and doctoral research utilises oral history methodology to uncover the 'hidden history' of the black LGBTQ+ movement in Britain, 1980-2000.

Olivia Wyatt is a member of the Young Historians Project and a third-year history undergraduate student at the University of York. Her research interests include representations of Black resistance during Caribbean slavery and Black women's activism in Northern England. She is curating oral histories on Black women's responses to the Chapeltown "riots" and is the co-organiser of 'From Margins to Centre?: An undergraduate conference on marginalised histories.'

Daniel Frost, PhD student at University of Reading

Abstract: 'We're going to do a Special Branch on the Special Branch': Black youth activism in 1980s Croydon

The 1981 death of white teenager Terence May in Thornton Heath, in the midst of reports of racist violence in the area, provoked a rush of comparisons to 'inner city' areas like Brixton, and led to what Martin Kettle described as 'the courtroom equivalent of the Scarman inquiry'. In the aftermath, a group of predominantly young Black people – or people presented as young – from Thornton Heath established, with GLC support, a community centre in a squatted building, Base Uhuru, at 43 Wellesley Road in Croydon town centre. The organisations at the site, the Croydon Black People's Action Committee (CBPAC) and the Police Monitoring Unit, have been little studied but represent an important example of self-organising by young Black people in the early 1980s. As well as the white council and police force, and generally older community relations organisations, CBPAC chafed against even more radical but typically older groups like *Race Today* and the Black Parents' Movement. In contrast with older groups, CBPAC mobilised comparisons with 'inner city' areas like Brixton as a positive, finding in them inspiration for a more confrontational stance with racism in suburban Croydon, and thereby contributed to the changing public perception of Croydon in the 1980s. At the



same time, CBPAC consciously referenced American popular culture and a longer tradition of Black resistance to racism, channelling the excitement generated by the initial occupation but struggling to maintain it in the face of internal divisions and mistakes. Drawing primarily upon GLC and media reports on these organisations as well as the CBPAC newspaper, *The Sniper*, this paper critically reflects on the difficulty of locating the unedited voices of the young Black people involved in both the Croydon 15 trial, the occupation of Base Uhuru, and the establishment of CBPAC and the Police Monitoring Unit.

Biography:

Daniel Frost is a South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership funded PhD student, working on the history of left-wing and community activism in Croydon from 1956 until the 1990s. He is interested in the experience of activism within a 'suburban' or 'new town' context and more broadly the role of place and representations of place in politics, influenced by the work of Raymond Williams and Doreen Massey. His MA research focused upon young people's activism within the township of Ermelo in late-apartheid South Africa, with a particular focus on responses to issues around crime within their communities. Before returning to academia Daniel worked in a south London secondary school, where he became interested in drawing attention to lesser-known histories of activism locally, including by young people. Daniel is supervised by Professor Matthew Worley (University of Reading) and Professor Andrew Thorpe (University of Exeter). In addition to academic work he is a Contributing Editor for *New Socialist* (newsocialist.org.uk), for whom he has written about local government and Britain's spatial politics.

Eshe Kiama Zuri, Jacob Oti-Akenteng & Lisa Robinson, Black Lives Matter Nottingham Activist Group/BLMUK in conversation with movement activists and allies.

In 2014 a small, but nevertheless significant, number of #BlackLivesMatter actions took place in the UK. Activists and protesters were organising under this hashtag but not necessarily as part of an organised movement. Scholars and activists were asking a critical question: 'Is this a moment or is this a movement?' The following year the first 'chapter' of Black Lives Matter UK was formed in Nottingham. The year after this, the Summer of Protest saw thousands of people in cities around the UK take to the streets. Some of these protests, such as the national #Shutdown actions, were organised by young movement leaders; some were not. Numerous accounts of BLMUK actions and activists (with varying degrees of accuracy and insight) have been written about BLMUK by journalists, academics and activists and allies both here and abroad. However, relatively little, outside of social media, has been publicly documented about BLMUK by BLMUK activists. There is a growing urgency for BLMUK activists to set historical records straight, capture our stories, determine our own narratives and identify how and where we archive our living legacies. Reflecting on deep conversations with other movement activists, in this paper BLMUK activists define the UK movement, explore the living legacies of the movement and contemplate the need to preserve our legacies and lessons. Most critically, they begin to consider how and where the legacies and learning might be archived for the benefit of present and future generations of young Black and Asian activists.

Biographies:

Eshe, Jacob and Lisa strategically building with the co-creators of BLMUK and BLMUS. This includes working with BLMUK and the University of Sussex to co-create the UK's first scholar-activism conference "Scholar Activism in the 21st Century (2018) inspired by October Dialogues, Black Lives Matter – Europe's first Black Lives Matter conference organised by Bright Ideas Nottingham and University of Nottingham (2016).



Eshe Kiama Zuri, 23, is a non-binary community organiser, inclusivity trainer and political activist. They are the founder of Notts Activist Wellness, Notts Queer Pride and UK Mutual Aid and co-founder of Vegans of Colour. They also own Yemoja Foods and are newly elected as the youngest Trustee at the Vegan Society.

Jacob Oti-Akenteng, 25, is charity fundraiser and activist-organiser. He is an historian researching black activist movements and resistance in the UK, Africa, the Caribbean and North, South & Central America. They will shortly be embarking on training to become a human rights lawyer.

Lisa J Robinson is a community organiser and founder and director of Bright Ideas Nottingham, a pioneering social enterprise working across diverse communities locally, regionally and nationally. She is a PhD student with Midlands 4 Cities undertaking research on centres of black activism and organising.