A MICRO-HISTORY OF 'BLACK HANDSWORTH':

TOWARDS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF RACE IN BRITAIN

By

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Abstract

This thesis represents an account of the experience of race in contemporary Britain. It adopts a 'micro historical' approach: the focus is on those of African-Caribbean descent in Handsworth, an inner-city area of Birmingham, during the 'long 1980s', defined roughly as the period from the middle of the 1970s to the start of the 1990s. This was a period of heightened racial tension. Popular anxieties about the black inner city were brought to the fore following rioting in 1981 and 1985, after which Handsworth was conceptualised by the media as the 'Front Line' in an ongoing 'war on the streets'. The long 1980s was also a period in which inequalities in housing, unemployment and other areas continued to disproportionately affect black communities in Handsworth. These issues were an important contributing factor to the black experience. However, this thesis argues that the black experience was by no means reducible to them. Race, it is argued, was something that was lived in Handsworth, sometimes in relation racism and inequality, but also in what E. P. Thompson famously argued to be 'the raw material of experience'. Race was a 'structure of feeling' in Handsworth. It meant having to deal with the effects of discrimination or high unemployment, for example, sometimes on a daily basis. But the thesis will show that race was also often re-articulated as a positive identity, and was lived out in routines, traditions, institutions and everyday practices. Taken together, this constituted what can meaningfully be described as a black way of life in Handsworth, something that represents a significant part of the social history of contemporary Britain.

In memory of Kenneth Connell

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List of Abbreviations

ACDL: Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League

ACSHO: African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation

AFFOR: All Faiths for One Race

ANL: Anti-Nazi League

ARC: Asian Resource Centre

AYM: Asian Youth Movement

BAFC: Black Audio Film Collective

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation

BBS: Birmingham Black Sisters

BMAG: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

CCCS: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

CRC: Community Relations Council

FCF: Faith and Confidence Finance

GLC: Greater London Council

HCTP: Handsworth Community Theatre Project

HLC: Handsworth Law Centre

IRR: Institute of Race Relations

IWA: Indian Workers' Association

NF: National Front

RAR: Rock Against Racism

WELD: Westminster Endeavour for Liaison and Development

WMCC: West Midlands County Council

Introduction

In 1987, after a series of riots had helped to establish the notoriety of Handsworth, an inner-city area of Birmingham, Maxine Walker, a black photographer and local resident, produced a collection of images entitled *Aunty Linda's Front Room*. The photographs featured various members of Walker's family posing in their front rooms, and provided a striking contrast to the scenes of violence and disorder that in many ways characterised Handsworth – particularly in the mainstream media – following riots in 1981 and 1985. Rather than showing disturbances on Handsworth's streets, the photographs captured scenes of domesticity. They featured family members posing next to particular items in the front room – china ornaments, religious iconography and patterned wallpaper. The black subjects of each frame appear not as violent aggressors but as mothers, fathers and aunties (*plate 1.0*).

Walker's photographs allude to the overarching argument made in this thesis. That is, there existed a discernibly black way of life in places like Handsworth, something that was lived in ordinary ways, alongside the racial tensions and disturbances in inner-city areas during the 1980s. Although there are parallels with other migrant and working-class communities, the front room as captured by Walker was something that was specifically black. This was made apparent in the 2005 exhibition, *The West Indian Front Room*. The exhibition, which was curated by the writer Michael McMillan and held at the Geffrye Museum of the Home in London, featured images taken by Walker and other photographers, as well as physical re-creations of the front room, which McMillan constructed by borrowing objects from friends and family (*plate 1.0*). The reaction of visitors was striking. The exhibition provoked 'emotional responses', McMillan recalled, triggering 'a kaleidoscope of memories in a sensorial landscape of sounds, sights, tastes,

joys and pain'.[1] On Blacknet, an African-Caribbean social networking website, users reminisced about their memories of particular items in the front room, from 'velvet wallpaper' and a 'colourful selection of fake flowers' to a 'gaudy portrait of a blonde, blue eyed Jesus Christ'.[2] One visitor to the exhibition reflected that it brought back 'a lot of memories of our front room…in Handsworth. My mom had the same coffee table. The China Cabinet with glasses she still has to this day'.[3]

This thesis argues that the front room was part of a much broader black way of life in contemporary Britain, and that this was manifest in a range of ordinary activities, relationships and institutions. The thesis is an account of this way of life. Its focus is on those of African-Caribbean descent in Handsworth, a district three miles to the north of Birmingham's city centre, during the 'long 1980s', defined roughly as the period from the mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1990s.

Both historians and sociologists have largely explored 'race' in Britain in an earlier period, and the focus has often been on the process of migration and settlement of first black and then south-Asian immigrants in districts such as Handsworth. The emphasis has generally been on uncovering the degree of inequality faced by these immigrants on arrival into Britain, rather than the everyday activities that black communities developed. Race is seldom understood as anything other than the relationship between black migrants and the 'host society' − the prevalence and changing nature of racism in Britain, for instance; hostility in the media and amongst some politicians, and the fundamentally uneven access of migrants to employment and suitable housing.

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[1] M. McMillan, 'Migrant Aesthetics in the Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009). p. 10.
[2] User on Blacknet forum, from internet source: http://www.bnvillage.co.uk/village-square/79543-west-indian-front-room.html (accessed 28 July 2011).
[3] A. C. Francis-Bethel, cited from internet source: http://www.studio-international.co.uk/photo/west_indian_front_room.asp (accessed 28 July 2011).

In different forms, these are issues that continued to impact black communities well into the long 1980s, a point illustrated by the resurgence of the far right National Front in the 1970s and the continuing prevalence of deprivation and high unemployment in inner-city areas like Handsworth. However, the relationship between black communities and forms of inequality, it is argued, was only one part of the black experience. By the long 1980s, this experience encompassed many other relationships. In spite of the uneven structures, people did find work, set up homes and, as Walker's photographs show, decorate them in a particular way. People developed routines, associations, political organisations and leisure institutions that, taken together, make a way of life. The central aim of this thesis is to document the nature of this way of life in the context of 'black Handsworth' in the long 1980s.

The thesis therefore represents a point of departure from existing histories of race in Britain. Rather than defining race solely in relation to forms of racism and economic and social inequality, the argument is that it was also experienced. That is, race was lived, sometimes in relation to racism and inequality, but also in what E. P. Thompson famously argued to be 'the raw material of experience'. [4] Just as Thompson demonstrated that class was embedded in people and in their social organisations, this thesis will explore the various ways in which race too was lived through 'traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms'. [5] Race meant having to deal with the effects of discrimination or high unemployment, for example, sometimes on a daily basis. But race was also often re-articulated as a positive identity, and was lived out in Handsworth in a variety of ways. In Raymond Williams' terms, race was a 'structure of feeling' in Handsworth. It was a 'common experience' that was present in people's outlooks,

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[4] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 8.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 9.

identities and associations, in forms of politics and in everyday cultures.[6] To apply the concepts of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, race was a 'habitus' that was manifest in people's everyday 'practice'. Race was 'actively' lived and felt in Handsworth; in sum, it was a 'whole way of living'.[7]

This introduction will elaborate these themes in greater detail. It will begin with an overview of the way in which black Handsworth has commonly been defined in external narratives: first, in the media, which articulated various anxieties about the black inner city, and second, in the numerous sociological investigations to have been conducted in the area. The approach taken in many of these investigations, it is argued, is emblematic of a more general approach taken in both sociologies and histories of race in Britain, in which the object of study is often not race, but rac*ism* or the impact of various structural inequalities on black communities. These were undoubtedly crucial factors in the experience of race. However, as the introduction will then move on to show, the notion of a 'structure of feeling' will allow the thesis to move towards an understanding of race as a social entity in a much broader sense. This theoretical discussion is followed by an assessment of the methodological issues relating to the location of sources and the reasons for the 'micro-historical' approach adopted, and finally, an overview of the overall structure of the thesis.

External definitions

Immigration has long been an important factor in the social make-up of Birmingham. A significant Jewish community has been evolving in the city since as early as 1730, the 'ubiquitous' Irish have been present in 'considerable numbers' since the early nineteenth

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[6] R. Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 18.
[7] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters: interviews with the New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979), p. 159.

century,[8] and the same period also witnessed significant migration from mainland Europe, particularly from Italy.[9] A small black presence was also recorded before the First World War,[10] and the first Asian community consisted of Yemani men who had arrived into Britain on merchant ships during the 1930s.[11] It was following the 1948 Nationality Act, however, which formally granted UK citizenship to all citizens of Britain's current and former colonies, that first Caribbean and then south-Asian immigrants began arriving in significant numbers.[12] These were economic migrants sought by the Government to help rebuild British infrastructure after the Second World War, but Britain also held a particular attraction for many migrants. Apart from high unemployment and a rising cost of living in the Caribbean and south-Asia – as well as the passing of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which restricted immigration into the United States, including from the Caribbean – the continuing presence of what remained in effect an Imperial education system in some countries meant that many migrants also maintained a strong emotional attachment to what was considered to be the 'Mother Country'.[13]

Nationally, by 1966 there were 267,900 people from the Caribbean and 231,300 people from India and Pakistan in the UK,[14] with two million black people living in Britain almost a decade later.[15] As John Solomos argues, the increase in black immigration from the so-called 'New Commonwealth' in this period led to the 'racialisation' of debates around immigration in Britain, with 'immigration *per se*'

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[8] R. Woods, 'Ethnic Segregation in Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2: 4, 1979. p. 455. By the 1960s those born in Ireland represented five per cent of Birmingham's population

[9] M. Dilloway, *Bella Brum: a history of Birmingham's Italian community* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1996).

[10] M. Dick, 'Locality and Diversity: minority ethnic communities in the writing of Birmingham's history', in C. Dyer *et al* (eds.), *New Directions in Local History Since Hoskins* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011), p. 86.

[11] M. Dick, 'Yemanis: the Yemani community', in M. A. Chisti (ed.), *Lok Virsa, Cultural Voyage: exploring the Muslim heritage* (Studley: Brewin Books, 2008), pp. 48-50.

[12] See P. Fryer, *Staying Power* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 372-374

[13] See various oral testimony in P. Edmead, *The Divisive Decade: a history of Caribbean Immigration to Birmingham in the 1950s* (Birmingham: Birmingham Library Services, 1999).

[14] E.J.B. Rose & N. Deakin, *Colour and Citizenship: a report on British race relations* (London: OUP, 1969), p. 97.

[15] P. Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 387.

becoming 'inextricably linked to black immigration'.[16] For a range of reasons, including the location of labour and the often-discriminatory practices of employment and housing agencies,[17] these migrants generally settled in areas such as Brixton in London, St Paul's in Bristol, Moss Side in Manchester and Handsworth in Birmingham. In 1951 fewer than 5,000 'New Commonwealth' immigrants resided in Birmingham, but by 1971 there were 68,000.[18] In Handsworth, in 1961 there were 2,926 local residents who were born in the New Commonwealth, with the number reaching 27,771 a decade later.[19] By 1981, 42 per cent of all households were headed by people born in the New Commonwealth, as opposed to just nine per cent in Birmingham as a whole.[20] Four years later, 58 per cent of the Handsworth population were of African-Caribbean or south-Asian origin, with a large number having been born in Britain.[21] This was the 'largest single concentration of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain'.[22]

The nature of Handsworth's 'blackness', however, was commonly defined in external narratives: by visiting politicians, academics and in the first instance, by the media. Almost as soon as black migrants began settling in the area, the local press emphasised the potential threat posed by Handsworth's black population. In 1959, for

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[16] J. Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 40. The 'Old Commonwealth' commonly refers to members with predominately white populations, such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The 'New Commonwealth' generally refers to the members in Africa, the Caribbean and south Asia.

[17] See A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State: the black experience in Britain', *Race and Class*, XVII, 1976, p.349.

[18] P. Ratcliffe, *Racism and Reaction: a profile of Handsworth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 8.

[19] *Ibid*., pp. 50-51.

[20] Birmingham Development Council/Birmingham City Council, *Handsworth/Soho/Lozells: inner area study 1985/6* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1986), p. 11,

[21] R. Bhavnani, *et al; A Different Reality: An Account of Black People's Experiences and their Grievances Before and After the Handsworth Rebellion of September 1995* (Birmingham: West Midlands County Council, 1986, p. 22.

[22] F. Dennis, 'Birmingham: Blades of Frustration', in K. Owusu (ed.), *Black British Culture and Society: a text reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.184.

example, one local newspaper described the area as a 'Little Harlem',[23] whilst a 1967 article in the *Birmingham Post* warned that 'racial riots could be the price of ignoring [the] immigrant problem' in what was now perceived to be 'the colour capital of Birmingham today'.[24] Predictions of the supposedly bleak future facing Handsworth as a result of its increasing black population were widespread. In 1977, Frederick Whitehead, a columnist in the *Birmingham Post* and a former Handsworth resident, used almost apocalyptic language. 'The tree lined street where I used to live,' he wrote, had become 'an alley of putrefaction':

> Many of its houses are pustules of social profanity, its gutters gather the jetsam of decay and the faces of the alien people who live there are a fretwork of sullen resignation. Handsworth 1977 has had its corporate entrails ripped out, the skeleton of its old order rattled to destruction and many of its streets overwhelmed by a typhoon of immigration that no area, outside the dream world of politicians who do not live there, could withstand.[25]

The onset of social unrest on a large scale in Handsworth during the 1980s was for many a confirmation of the legitimacy of such anxieties, the common undercurrent of which often related to race.

Together with unrest in Tottenham and Brixton, the 1985 Handsworth riots – which resulted in 122 injuries, an estimated £15million of damage to property, and the deaths of two members of the public[26] – were referred to by the then Metropolitan Police Chief Sir Kenneth Newman as 'the worst rioting ever seen on the mainland'.[27] The events, which took place on a considerably larger scale than the riots of 1981 and unlike

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[23] Anonymous author, 'The "Little Harlems" Must Go', *Evening Dispatch*, 22 February 1955. Birmingham Newspaper Cuttings, Ethnic Communities File 1954-1968, Birmingham Central Library, p. 3 (pages given in local newspaper references refer to the sequence in which they appear in the archival file).
[24] Anonymous author, 'Racial Riots Could be the Price of Ignoring Immigrant Problem', *Birmingham Post*, 31 August 1967. Birmingham Newspaper Cuttings, Ethnic Communities, 1954-1968, Birmingham Central Library, page not marked.
[25] F. Whitehead, 'The Stark Truth on Handsworth', *Birmingham Post*, 30 November 1977. Newspaper Cuttings, Handsworth and Handsworth Wood, Dec 1963-Dec 2004, Birmingham Central Library, p. 14.
[26] See police report into the riots: G. Dear/West Midlands Police, *Handsworth/Lozells September 1985* (Birmingham: West Midlands Police, 1985), pp. 48-49.
[27] Cited in A. Sivanandan, 'UK Commentary – Britain's Gulags' in *Race & Class*, 27, 1986, p. 81.

this earlier unrest, were limited in Birmingham specifically to the Handsworth area, were widely conceptualised as race riots. Almost immediately, they became the central component of the way in which the district was defined externally, not just locally but nationally. To Nicholas Fairbairn, for example, the Conservative MP for Perth and Kinross in Scotland, the reasons for what had happened were simple: 'the West Indians are lazy, the Asians are enterprising…the West Indians are jealous of the Asians'.[28] The national media placed the events in the context of previous warnings about the supposed dangers of allowing too much black immigration into Handsworth. Handsworth became characterised as the 'Front Line' in a 'war' between police and the 'gangs of West Indian…youths' who were 'grouped at every corner'.[29] After the first day's unrest in Handsworth on the 9th of September, an editorial in the West Midlands-based *Express and Star* encapsulated the media's prevalent narrative with a question to its readers: did they want 'the police [to] operate a different law in Handsworth which will allow blacks and Asians to behave in a way in which people would not be allowed to behave in other areas?'[30]

Alongside the media's focus on the area, Handsworth's 'blackness' was also defined externally by an increasing number of academics who visited the area in order to find answers to what was characterised as Britain's 'immigrant' or 'racial' question. The emphasis here was not on articulating the perceived threat posed by Handsworth's black population, but on uncovering the structural inequalities faced by black immigrants in their access to suitable housing or employment. In 1969, for example, the Runnymede Trust commissioned the Grenadian researcher Augustine John to produce a 'guide to the

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[28] Cited in See R. Bhavnani, *et al; A Different Reality*, p. 13.
[29] C. Gysin, 'War on the Streets', the *Mirror*, 11 September 1985, p 1.
[30] Editorial, *Express & Star,* 10 September 1985, p. 14.

landscape' in Handsworth.[31] What followed was *Race in the Inner City*, in which John

highlighted the effects of a culturally insensitive education system, high unemployment

rates and a 'perennial lack of basic resources and amenities' as contributing towards a

general sense amongst the black population in Handsworth of being '*de facto* second-

class citizens'.[32] In the mid-1970s, academics in the Department of Sociology at the

University of Warwick undertook an extensive research project in Handsworth, resulting

in two voluminous surveys of the 'British race relations scene'.[33] Peter Ratcliffe's

Racism and Reaction (1981) was a largely empirical analysis of themes such as the

employment status of black communities, and mapped what was described as a 'sub-

market' of low skilled work which black immigrants were often forced to take.[34] John

Rex and Sally Tomlinson's *Colonial Immigrants in a British City* (1979) was a more

theoretically sophisticated critique of the same survey-based evidence, and built on Rex's

earlier emphasis on the centrality of housing.[35] The scale of uneven access to housing in

Handsworth was so extensive, it was argued, that the black population had become 'in

effect a separate underprivileged class' – what the authors termed 'the housing class'.[36]

As well as academics, during the 1970s postgraduate students began undertaking

investigations into Handsworth.   These were largely concerned with a specific

sociological issue such as, for example, the problem of homelessness amongst black

youth,[37] or the growing number of single mothers in the area.[38] Towards the end of the

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[31] D. Nandy, director of the Runnymede Trust, in A. John, *Race in the Inner City: a report from Handsworth, Birmingham* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1970), p. 7.
[32] A. John, *Race in the Inner City*, *p*. 34.
[33] P. Ratcliffe, *Racism and Reaction*, p. 1.
[34] *Ibid*., pp. 219-221.
[35] See J. Rex & R. Moore, *Race, Community, and Conflict : a study of Sparkbrook* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).
[36] J. Rex & S. Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 275. The notion of the 'housing class' was first articulated in J. Rex & R. Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict: a study of Sparkbrook* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).
[37] B. I. Henry, *Homelessness and a Particular Response Amongst Young West Indians in Handsworth, Birmingham* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1974).

decade, in the context of rising crime rates, the police also began to take an academic interest in Handsworth. In 1977 John Brown, a researcher with close links to the police,[39] was commissioned to write a report on 'police-West Indian relations'. The ensuing *Shades of Grey*, in which Brown presents a view of the situation from the point of view of the police, attributed the crime levels to a group of 'hard core' black youth,[40] and the report served to increase anxieties about black Handsworth in the local media.[41]

By the start of the 1980s, the level of external attention that Handsworth was receiving – from both the media and academics – was such that one local minister was moved to place a sign outside his church reminding passers-by that 'Handsworth is not a zoo'.[42] Yet the rioting in 1981 and 1985 increased external attention on the area still further. Alongside reports undertaken by the probation service,[43] police,[44] council and government,[45] there was an investigation undertaken by John Gaffney, an academic in the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (founded by Rex at Warwick),[46] and an 'Independent Black Inquiry', conducted by a panel that included the cultural theorist Stuart Hall and his then Ph.D student, Paul Gilroy. The black inquiry made it clear what

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[38] P. Davies, *Trapped! Unmarried West Indian Mothers in Handsworth* (Birmingham: Westhill College, c. 1975).

[39] P. Gilroy, 'Police and Thieves', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 160-161. For Brown's observations about the West Indian family, see J. Brown, *Shades of Grey*, p. 11.

[40] J. Brown, *Shades of Grey: police-West Indian relations in Handsworth* (Cranfield: Cranfield Institute of Technology, 1977), p. 3.

[41] See, for example, F. Whitehead, 'The Stark Truth on Handsworth', *Birmingham Post*, 30 November 1977. Newspaper Cuttings, Handsworth and Handsworth Wood, Dec 1963-Dec 2004, Birmingham Central Library, p. 14.

[42] Cited in D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p. 101.

[43] West Midlands Probation Service, *After the Disturbances: not back to normal. A report of the West Midlands Probation Service following the Lozells and Handsworth disturbances of September 1985* (Birmingham: West Midlands Probation Service, 1986).

[44] G. Dear, *Handsworth/Lozells September 1985* (Birmingham: West Midlands Police, 1985).

[45] For the council report into the same events see J. Silverman, *The Handsworth Riots, 9, 10, 11 September: a report of an inquiry of Julius Silverman presented to Birmingham City Council* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1986). For the Government-commissioned report into the 1981 riots, see P. Southgate, 'The Disturbances of July 1981 in Handsworth, Birmingham: a survey of the views and experiences of male residents', in S. Field & P. Southgate, *Public Disorder: a review of research and a study in one particular area* (London: HMSO, 1982).

[46] J. Gaffney, *Interpretations of Violence: the Handsworth riots of 1985* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1987).

they saw as the reasons for the unrest. It was noted that 70 per cent of the Handsworth area was 'extremely deprived', whilst 49 per cent of black households lived in overcrowded conditions.[47] The authors argued that the area was a 'stunning portrait of extensive social, environmental and economic deprivation', and proclaimed: 'racism makes that misery for black people even worse'.[48] The black experience in Handsworth, the report stated, was an 'experience of relative poverty, institutionalised discrimination, denied opportunity, denigrated pride, devalued culture and state harassment. It is an experience that is real and cannot be denied or wished away'.[49]

Handsworth was the subject of over a dozen investigations over a period of fifteen years.[50] The investigations by John, Rex and the 'Independent Black Inquiry' in particular were in many ways indicative of a more general approach to the subject of race in contemporary Britain. Race was commonly defined either in relation to forms of rac*ism*, or in relation to poverty and the continuing impact of structural inequality in inner-city areas. This is illustrated by a number of distinct – if sometimes related – approaches.

First, the work produced by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) has at different times defined race in relation to structural inequality and racism. The IRR was established in 1958 by a group of former colonial civil servants and, following the Nottingham and Notting Hill riots in the same year,[51] it commissioned numerous

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[47] R. Bhavnani *et al*, *A Different Reality*, p. 21.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Those that have not already been cited are: AFFOR/Green, C., *Talking Blues;* AFFOR/Jamdagni, L., Phillips-Bell M. & Ward, J., *Talking Chalk: black pupils, parents and teachers speak about education* (Birmingham: AFFOR, 198; Birmingham Area Studies Group, *Handsworth/Soho/Lozells: Inner Area Study 1985/6* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1986); Brown, J., *Policing by Multi-Racial Consent: the Handsworth experience* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1982; Dept. of Trade & Industry, *The Government's Handsworth Task Force: An Evaluation Report* (London: Dept for Trade & Industry, 1989); John A. & Humphry, D., *Because They're Black* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Weaver, G., 'Political Groups and Young Blacks in Handsworth', Faculty of Commerce and Social Science discussion paper, University of Birmingham, Series C, 38, 1980.
[51] A. Sivanandan, 'Race and Resistance: the IRR story', in *Race & Class*, 50: 2, 2008, p. 3.

statistical surveys that attempted to establish the nature of the main areas of black settlement. These surveys outlined the 'demographic scene' in areas of black settlement, and focused – like John, Rex and others in Handsworth – on a lack of quality housing, overcrowding and unemployment.[52] In 1972, however, a radical group led by its librarian Ambalavaner Sivanandan usurped the IRR's establishment, and denounced its methods as invasive and patronising. The emphasis shifted to a class-based approach, with the aim being to form a 'reappraisal of the whole of society, its value systems and its political and economic structure'.[53] The IRR began to focus on the 'economic level' and the 'level of productive forces',[54] and took an active role in contemporary anti-racist campaigns. If the IRR before 1972 had focused on uncovering, through a rigorous, survey-based approach, structural inequality in areas of black settlement, after 1972 the object became 'white society',[55] racism, 'and its begetter, imperialism'.[56]

Second, running parallel to the approach of the IRR in its radical guise was a body of work that attempted to examine race through the prism of culture. This generally also maintained a Marxist influence, but as Sivanandan himself observed – critically – this was increasingly manifest through an engagement with the work of continental Marxist theorists such as Gramsci and Althusser, which were only beginning to be published in English.[57] The key publications in this tradition mostly emanate from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and followed the appointment of Stuart Hall as director in 1968. On one level, the aim of this approach was to shed light

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[52] Perhaps the most famous example of this IRR approach is E. J. B. Rose & N. Deakin, *Colour and Citizenship: a report on British Race Relations* (London: Oxford University Press/IRR, 1969).
[53] A. Sivanandan, 'Race and Resistance: the IRR story', p. 3.
[54] A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: writings on black struggles for socialism* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 23.
[55] See A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Class and the State: the black experience in Britain', in A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p. 102. & K. Owusu, 'The Struggle for a Radical Black Political Culture: an interview with A. Sivanandan', in K. Owusu (ed.), *Black British Culture and Society: a text reader* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 419.
[56] A. Sivanandan, 'Race and Resistance: the IRR story', p. 28.
[57] A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance*, p. 23.

on the ways in which race was culturally expressed, particularly amongst a young black generation in Britain. Within the seminal analyses on subcultures, for example, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: the meaning of style* (1979) highlighted the way in which a loose embrace of Rastafarianism amongst young black Britons led to the development of a particularly black style and music scene, manifest in activities such as the growing of hair into dreadlocks or the purchasing of imported Jamaican reggae music.

Yet these were not treated as cultural expressions in their own right, and were only understood in relation to broader, structural themes. Thus for Hebdige, the emergence of a 'Rasta' style was defined on the one hand as a way of 'refracting the system of black and white polarities [and] turning negritude into a positive sign'[58] and, on the other, as a means of expressing 'unequivocally the alienation felt by many young black Britons' as a result of 'bad housing, unemployment and police harassment'.[59] In other words, race was again defined in relation to racism and inequality. Similar themes were present in other works on race produced at the CCCS. *Policing the Crisis* (1978), for example, was provoked by the arrest and subsequent sentencing to an unprecedented twenty years in prison of a black youth following a 'mugging' in Handsworth. It documented what became a highly racialised moral panic regarding the black inner city nationwide. But, rather than question the extent to which this impacted on the experience of what is termed the 'black proletariat', the emphasis was instead on deconstructing how and why the perception of black crime in the inner city generated such anxiety in Britain. Again, the focus was not on race but rather – in a complex and often highly sophisticated analysis – on unpicking the ideological effects of the breakdown in the post-war consensus, what was termed the 'crisis in hegemony' and the onset of the 'law-and-order society'.[60]

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[58] D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 37.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[60] See parts three amd four of S. Hall *et al*, *Policing the Crisis: mugging, the state and law and order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

Finally, amongst historians, the focus has largely been on exploring the changing manifestations of racism in different historical contexts. Politically, for example, a central theme has been the attempt to highlight the reasons for a series of racialised immigration policies in Britain from the 1960s that were particularly aimed at limiting the entry of black and Asian immigrants from the former colonies. Solomos' *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain*, for instance, one of the foundational introductions to the subject,[61] highlighted two key turning points: the 1964 by-election in multi-racial Smethwick – a district adjoining Handsworth – in which the Conservative candidate Peter Griffiths won with the unofficial election slogan, 'if you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour', and Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech, made in Birmingham in 1968. Both events, Solomos argued, acted as important contributory factors to the passing of the Conservative Government's 1971 Immigration Act, which required all Commonwealth citizens to obtain a work-permit in order to enter Britain.[62]

Alongside this, historians have also worked to problematize the changing nature of 'racisms' in Britain at a social level.[63] Historians have shown how, particularly in an earlier period of immigration into Britain, conceptions of race were often combined with prejudices against ethnicities, religions and nationalities. Panikos Panayi, for example, highlighted the forms of hostility faced by German communities in Britain during the First World War, from 'witch-hunts' to boycotts, on a scale, he argues, that 'few immigrant communities in Britain have experienced'.[64] In *We Europeans?*, Tony Kushner documented the presence of a multiplicity of 'racisms' in the inter-war period,

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[61] Solomos' book has been reprinted three times: J. Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989; 1993; 2003).
[62] J. Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 56-58.
[63] For an argument in favour of the plural use of the term, see T. Kushner, 'Remembering to Forget: racism and anti-racism in postwar Britain', in B. Cheyette & L. Marcus (eds.), *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew"* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), p. 237.
[64] P. Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1991), p. 1.

both in terms of casual or verbal abuse and acts of violence, often against 'white' populations such as the Jewish and Italian communities.[65]

In a sense, therefore, in both sociological and historical approaches to race in contemporary Britain, the primary subject of study is in fact not race at all. Rather, it is – variously – inequalities in housing or unemployment, changes at the economic 'base', the breakdown in the post-war consensus or the shifting nature of racial discrimination. As Geoff Eley recently put it, there is the general sense that race is always about 'something else'. [66]

Structures of Feeling

This thesis argues that whilst undoubtedly influenced by the themes of racism, inequality and poverty, the black experience in Handsworth was by no means reducible to them. The attempt is to provide a fuller account of the ways in which race was experienced in Handsworth, and articulate race as a 'structure of feeling'. Raymond Williams coined the term in 1954 in an essay on film and the dramatic tradition,[67] but expanded on it throughout his career to encapsulate a broader analysis of culture and society, and the term remains one of Williams's 'most characteristic concepts'. [68] Writing in 1977, Williams defined a structure of feeling as a way of understanding a 'social experience' that was discernibly common to a particular group or section of society at a given time.[69] As Williams has admitted, the term is 'deliberately contradictory'.[70] On the one hand,

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[65] See T. Kushner, *We Europeans?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).
[66] G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race": migrancy, cultural difference and the remaking of Europe', in R. Chin *et al* (eds.), *After the Nazi Racial State: difference and democracy in Germany and Europe* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2009), p. 173.
[67] This is pointed out by John Higgins in his introduction to Williams's work, *Raymond Williams: literature, Marxism and cultural materialism* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 37. See M. Orrom & R. Williams, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954).
[68] J. Higgins, *Raymond Williams: literature, Marxism and cultural materialism* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 37.
[69] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 131.
[70] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.

'feeling' alludes to something elusive, a form of consciousness, or as Williams puts it, 'impulses, restraints [and] tones'.[71] But on the other hand, 'structure' implies that this is something knowable. It is a 'pattern' or a 'set, with specific, internal relations',[72] something that it is possible to 'perceive operating'.[73] For Williams, it is culture in its widest sense – as a 'whole way of life'[74] – that best reflects a particular structure of feeling. This might be influenced by external discourses, what Williams terms 'the official consciousness of an epoch…its doctrines and legislation'.[75] In the context of race in the long 1980s, this could be the presence of racialised immigration acts or the permeation of racialised discourses in the mainstream media. But a structure of feeling is also something separate from such 'consciousness'. It is a 'whole process of living':[76] it is meanings and values 'as they are actively lived and felt'.[77]

This thesis provides a re-engagement with Williams, and this is indicative of a more general objective: to articulate an account of race that is social in the broadest sense of the word. The appearance of Williams' *Culture and Society* in 1958 and *The Long Revolution* in 1961 helped stimulate the project of 'people's history' or 'history from below', which Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is only the most famous example. In these accounts class, and later gender, were conceptualised generally in terms of the ways in which ordinary people dealt with the reality of their position in society – whether ultimately determined by the effects of capitalism or patriarchy – in their everyday lives. The boundary between history and anthropology became less clearly

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[71] *Ibid*.
[72] *Ibid*. See also R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.
[73] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.
[74] R. Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 18.
[75] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.
[76] *Ibid*.
[77] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

defined, and historians began exploring the ways in which class and gender were manifest in people's shared histories, forms of politics, consciousness and everyday experience.[78]

Academics have been reluctant to develop an understanding of race as a social experience in a manner similar to class and gender. Indeed, a number of scholars have devoted considerable space to arguing that the term 'race' should not be used at all. David Theo Goldberg, for example, shows how definitions of race are not fixed in racist discourses but are changeable, something that, he argues, means that race is 'by nature (insofar as it has one) a concept virtually vacuous in its own right'.[79] Similarly, whilst Robert Miles argues for the analytical validity of an ideological 'racism', race is regarded as something that 'has no objective reality'.[80] Its 'scientific' basis having been fundamentally disproven, race 'in reality…does not do anything (or have any consequences)'.[81] As a social construct and something that is 'socially imagined',[82] the term is 'no more than [an] idea'.[83] Academics who continue to deploy the concept 'have, perversely, prolonged the life of an idea that should be explicitly and consistently consigned to the dustbin of analytically useless terms'.[84]

Geoff Eley attributes both this opposition to the use of race – and the failure to properly engage with it already outlined – in part to the collective trauma of a generation as the scale of the atrocities during the Second World War became apparent.[85] Eley, writing in a 2009 essay on the discourses of race in the western European context, concludes by suggesting the need for a re-engagement with the concept of race. It is possible, Eley contends, to fully accept that race is something that is socially 'imagined'

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[78] For a useful overview of these processes amongst historians, see G. Eley, *A Crooked Line: from cultural history to the history of society* (London: University of Michigan, 2005), p. 56.
[79] D. T. Goldberg, *Racist Culture: philosophy and the politics of meaning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 210.
[80] R. Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 43.
[81] *Ibid*.
[82] R. Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 71.
[83] R. Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour*, p. 43.
[84] R. Miles, *Racism*, p. 72.
[85] G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race"', pp. 173-177.

whilst at the same time being able to recognise that this also 'creates places where in practice, with varying degrees of awareness, members of a society have perforce to dwell'.[86] Race is a social construct but it can also, Eley suggests, possesses 'entirely "real" forms of social, cultural, and practical existence'.[87]

Earlier debates around the concept of ethnicity have produced a similar emphasis. Tariq Modood, for example, stresses a definition of ethnicity that is also rooted in experience. Ethnicity is seen as a 'mode of being' made up of 'real collectivities, common and distinctive forms of thinking and behaviour, language, custom [and] religion', none of which can adequately be understood in relation to forms of oppression.[88] Although Eley does not discuss ethnicity directly, it seems clear that his conception of race as a practical and social reality includes aspects of ethnicity, but also goes beyond them. Race is seen as something far broader, as a 'social formation' that is manifest not only in language or religion, but also as a 'real social topography: forms of everydayness, actually existing patterns of organised community, an entire architecture of common belonging'.[89] Through its re-engagement with the work of Williams this thesis will attempt to show that in the long 1980s, race was something that was 'actively' lived, felt and above all experienced. It was manifest in tastes, aesthetics and fashions, in forms of politics and community associations, and in everyday social and cultural activities.

The focus in this thesis on the 'long 1980s' is critical to the exploration of these themes. The period between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s was discernably an era of heightened racial tension. In many ways, the real effects of both Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech and the 'mugging panic' highlighted by Hall and his colleagues

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[86] G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race"', p. 176.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[88] T. Modood, 'If Races Do Not Exist, Then What Does? Racial Categorisation and Ethnic Realities', in T. Modood, *Multicultural politics: racism, ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 51. The essay was first printed in R. Barot (ed.), *The Racism Problematic: contemporary sociological debates on race and ethnicity* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996).
[89] G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race"', p. 167 & 176.

at the CCCS in *Policing the Crisis*,[90] only began to be felt in the long 1980s. For Martin Barker, the idea that black immigration represented a threat to the 'British character' has been 'a central weapon in the Tory armoury' since the early 1970s.[91] But it was heightened following the election of the Conservative Government in 1979. As Hall and Jacques argue, the Thatcher political project elaborated many of the connections that Powell had established between 'images of the nation, the British people' and the supposed threat posed by immigrants to, as Thatcher put it, 'the British character'.[92] For Anna Marie Smith, it was 'racial antagonism' during the Thatcher period that 'operated as the key which made the disintegration of the nation…intelligible'.[93]

In many ways, this might be regarded as the dominant structure of feeling on race in the period. Race, as Smith puts it, was 're-coded' during the long 1980s, and became intimately connected with anxieties regarding 'crime wars, law and order, inner-city unrest' and the possible 'revival of British "greatness"'.[94] Within the Conservative Party, such ideas were widely articulated in the right-wing journal the *Salisbury Review*, founded in 1982,[95] as well is in mainstream media outlets like the *Daily Mail*.[96] In Government, they were reflected in the passing of legislation such as the 1981 British Nationality Act, which redefined British citizenship and, in the process, severely curtailed the right of entry into Britain of New Commonwealth immigrants.[97] Smith even argues

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[90] S. Hall, 'A Torpedo Aimed at the Boiler Room of Consensus', *New Statesman*, 17 April, 1998. Cited in G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race"', p. 237.

[91] M. Barker, *The New Racism*: *conservatives and the ideology of the tribe* (London: Junction Books, 1981), p. 15.

[92] S. Hall & M. Jacques (eds.), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London : Lawrence and Wishart in association with Marxism Today, 1983), p.38. Thatcher quote comes from a speech she made on immigration in January 1978 – cited in M. Barker, *The New Racism*, p. 15.

[93] A. M. Smith, *New Right Discourses on Race and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8.

[94] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[95] See R. Scruton (ed.), *Conservative Thoughts: essays from The Salisbury Review* (London: Claridge, 1988).

[96] M. Barker, *The New Racism*, p. 15.

[97] E. H. H. Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 131.

the invasion of the Falklands in 1982 was an important manifestation of what she terms the 'Powellian legacy of guilt-free British nationalism'.[98]

The centrality of race within political discourse in the period has therefore been well-documented. However, more importantly for the direction of this thesis, the mid-1970s onwards also witnessed a number of significant developments within black inner-city areas. In spite of the prominence of increasingly hostile external discourses, black communities had by this period become permanently established. Although a gradual process, any lingering aspirations of first-generation migrants to one day return 'home', for example, were largely dispelled.[99] Partly as a result of this, the long 1980s was a period of significant variety within both political and cultural life.

Politically, it was from the mid-1970s onwards that a young black generation came of age. In Handsworth, self-help groups such as the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACHSO) that had been formed in the 1960s by the first generation of migrants, worked alongside organisations like Birmingham Black Sisters, which were established by the generation born in Britain. The long 1980s was therefore the first period in which competing aims and ideologies of black groups in Britain were often manifest along generational lines. As well as this, black leisure institutions such as blues dances, dominoes leagues and cricket clubs that were predominately established by an older generation, co-existed alongside the formation of a younger generation's British reggae scene, perhaps symbolically marked by the release in 1978 of the Handsworth-based Steel Pulse's debut album, *Handsworth Revolution*.

Furthermore, as Kwesi Owusu shows, partly influenced by a growing tendency for local councils to fund black artists in the 1980s, this was also the first period in which a

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[98] A. M. Smith, *New Right Discourses on Race and Sexuality* p. 9.
[99] See Stuart Hall testimony in M Phillips & T. Phillips, *Windrush: the irresistible rise of multi-racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 139.

discernibly black arts scene emerged in Britain.[100] In Handsworth, this included artists such as the documentary photographers Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar, the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, dance groups, theatre companies and various writers and novelists. Although many of these artists continued into the 1990s and beyond, it was the 1980s – as one Handsworth arts magazine reflected in 1992 – that was the 'critical decade'.[101] The work of these individuals, groups and institutions – and the themes of leisure, the political and the cultural – will form a central part of this thesis. Alongside the more general notion of 'everyday life', these case studies will form the basis of the attempt to uncover the black structure of feeling in Handsworth, one that was shaped by racism and external discourse, but one which was also increasingly being articulated positively during the long 1980s, a crucial period of community formation.

Historians have only recently begun to focus on the 1980s, and this work has in general adopted a party political emphasis. Ewen Green's *Thatcher*, for instance, is perhaps the most convincing analysis of the processes that led to the Conservative victory in 1979 and the key effects of Thatcherism on British society, though there are numerous other works on particular aspects of the Thatcher project.[102] On the Labour Party, Lucy Robinson has explored the relationship between political activism and the onset of the new televisual media culture of the 1980s.[103] Though, as has been shown, the centrality

[100] K. Owusu, *The struggle for black arts in Britain: what can we consider better than freedom* (London: Comedia, 1986). See also A. Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: the history of the 50 years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), pp. 296-297.

[101] *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 'Critical Decade: black British photography in the 80s', 2: 3, Spring 1992.

[102] See, for example, P. Byrd (ed.), *British Foreign Policy Under Thatcher* (Oxford: Philip Allan, 1988); S. Croft (ed.), *British Security policy: the Thatcher years and the end of the cold war* (London: Harper Collins, 1991); P. Thornton, *Decade of decline: civil liberties in the Thatcher years* (London: National Council for Civil Liberties, 1989).

[103] L. Robinson, '"Sometimes I Stay in and Watch TV…": Kinnock's Labour Party and Media Culture', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22: 3, 2011, pp. 354-390.

of race within the 'politics of Thatcherism' has been elaborated in detail,[104] historians have so far been slow to examine race from a social perspective in the 1980s. For Geoff Eley, it was 'no accident' that the most sophisticated interventions on this subject were made outside history departments, at inter-disciplinary projects such as the CCCS.[105]

Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) remains one of the most theoretically sophisticated investigations of both the political and cultural manifestations of race in Britain during the long 1980s, having begun as a Ph.D thesis at the CCCS. As has been discussed, the thesis will attempt to move beyond cultural studies approaches to race by forming an analysis of race as a lived experience, rather than something defined only in relation to wider structural developments. However, given the scale of work produced at the CCCS on the 1970s and 1980s – and the number of CCCS scholars who have gone on to analyse subjects directly relevant to this thesis – the cultural studies field, and in particular the work of Gilroy, will be an important point of theoretical reference as the thesis progresses. Alongside this, partly because of Gilroy's engagement outside academia in the 1980s, politically with groups such as Rock Against Racism and culturally with the developing reggae scene,[106] the book might also be treated as something of a product of its time, a primary source reflective of wider themes in the development of black Britain during the long 1980s.

There is the sense that what is required is a historical grounding of the CCCS approach to race in general and *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* in particular. *There Ain't No Black* attempts to provide a general analysis of themes occurring across Britain in the 1980s. Where specific examples are utilised, these are often areas that

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[104] Alongside the work of Hall and Jacques and Anna Marie Smith, see the more recent S. Brooke, 'Articulating the nation: British Conservatism, Race and the 1988 Education Act', *Left History* 14, 2010, pp. 9-30.

[105] G. Eley, 'The Trouble With "Race"', p. 164.

[106] Gilroy spent time working as a reggae DJ. See the information provided on the back cover of P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

Gilroy was himself directly involved in. Alongside his role in reggae culture, for instance, Gilroy's arguments about the Greater London Council were partly informed by a period he spent working for the Council.[107] By adopting a historical perspective on the long 1980s, the thesis will be able to problematize some of the theoretical assumptions made in works like *There Ain't No Black*.

Although much less theoretical in emphasis, existing historical accounts of race in Britain are often overly broad in focus. Two of the key works on immigration, for example, Colin Holmes' *John Bull's Island* (1988) and Panikos Panayi's *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain* (1994), both look at themes taking place nationally over a period of more than a hundred years.[108] While works such as these provide a useful overview of issues that take place at a macro level, they lack the focus to be able to explore the complexities and intricacies of race in Britain. The hope is that the micro-historical approach of the thesis – the emphasis on an overtly narrow period, firmly grounded in one particular area – will allow the thesis to form a detailed account of the experience of race in Britain, whilst at the same time highlight themes that were also taking place in similar inner-city areas across Britain in the 1980s.

Methodology and Sources

Rather than offering a generalised overview, micro-histories are able to articulate key themes in 'microscopic detail' because of their explicitly 'narrow compass in time and space'.[109] By focusing specifically on the African-Caribbean population during a key period, it is hoped that the thesis will be able to articulate more clearly how race was experienced at a practical, concrete level. The African-Caribbean population is the

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[107] *Ibid*.
[108] See C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island: immigration and British society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) and P. Panayi, *Immigration, Ethnicity and Racism in Britain, 1815-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).
[109] C. Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: two or three things I know about it', *Critical Inquiry*, 20: 1, 1993, p. 11.

longest established 'black' community in Britain, having been the first group to migrate in significant numbers after 1945. Alongside this, it was the African-Caribbean community in particular that was the focus of external anxieties regarding black Handsworth in the long 1980s – as one commentator put it, the area's 'fame, or infamy, rests mainly on its…Afro-Caribbean population'.[110]

In contemporary British discourse, it is conventional for those of African-Caribbean origin or descent to be referred to as 'black' and unless otherwise stated, this thesis also adopts this usage. However, this is also problematic. At different points, 'black' has also been used to refer to all 'non-white' communities in Britain. This was common practice in the media during the 1950s and 1960s, for example, and 'black' was also adopted as an identity by some south-Asian political groups in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside the African-Caribbean organisations which were active in the period. In Chapter Two of this thesis, which considers local politics in black Handswoth, it is therefore necessary to broaden the focus beyond the African-Caribbean population to assess the significance of those south-Asian groups that also considered themselves 'black'.

The focus on a single community might be regarded as being problematic more generally. Beyond the realm of the politics, for instance, there will be insufficient space to explore in detail the experiences of south-Asian and other minority communities that made up a significant proportion of the population in 1980s Handsworth. An approach that included other ethnic communities would require significant explanation of how differences in language, religion and leisure functioned in relation to each other. Such complexities warrant their own detailed study, and a fully comparative analysis of the experiences of African-Caribbean, south Asian and potentially other minority

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[110] F.Dennis, 'Birmingham: Blades of Frustration', p. 184.

communities in Handsworth would inevitably result in the loss of the 'microscopic detail' that this thesis attempts to provide.

Handsworth has been chosen as the subject of this inquiry in part because it is regarded as being paradigmatic. As was commonly pointed out in the numerous reports and sociological investigations into the area, Handsworth is 'not unique or particularly nasty', but rather a 'typical inner-city suburb, once prosperous, now on the decline, and multi-racial'.[111] For Rex and Tomlinson, Handsworth was in many ways more representative than Brixton or any other black area of London because, 'since these are part of the main metropolitan area of Great Britain, they are subject to some special circumstances which make them atypical'.[112] The contention is that the way in which race was experienced in Handsworth in the long 1980s was mirrored in other black areas of Britain. Whether churches, reggae bands or self-help organisations, the institutions that formed part of daily life in Handsworth were accompanied by similar institutions in areas such as Brixton, St Paul's or Moss Side. This included formal collaborations. Organisations such as the ACSHO, for example, worked alongside like-minded groups from other areas and reggae groups and sound systems played on bills that included acts from across the country.[113] By the time the Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League was established in 1989, for instance, it had participants from seven cities and towns, including Leicester, Manchester and Rugby.

Yet Handsworth is for a number of significant reasons also atypical. Firstly, not only were there a large number of black artists operating in the area, many of these artists were strikingly successful. In music, both Steel Pulse and Musical Youth – another local

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[111] D. Nandy, cited in A. John, *Race in the Inner City*, p. 7.
[112] J. Rex & S. Tomlinson, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City*, p. 70.
[113] In *Changing Britannia*, for example, the owner of one north-London sound system recalled how 'every area was known for its sound', and stated that 'Birmingham had a reputation for sounds with seriously big equipment'. Cited in R. Harris & S. White (eds.), *Changing Britannia: life experience with Britain* (London: New Beacon Books, 1999), pp. 130-131.

reggae band – were nominated for Grammies;[114] in the visual arts, Vanley Burke has a had a retrospective of his work published with an introduction by Stuart Hall;[115] in literature, Benjamin Zephaniah came third in a 2009 poll to find Britain's favourite poet.[116] Secondly, Handsworth became a part of the national consciousness during the 1980s in a way that few other areas did. As the novelist Salman Rushdie put it in 1986, 'if you say "Handsworth," what do you see? Most Britons would see fire, riots, looted shops, young Rastas and helmeted cops by night. A big story; a front page'.[117] Finally, related to this, Handsworth is atypical precisely because of the scale and variety of the external attention it received during the period. This not only included the media and the various sociological reports and investigations, but television documentaries, a BBC drama that spanned two series and *Handsworth Songs*, the influential black arts film by the Black Audio Film Collective.[118]

In terms of writing the history of race in Britain, Handsworth therefore offers a rich case study. It is its atypicality that largely provides this thesis with its archival base. As Magnusson argues, 'nearly all cases which microhistorians deal with have one thing in common; they all caught the attention of the authorities, thus establishing their archival existence'.[119] Handsworth caught the attention of the 'authorities' in the broadest sense of the word – it has received attention from the police, but also from the media, BBC writers, novelists and independent filmmakers. These sources are in essence external

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[114] Steel Pulse were won a Grammy for their 1986 release *Babylon the Bandit* (Mango Records) whilst Musical Youth were nominated in 1984 for the award of Best New Artist.

[115] See M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), pp. 12-15.

[116] See BBC press release, 'T.S. Eliot voted nation's favourite poet', cited from internet source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/10_october/08/poetry.shtml (accessed 26 September 2010).

[117] S. Rushdie, (1986) 'Songs don't know the score' in J. Procter (ed.) *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: an interdisciplinary anthology* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), p.263.

[118] *Empire Road* ran for two series on BBC 2 between 1978 and 1979. J. Akomfrah, *Handsworth Songs* (1986).

[119] S. G. Magnusson, 'What Is Micro History?', posted on George Mason University Website: http://hnn.us/articles/23720.html (accessed 5 August 2006).

representations of Handsworth, but they will nevertheless be utilised at different points throughout the thesis.

The challenge has been attempting to locate sources from within Handsworth that enable the thesis to articulate 'experience' in sufficient detail. Because of the diverse nature of the subject, there is not a formal archive in existence that draws such material together. The websites 'Digital Handsworth' and 'Connecting Histories',[120] two local history projects run in conjunction with Birmingham Central Library, offered some starting points, though their collections are relatively limited for the period in question. The archive of Vanley Burke, who followed his mother to Handsworth from Jamaica in 1965 and has collected Handsworth-related material for more than four decades, also provided a point of departure. His archive includes political magazines, flyers from various arts groups and the memorial cards of local funerals he had attended. Yet these sources were not in themselves enough, and required considerable contextualisation. This was sometimes found in small parts of other archival collections, for example the papers of the Kokuma Dance Company at the National Resource Centre for Dance at Surrey or a selection of those of the Harambee community group in the National Archives. More often, however, the ability to follow a lead and expand the material in a particular direction depended first on being able to track down particular individuals, and second on the often-unpredictable decisions made by these individuals to save material long after they have ceased to be involved, whether in a political group, reggae band or cricket club.

Alongside sources such as photographs (both the work of professionals and those that were taken by local residents in high-street portraiture studios), flyers advertising live music events, the various literature of political groups, video recordings of dance companies, scripts of plays and, in one case, the hand-written memoirs of a former

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[120] Digital Handsworth: http://www.digitalhandsworth.org.uk/; Connecting Histories: http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/ (both accessed 29 September 2011).

captain of Handsworth Continental Cricket Club, this thesis relies to a considerable degree on oral histories, both those in existing collections and interviews conducted specifically for this thesis. The strategy deployed over the period of research has been to identify and contact key and representative figures in a particular field and, presuming they were willing and able to take part in an interview, use it to contextualise and expand upon what archival material had already been obtained. There were, of course, some instances in which oral interviews came first and led to archival material being obtained only once a relationship had been established, and in these cases the process worked in reverse. There were also occasional instances in which written archival documents were, for various reasons, virtually impossible to obtain. These often came when the subject was most rooted in the kind of everyday experience that few people consider it worthwhile to record – the style of dominoes that was played in the pub, for example. In the absence of any Mass-Observation-style survey of social habits in black Handsworth, the emphasis in these instances has been on conducting a greater number of oral histories that can at least be contextualised and compared with each other. Raymond Williams summarised the process of reconstructing a structure of feeling as using all the cultural artefacts available to 'attempt to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period'.[121] Once the 'carriers of a structure die', Williams argues, 'the nearest we can get to this vital element is in the documentary culture, from poems to buildings and dress-fashions'.[122] Alongside such resources, then, the contemporary nature of this thesis has allowed for the collection of more than fifty oral interviews.[123]

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[121] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 132.

[122] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 65.

[123] For a full list of the oral histories conducted for this thesis, see bibliography. For a glossary of biographical information regarding key interviewees, see Appendix 1.

The general problems associated with oral history-based approaches have been widely commented upon.[124] These can be summarised as concerns regarding the accuracies of people's memories, the possibility that respondents' answers are nostalgic and even fictional, and the influence of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. However, no source whether written or spoken is without bias, and as Elizabeth Tonkin argues, 'oral history is not intrinsically more or less likely to be accurate than a written document'.[125] Furthermore, reliance on more conventional, written historical sources – such as police or government reports – can lead to the lives and experiences of ordinary people being overlooked,[126] subjects that are pivotal to this thesis. In the period of research, the aims during the process of conducting interviews were twofold: to structure each interview with a series of questions that were relevant to the particular field in which the interviewee had operated in the 1980s – often identifying key themes from previously obtained archival documents; but at the same time as this, to allow each respondent the space to be able to forward their own thoughts and emphasise themes that they themselves regarded as important. Rather than seeing oral history as somehow providing a window onto the past as 'it really was', the contention is that its true value lies in its subjectivity. The way in which people order and make sense of their lives – including nostalgia or half-truths – is at the heart of human experience. It is because of this that oral history can be regarded as a particularly effective way of uncovering the 'process of living' that Williams defined as a structure of feeling.[127]

Yet there are some issues with oral history that are particularly relevant to the researching of this thesis. These relate to the processes that are involved when a white

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[124] See A. Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: oral history and the art of dialogue* (London : University of Wisconsin Press, 1997) and R. Parks & A. Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[125] E. Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts: the social construction of oral history*; (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.113

[126] From Internet source: *The Oral History Society*, www.ohs.org.uk; 1 December 2006

[127] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.

researcher who has never lived in Handsworth is conducting interviews with predominately black interviewees. There is a sense that some interviewees – perhaps unconsciously – tailored their answers in such a way that they believed a young, white researcher would want to hear, or best be able to understand. This often meant that people articulated answers to questions in a manner that conformed to widely established, nostalgic narratives of black Britain.[128]

Matthew Mead has recently drawn attention to what he terms the *Empire Windrush* 'myth'.[129] The docking of the *Windrush* at Tilbury in 1948 is widely cited as marking the beginning of large-scale black migration to Britain. In 1998, for example, to mark the 50th anniversary of the ship's arrival, the BBC aired a documentary series that corresponded with the publication of Mike and Trevor Phillips' *Windrush.* However, Mead shows that there was in fact great variety to the backgrounds of the passengers on board the ship, with numerous people coming from countries as geographically disparate as Uganda, Italy and Poland, alongside those of Jamaican origin.[130] Yet in numerous popular narratives of black settlement in Britain, the docking of the *Windrush* nevertheless became the imaginary starting point. Part of this nostalgia, it will be argued, was a widespread tendency to emphasise the experiences of the black population once in Britain in terms of resistance to racism and other forms of domination. Publications such as *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* contributed to this narrative, which was popularised by documentaries, books such as *Windrush* and, it is suggested, often repeated by oral history interviewees. Younger generations, for instance, were keen to talk about 'sound systems' as a way of resisting the unequal structures around them in Handsworth, rather than relative banalities such as the consumption of records. The

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[128] The classic example of this kind of narrative is perhaps T. Phillips & M. Phillips' *Windrush*.
[129] M. Mead, '*Empire Windrush*: cultural memory and archival disturbance', *Moveable Type*, 3, 2007, p. 116. Accessible from internet source: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/graduate/issue/3/pdf/mead.pdf (accessed 2 November 2011).
[130] *Ibid*., p. 119.

notion of a black nostalgia in Britain is something that will be returned to in greater detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

The process of researching this thesis has been helped by having grown up and gone to school in Balsall Heath and Sparkhill – areas to the south of the city from Handsworth with similarly high black populations – and therefore having first-hand experience of inner-city life in Birmingham, albeit in a different period and context. Over the course of the research various community projects were also undertaken in Handsworth, including outreach work with a local school, an exhibition held at Handsworth Library and a witness seminar to mark 25 years since the Handsworth riots.[131] Each project helped to develop relations in Handsworth and contributed to the archival material. In terms of the methodological approach, one option might have been to move to Handsworth. Yet this may also have been problematic. At the same time as studying at the CCCS and co-writing *Policing the Crisis*, for instance, Chas Critcher also lived in Handsworth whilst volunteering at a local community organisation. As a participant at the witness seminar on the Handsworth riots, Critcher reflected how in spite of being a local resident, 'there were vast areas…which were invisible to me' as a 'middle-class student'. Critcher only 'saw what people would present…to me' and as a result 'there are large parts of Handsworth' he 'didn't know'.[132] The issue of an outsider – whether real or perceived – being able to 'see' black Handsworth also goes beyond race. In *Behind the Frontlines: journey into Afro-Britain* (1988), the black writer Ferdinand Dennis reflects on his often traumatic experiences of working in the early 1980s for a charity in Handsworth, the client base of which were local black youth. Dennis struggles to come to terms with the numbers of young people who had embraced Rastafarianism,

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[131] See Appendix II for exhibition catalogue to *Photographing Handsworth: Representing Handsworth 25 Years On*.

[132] C. Critcher, cited in *The Handsworth Rebellions: Revisiting Handsworth 25 Years On* witness seminar, the Drum arts centre, Aston, 15 September 2010 (organised by the University of Birmingham). Transript available on request.

and is shocked when one of his former clients later tells him that the presumption was that he was working as an undercover police officer. Dennis was 'wounded with indignation. I, who'd perceived myself as a hapless nurse, was now viewed…as an agent of their enemy'.[133] Such overt suspicions may have decreased by the time this research was carried out, but it was nevertheless necessary to be mindful of similar issues at each stage of the researching and writing of this thesis.

Thesis Overview

The thesis begins by further problematising the search for an authentic view of black Handsworth. Using a range of visual imagery from within the area – including the documentary photography of Vanley Burke, Pogus Caesar and others, the images of community photography groups and the photographs taken by local residents in high-street portraiture studios – Chapter One asks if there is a view of black Handsworth from within that might be regarded as emblematic of an authentic reality beyond the negative portrayals found in the pages of tabloid newspapers.

What is found is that in many instances, the view from within is just as problematic as representations generated from without. Stereotypical narratives such as conflict or urban decay are often repeated, at times with almost the exact same image. The photographs of conflict and urban decay found in the pages of tabloid newspapers, it will be shown, were also a prominent feature of the way in which black Handsworth represented itself. Rather than offering, as Stuart Hall suggests, an 'alternative history of black people in Britain',[134] the chapter argues that photography from within Handsworth provides only signposts towards where that history might be located. Deprivation and

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[133] The particular extract is from F. Dennis, 'Birmingham: Blades of Frustration', in K. Owusu *Black British Culture and Society,* p.184.

[134] S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 2: 3, 1992, p. 108.

rioting were part of normal life; so too, the images show, were scenes from inside pubs, houses and betting shops. The photographs provide fleeting glimpses of everyday life in black Handsworth. The remainder of the thesis attempts to elaborate this in greater detail.

The long 1980s was a critical period for racial politics in Britain, the nature of which provides the basis of Chapter Two. This was the period in which 'black' as an encompassing political identity – meant to signify anyone who was not white – began to fracture. It has been commonly argued that this was as a result of the state's actions, and primarily, the distribution of state funds on the basis of ethnicity – along religious, linguistic and 'cultural' lines. Conversely, through an analysis of a range of Handsworth organisations, Chapter Two will show that whilst this may have been an influence, it was also a process that was occurring independently from the state, at grassroots level. In Handsworth, groups such as the ACSHO refused to accept state funding yet emphasised an explicitly narrow notion of 'black' as an African-Caribbean identity. At the same time as this, the Asian Resource Centre, an organisation that operated parallel to the ACSHO and accepted state funds, maintained an ideological commitment to 'black' as a unitary term, yet in their day-to-day activities catered primarily for the needs of south-Asian communities in Handsworth. Even when different communities shared the same basic problems, these were often experienced in ethnically distinct ways, and therefore required the involvement of ethnically-specific groups. The failure of 'black' as an encompassing term, the chapter concludes by suggesting, was ultimately the result of a mismatch between race as defined ideologically, for political ends, and how it was lived and felt in practice.

Chapters Three and Four move into the realm of the social and cultural in Handsworth. Whereas Chapter Two focused on the nature of 'black' as a political identity, Chapter Three examines the construction of black as a cultural identity. Using

the case studies of Handsworth Continental Cricket Club, Kokuma Dance Company, and, more generally, reggae and sound system culture, it is argued that in the long 1980s there was a transition from the Caribbean to Africa in Handsworth. For the predominately older generations at Handsworth Cricket Club, a black identity was manifest through reference to the Caribbean. For the predominately younger generations active in Kokuma, reggae bands and sound systems, the Caribbean was replaced with a focus on Africa. However, this was not Africa in any literal sense; rather, it is argued, this was an 'invention of tradition', the most significant consequences of which came firmly in the Handsworth context.

The final chapter of the thesis moves beyond formal cultural institutions and practices to an analysis of culture in its broadest sense, in everyday life. Scholars commonly define the 1970s and 1980s as a period of heightened political engagement, particularly with the emergence of the Women's and Gay Liberation movements.[135] However, whilst forms of politics were an important part of the black experience, Chapter Four aims to point to the existence of a black way of life away from the political, using the examples of the pub, the church and the front room. Race was manifest in each of these spaces through practice. Using Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus', it will be shown that race was something that people *did* in Handsworth: the particular style of dominoes that was played in the pub or club; the manner of worshipping in the church; the specific way of decorating and using the front room.

The use of Bourdieu allows the thesis to build on the work of Raymond Williams. In 1958, Williams famously declared that 'culture is ordinary'.[136] However, what was often manifest in Williams' writings was a portrayal of working class culture that – at

[135] See A. Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945: sex, colour, peace and power* (Basingstoke: Palgarve, 2001).

[136] R. Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', 1958, in B. Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 92.

least implicitly – attempted to highlight forms of resistance to domination. The use of Bourdieu enables the ordinariness of practices such as the game of dominoes to be foregrounded, and conceptualised as important parts of the black structure of feeling. Most clearly, such practices were not directly connected to either structural inequality or racism in Handsworth. Neither were they necessarily about formulating forms of resistance to these themes. Nevertheless, race permeated them. As Paul Gilroy argues, the emphasis in conventional narratives of black Britain generally does not leave room for the 'right of blacks…not to be exciting'.[137] The practices in the pub, church and front room, it will be shown, were routine, ordinary, even banal. As such, they form fundamental parts of the history of race both in Handsworth and in Britain.

There are two overarching problems that recur at different points throughout the thesis. The first is the problem of attempting to locate the 'authentic' representation of black Handsworth. This is illustrated most overtly through the example of photography in Chapter One, but it is also evident at other points in the thesis. In Chapter Two, an 'authentic' black politics is found to be fundamentally problematic, whilst Chapter Three suggests that black cultural identities were often based on the 'invention' of traditions. The second problem is related to the first, and regards the presence of the black nostalgia in Britain, whether in exhibitions, works of art or even in oral histories conducted for this thesis. The conclusion of the thesis discusses these issues in detail. It argues that whilst undoubtedly pertinent, beyond such issues, race was nevertheless pervasive in Handsworth. It was lived through relationships, in institutions and through everyday practices. Race was a structure of feeling in Handsworth, something rooted, as E.P. Thomson argued class was, in forms of consciousness and everyday experience.

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[137] P. Gilroy, 'Climbing the Racial Mountain: a conversation with Isaac Julien', in P. Gilroy, *Small Acts: thoughts on the politics of black cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 169.

In the opening to *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy uses the words of John Nelson, a stone mason of Birstall, quoted by Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*. Nelson had dreamt of an encounter with a strange figure on a Yorkshire lane: 'I thought I saw Satan coming to meet me in the shape of a tall, black man, and the hair of his head like snakes'.[138] For Gilroy, the quote helped illuminate what he saw as the 'ethnocentricity' of the cultural studies project, and the 'marginalization of "race" and racism' even when it 'stares cultural studies in the face'.[139] Gilroy, for instance, points to Williams' own silence on the subject of race throughout his academic career.[140] Almost twenty-five years since the publication of *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, the absence – both in cultural studies and social history – is not of accounts of racism, but of race. There has been an unwillingness to posit an understanding of race as an experience in a manner similar to the way in which both class and gender have come to be understood. This thesis aims to rectify this absence by re-engaging with the work of Williams. In this sense, it borrows not only from the tradition of micro-history, but also from the traditions of cultural studies and social history. Its aim is to articulate race in Britain not as a byword for 'something else', but as a structure of feeling, as an active, lived and common experience. Ultimately, then, what this thesis attempts to provide is a move towards a truly social history of race in Britain.

[138] Cited in P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 11.

[139] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 12.

[140] Williams only confronts the subject of race late in his career and as Gilroy notes, this is limited 'to the social and cultural tensions surrounding the arrival of "new peoples"'. Gilroy goes on to highlight what he sees as the similarities between Williams's conception of national identity and Enoch Powell's. See P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 49 & R. Williams, *Towards 2000* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1983).

Plate 1.0: the 'West Indian' front room

Maxine Walker, *Aunty Linda's Front Room*, 1987. From M. McMillan, *The Front Room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), p. 84.
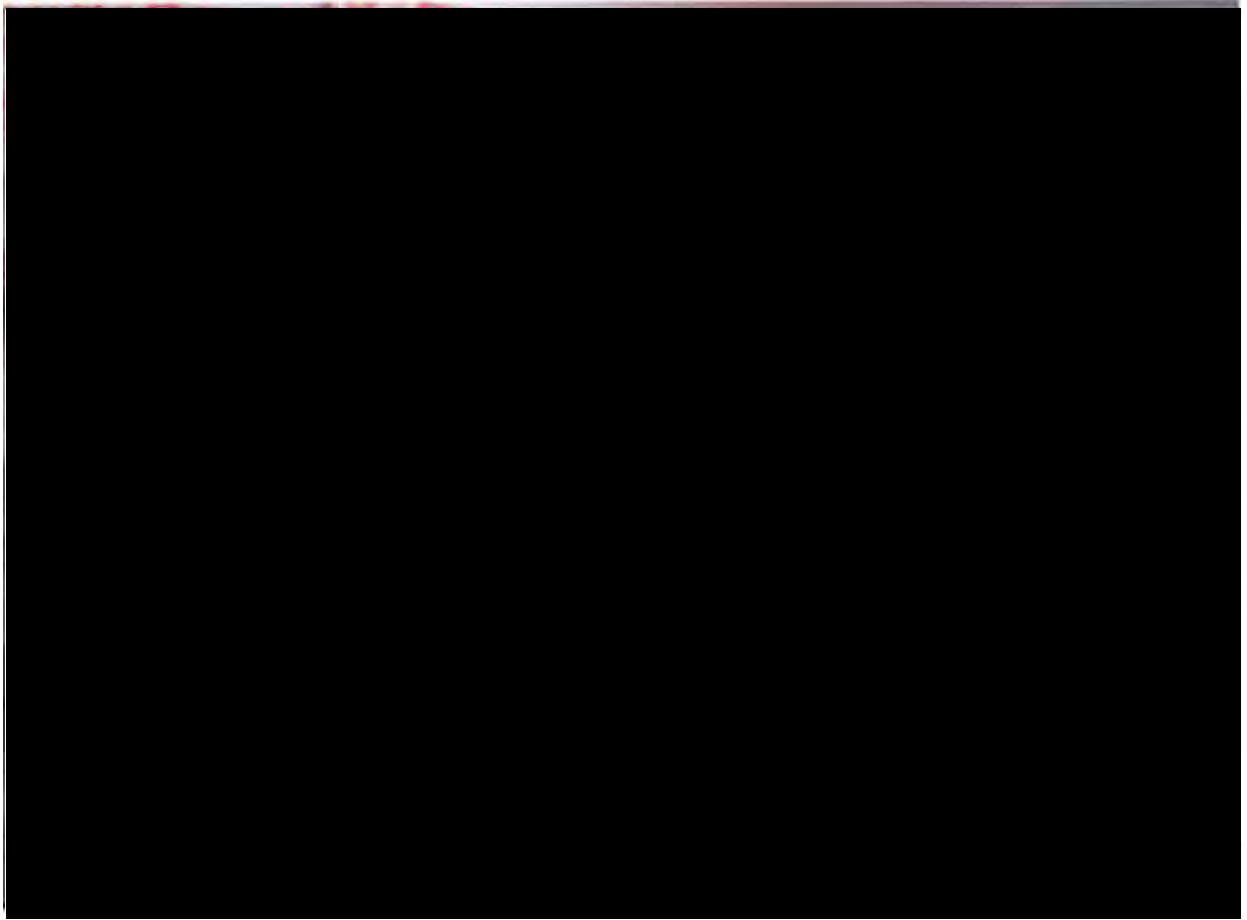
Installation from *The West Indian Front Room*, Geffrye Museum of the Home, 2005.
From M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 17.

Chapter One: Visualising Handsworth

Introduction

Over four weekends in the summer of 1979, three photographers – Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon – set up a makeshift photography studio on the street outside their shared premises in Grove Lane, Handsworth. The studio consisted of a thirty-five-millimetre camera mounted on a tripod, a plain white backdrop, and a sign in three different languages inviting passers-by to come in and take their own photograph. The photographers hoped to generate a set of images that would more accurately capture what they saw as the 'richness' of the area, as opposed to the photographs of 'deprivation and inferiority' that had come to characterise Handsworth in the mainstream media.[1] How and when the photograph was taken was left up to the participants: the camera was attached to a long cable release that each participant would hold: Bishton, Homer or Reardon would set the camera up, hand participants the cable release and then stand aside, leaving control over the shutter literally in the hands of the person whose photograph was being taken (*plate 1.2*).

Bishton, Homer and Reardon saw their photographic practice as a way of overcoming what had become the dominant representation of Handsworth from 'without': that which had largely been presented in the external media. Six years after the Self-Portrait Project, shortly after the 1985 riots, the novelist Salman Rushdie summarised the dominant perception of Handsworth as 'fire, riots, looted shops, young Rastas and helmeted cops by night. A big story; a front page'.[2] At different points, both Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have argued for the ways in which photography might be able to move beyond such stereotypes and unearth a more accurate picture of life in black Britain. Hall

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[1] D. Bishton, 'Local Colour', *the Sunday Times Magazine*, 21September 1980, p. 96.
[2] S. Rushdie, (1986) 'Songs don't know the score' in J. Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: an interdisciplinary anthology* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), p.263.

sees photography as forming 'a sort of alternative history of black people in Britain',[3] while in his recent 'photographic history' of 'black Britain',[4] Gilroy argues that photographs represent 'beautiful fragments' of a 'whole but unfinished historical experience'.[5] For Gilroy, photographs can provide an 'alternative understanding' about the type of history being told, and its place within what is generally considered to be 'authentic' British history.[6]

By exploring the diverse range of photographic practice that took place in Handsworth throughout the long 1980s, this chapter shows that the search for a more authentic image of black Britain is more problematic than either Hall or Gilroy allow for. In spite of the political motivations behind projects such as the Handsworth Self-Portrait Project or the work of documentary photographers such as Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar who were also active in Handsworth in this period, the stereotypical images of deprivation and 'helmeted cops by night' maintain a continual presence. In Bishton, Homer and Reardon's Self-Portrait Project, this presence was felt in the desire to remove Handsworth from the picture altogether; in the work of documentary photography in Handsworth, it will be shown, it was manifest in the recurrence of almost identical images to those regularly seen in the pages of tabloid newspapers.

The implication, this chapter argues, is that the search for an alternative, more authentic view of black Handsworth is highly problematic. The association between the black inner city and scenes of poverty and conflict was part of the dominant structure of feeling in 1980s Britain; but these scenes were also part of the black structure of feeling in Handsworth, and maintained an influence on how people represented themselves. Rather than providing an 'alternative history', therefore, the photographs from within represent a

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[3] S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 2: 3, 1992, p. 108.
[4] P. Gilroy, *Black Britain: a photographic history*, London: Saqi/Getty, 2007).
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 11.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

broader perspective on the same history. They suggest ways of forming an expanded definition of the black structure of feeling, by providing glimpses of the leisure, religious and other activities that local residents engaged in on a daily basis. The work of Handsworth photographers show that scenes from reggae concerts, for example, religious worship or protest marches were a significant part of everyday life in the community. However, these photographs also illustrate that in the context of Britain in the long 1980s, so too were interactions with the police and urban deprivation.

The chapter begins by exploring the nature of the view of Handsworth from without – those often found on the front pages of tabloid newspapers – and articulates the difficulty in moving beyond them by using *Handsworth Songs* as a case study. The film, which was released in the aftermath of the 1985 riots in Handsworth, had the explicit aim of deconstructing the media's portrayal of both the riots themselves and the history of black settlement in Britain more generally. In its place, *Handsworth Songs* sought to forward what was regarded as the essential diversity of black life. However, it will be shown, the film in fact ended up repeating many of the familiar images of violence and social unrest. It was unable to find the language with which to tell Handsworth's 'songs'.

Following on from this, the chapter moves on to form a comparison of the portraits from Bishton, Homer and Reardon's 1979 Self-Portrait Project, and those taken in the 1950s and 1960s in the Dyche studio, a high-street portraiture studio commonly used by immigrants in order to create images to send back to friends and family back 'home'. These photographs provide a visually striking contrast to the images commonly found in the mainstream media. Yet this is only achieved by removing the Handsworth context from the picture. The true value of these images, it will be argued, lies in what they reveal about the political motivations of their authors and, in the case of the Dyche photographs, the way in which they articulate the widespread desire amongst migrant

communities to create an image of prosperity and success, regardless of the realities of life beyond the frame.

The final two sections explore contrasting examples of documentary photography in Handsworth, and encapsulate the tensions that are at the heart of this chapter. In different ways, each documentary photographer was explicit in their ambition to present an alternative, more authentic picture of black Handsworth, in the words of Rushdie, to create a set of images of Handsworth that could 'chase out the old'.[7] Partly because of their position as local residents, these photographers were able to gain access aspects of social life that suggest important – and, indeed, a relatively unexplored – parts of this history: scenes from inside everyday institutions such as homes or betting shops, intimate moments such as weddings, funerals or baptisms. Together, such photographs point towards the significance of an unstaged everyday in Handsworth, ordinary institutions and practices that the remainder of the thesis will attempt to elaborate in greater detail. However, from professional photographers like Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar to the students who enrolled on a 'community photography' course in Handsworth, no practitioner was ever able to depart fully from images of social unrest or urban deprivation. How people saw themselves inside Handsworth was not always different from how others viewed them from outside. Practitioners who lived and worked in Handsworth were unable to portray a more authentic Handsworth devoid of the political context without. The black structure of feeling was shaped by representations of Handsworth that were constructed not only by its own residents, but also by the images found in the pages of tabloid newspapers.

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[7] S. Rusdhie, introduction to D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p 7.

External definitions

In the aftermath of the 'riots' in Handsworth in September 1985, the same photograph appeared on the front page of every national tabloid newspaper [*plate 1.1*].[8] The 'black bomber', as the man in the photograph came to be known, became emblematic not only of the riots in Handsworth but also of the perceived nature of the area as a whole in the context of 1980s Britain. The *Daily Mirror* described the black bomber as the 'terrifying face of Front Line Britain',[9] whilst the *Express* saw him as 'the ugly, menacing face of Handsworth, England on…a night when racial violence boiled over into an orgy of fire, looting and murder'.[10] In the days after the rioting, the *Sun* launched its own campaign to name the black bomber, eventually revealing him to be 'hate-filled' James Hazell, a father of three who supposedly held a 'massive grudge against the police'.[11]

It was in the context of such representations of Handsworth that the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC), a group of graduate film students who met at Portsmouth Polytechnic in the early 1980s, made *Handsworth Songs*. The film – which was the BAFC's first major release – was meant as a way of moving beyond what the Collective saw as the 'hegemony' of the mainstream media's representation of race not just in the 1980s, but of black migration to Britain from the 1950s onwards.[12] Through a mixture of interviews with local residents, the disruption of conventional narrative style and the fusing of archival footage with contemporary views of Handsworth, the film sought to – as Reece Auguiste, a founding member of the BAFC, put it – 'capture...the sensibilities of those who were for over 30 years voiceless', or those who 'were only given a voice when the BBC or other television companies said, "you may now speak"'.[13]

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[8] It appeared on the front page of the *Sun*, the *Mirror*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Star* and the *Daily Express*.
[9] C. Gysin, 'War on the Streets', Daily Mirror, 11 September 1985, p.1
[10] A. Rees, 'Handsworth Ablaze Again after Night of Horror', *Daily Express*, 11 September 1985, p. 1
[11] A. Parker, 'Sun Names Black Bomber', in the Sun, September 13, 1985, p.1.
[12] R. Auguiste, '*Handsworth Songs*: Some Background Notes', in *Framework*, 35, 1988, p. 6.
[13] *Ibid*.

As Auguiste's comments alluded to, the photograph of the black bomber was just one point in a much longer history of the media's representation of race in contemporary Britain, stretching back to the portrayal of black migrants as they arrived in the country for the first time. Reflecting on the archival newsreel footage of migrants arriving into Britain in the 1950s, John Akomfrah, the director of *Handsworth Songs*, remarked that 'they seemed not even to be about people, they seemed to be about statistics. You know, "Oh, here come the darkies...coming off the boat". It just seemed to lack any understanding that the people you were looking at, people of colour, might have a trajectory that was not just to do with them being a statistic'.[14] Newsreel footage was one part of these early representations; another was news-photography.

In this early period of black settlement in Britain photographs in newspapers and magazines contributed to a narrative that presented black immigrants as a potential problem for British society. In publications such as the *Picture Post*, photographs of immigrants on their arrival into Britain – waiting on station platforms or at HM Customs – commonly featured a prominent uniformed police presence, thereby immediately emphasising the potential for criminality amongst this population. Upon their settlement in areas such as Handsworth, immigrants were regularly framed in the context of an easily recognisable sign of urban deprivation. Photographs featured black people in front of derelict housing, or with litter blowing around their feet. On the one hand, particularly in left-leaning publications such as the *Picture Post* and the *Manchester Guardian*, and in keeping with the liberal tone adopted in institutions such as the Institute for Race Relations in the 1950s, this emphasised a widely recognisable subject-position of black

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[14] J. Akomfrah, cited in K, Eshun, 'An Absence of Ruins – John Akomfrah in conversation with Kodwu Eshun', in K. Eshun & A. Sagar (eds), *The Ghosts of Songs – the film art of the Black Audio Film Collective* (Liverpool: LUP, 2007), p. 132.

victimhood.[15] On the other hand, as Paul Gilroy notes, the recurrence of such images also seemed to suggest that black people were 'connected in some deep and abiding way with the slum-like conditions they had been forced to inhabit'.[16]

By the time of the rioting in Handsworth and other areas in the 1980s, images in mainstream newspapers drew upon a different set of narratives regarding the black presence that explicitly framed it as an overt and violent threat. These were dictated by a series of important moments. First, the key effect of Enoch Powell's 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech – which was delivered in Birmingham and referenced themes supposedly occurring in Powell's nearby constituency of Wolverhampton – was to articulate anxieties about the black presence not simply in terms of numbers or 'difference', but in terms of the direct threat it supposedly posed for the white population. Powell evoked the image of a white female pensioner being tormented by 'wide-grinning piccaninnies' who pushed excrement through her letter box, broke her windows and harassed her on her way to the shops.[17] The second key moment is the 'mugging panic' in the early 1970s, which began after a violent and unprovoked attack on a passer-by in Handsworth. 'Mugging' was represented by the media as both a particularly black crime and a symptom of inner-city decay, and black youth in particular became conceptualised as posing a threat not only to pensioners but also to anyone who happened to be walking the inner-city street.[18] Finally, the riots themselves provided the moment in which the black threat in the inner city went from being conceptualised in individual to collective terms. As Gilroy argues, black youth in the inner city were now perceived as a 'collective, proto-insurrectional'

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[15] See, for example, K. Walker, 'How Can We Combat the Colour Bar?', in *Picture Post*, 2 October 1954, p. 45.

[16] P. Gilroy, *Black Britain*, p. 94.

[17] Enoch Powell, from Internet source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html, 18 January 2011.

[18] For a thorough account of the 'mugging panic' in Britain, see Stuart Hall *et al, Policing the Crisis – Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978).

community,[19] a 'riotous mob [who were] energized by the deviant impulses of their pathological alien culture'.[20]

Although in the aftermath of the riots in Handsworth there was little consensus over what happened, with possible explanations ranging from the 'straightforward thuggery' of those that took part,[21] to a mass reaction against societal racism and unemployment,[22] the printed press – especially the tabloid newspapers – made it clear what they saw as the reason for the unrest. Many newspapers emphasised comments made by the West Midlands Police Constable Geoffrey Dear, who attributed the riots to groups of black youth who were 'driven on by bloodlust'.[23] The photograph of the black bomber [*plate 1.1*] was therefore powerful because it encapsulated the media's (and Dear's) common-sense interpretation of the events as being essentially to do with 'race'. The riots were presented as the 'natural' and ultimate consequence of allowing Handsworth to become 'black'. The *Daily Mail*, latching on to Dear's comments, had a front page headline of 'bloodlust', and described the perpetrators as the 'worst elements in society'.[24] In the Birmingham *Express and Star*, 'defiance of the law' was presented as 'the first lesson many young blacks learn in life', and 'a black thug' was characterised as 'as big a menace to his race as a white fascist is to his'.[25] The headlines encapsulated the way in which black Handsworth was now being perceived. The 'burning streets of Handsworth'[26] had become 'the Wasteland',[27] the 'bleeding heart of England'.[28] In the

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[19] P. Gilroy, 'Police and Thieves' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back – Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. (London: Hutchinson/CCCS, 1982), p. 173

[20] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 228.

[21] Chief Constable Geoffrey Dear, cited in J. Gaffney, *Interpretations of Violence: the Handsworth riots of 1985* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1987*)*, pp. 17-18.

[22] J. Silverman, *The Handsworth Riots, 9, 10, 11 September: a report of an inquiry of Julius Silverman presented to Birmingham City Council* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1986).

[23] A. Rees, 'Handsworth Ablaze Again after Night of Horror', *Daily Express,* 11 September 1985, p.1

[24] G. Greig, A. Chalmers & J. Hamshire, 'Bloodlust', the *Daily Mail*, 11 September 1985, p. 1.

[25] Editorial, 'Blame Rioters, Not the Police', *Express & Star,* 11 September 1985. Newspaper Cuttings, September 1985, vol. 1, Birmingham Central Library, p. 20.

[26] K. Tudor, 'Terror in Flames of Hatred', *Express and Star*, 10 September 1985. Newspaper Cuttings, September 1985, vol. 1, Birmingham Central Library, p. 12.

Mirror, the riots were perceived as a 'War on the Streets', and black Handsworth was the 'Front Line'.[29]

Like the moral panic over 'mugging', the image of the black bomber articulated the threat posed by the black inner city in individual terms. Other news-photography, however, presented it in collective terms by giving visual expression to the notion that the riots in Handsworth were part of a 'war'. The photographs of the aftermath of the events (*plate 1.1*), for example, have immediately clear parallels with images of the damage done to British cities by the German Blitz during the Second World War, something the *Daily Mirror* made explicit in their christening of the events 'the blitz of the Lozells Road'.[30] The presence of uniformed police officers in these images emphasises the criminality of the riots, and also helps reinforce the notion that they form part of a 'war'. The images present a stark contrast between the orderliness of the uniformed policemen and the disorder all around them in Handsworth. As the Birmingham *Express & Star* reaffirmed, this was the 'Handsworth blitz'.[31]

One recurring scene in the photo-reportage of the riots in Handsworth is that of vandalised and looted shops. This is important because it shows how this photography resonated on a number of different levels in the context of 1980s Britain. In the first instance, such images reinforce the continual binary in the reporting of the riots between law and disorder. Secondly, the theme of looting helped to emphasise the common-sense theory that the events in Handsworth were 'black on black', the result of African-Caribbean jealousy of Asian entrepreneurship. In a caption beneath a photograph of PAK Butchers, for example, the *Birmingham Post* emphasised that it was 'Asian shopkeepers'

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[27] C. Gysin, 'War on the Streets', *Daily Mirror,* 11 September 1985, p.1
[28] P. Brown, & Nicholas Deakin, 'The Bleeding Heart of England', *The Guardian,* p.15.
[29] C. Gysin, 'War on the Streets', *Daily Mirror,* 11 September 1985, p.1
[30] *Daily Mirror,* 11 September 1985, p.3.
[31] K. Tudor, 'Terror in Flames of Hatred', in *Express & Star*, Newspaper Cuttings, September 1985, vol. 1, Birmingham Central Library, p. 12.

[premises that were] smashed in a barrage of bricks and stones'.[32] Finally, these images illustrate how the reporting of the unrest in Handsworth also tapped into anxieties that were not specifically to do with race, but were of particular importance in the context of 1980s Britain. Photographs of looting and of damage done to private property suggested that this was more than simply an attack on Handsworth: the riots represented an affront to the common values of individual entrepreneurship and private property that so characterised the politics of Thatcherism throughout the period of Conservative Government in Britain.[33] As the *Birmingham Post* put it, beneath a photograph of a elderly white woman returning to her now-overturned car (*plate 1.1*), 'what have I done to deserve this...'.[34]

The front page of the *Daily Mirror* after the first day's rioting perhaps best encapsulates the established representation of Handsworth from without in 1985 (*plate 1.1*). On one side, of course, is the omnipresent black bomber, but the accompanying photograph is just as important. In many ways, this photograph most classically represents the image of the urban unrest in Britain during the 1980s, as reported in the media. The headlines clearly frame what we are seeing – the 'Front Line' in the supposed 'War on the Streets' – but the photograph also tells us which side we are on.[35] The viewer of the photograph surveys the scene – the burnt out car, the flames, the smoke – over the shoulder of the policeman, seeing things almost exactly as he does. The layout of the front page has made the black bomber's petrol bomb reach across to the photograph of the Front Line, suggesting the next phase of the 'enemy' attack is imminent. Despite

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[32] Anonymous author, *Birmingham Post*, 10 September 1985. Newspaper Cuttings, September 1985, vol. 1, Birmingham Central Library, p. 43.
[33] The 1980 Housing Act, which made it easier for council houe tenants to purchase their own property and resulted in 370,000 tenants buying their own house within two years of the act, is generally regarded as being pivotal to the Thatcher project. See E.H.H. Green, *Thatcher*, p. 129. As Thatcher herself put it in 1984, 'a country that has no property rights has no human rights'. Cited in M. Daly & A. George (eds.), *Margaret Thatcher in her own* words, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 34.
[34] Anonymous author, *Birmingham Post*, 10 September 1985, Newspaper Cuttings, September 1985, vol. 1, Birmingham Central Library, p. 43.
[35] C. Gysin, 'War on the Streets', *Daily Mirror,* 11 September 1985, p.1

the carnage in front of him, however, the photograph depicts the policeman standing firm, his helmet and riot gear speaking of his continued defiance. The viewer is positioned behind the policeman whilst looking at the photograph, but this is also metonymically so. The police are presented as fighting not just for Handsworth but also for Britain itself – these are 'our' troops on the Front Line.

It was these images – both contemporary and historic – that the BAFC sought to overcome in *Handsworth Songs*. The aim was to move beyond what John Akomfrah termed the 'official discourse', which 'insisted on treating black subjectivity as simply either criminal or pathological'.[36] In place of the black bomber or images of the Handsworth 'front line', the aim was to produce an alternative narrative that represented what was seen as the essential plurality of the black experience. The film moved away from the linear narrative form of conventional documentaries, and instead interspersed scenes of contemporary Handsworth in the aftermath of the rioting with archival footage of black people as they arrived into Britain on boats, waited at customs or queued at the labour exchange. One of the most regularly cited parts of *Handsworth Songs* are the words of the narrator midway through the film:

> On the 10th of September 1985, a journalist is pestering a middle-aged black woman on the Lozells Road. He wants her opinion on the disturbances. Did she have a relative involved? Could he talk to one of them? He is writing a story. She looks at the debris and says to him calmly: 'there are no stories in the riots. Only the ghosts of other stories'.[37]

This passage neatly surmises the overall message of *Handsworth Songs*: the individual and changing nature of black people's voices in Handsworth – and in Britain – are continuously overridden by the media who are in search of a sensationalist and monolithic narrative with which to frame them with. Such stories have become 'ghost' stories

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[36] J. Akomfrah, cited in K, Eshun, 'An Absence of Ruins', p. 132.
[37] J. Aknomfrah, *Handsworth Songs* (1986).

because they have been forcibly silenced, drowned out by what Auguiste saw as the 'hegemony' of the mainstream media – images of black subjects next to derelict housing or the view of Handsworth over the shoulder of an armoured policeman.[38]

The disruption of form in *Handsworth Songs* was designed as a way of articulating a pluralistic conception of the black experience beyond these 'front page' images. The film consists of juxtapositions between, for example, contemporary views of Handsworth and archival footage, or between a soundtrack that switches from reggae music to religious hymns. The aim was to place the events in Handsworth in the context of 'industrial decline and structural crisis',[39] combining scenes of burnt out shops and rubble in 1985 with imagery symbolic of Britain's industrial peak. The viewer is presented with footage of a statue of James Watt in Birmingham, for example, whilst at the same time being able to hear crowds of people and police sirens, before eventually the film cuts to footage of uniformed police officers being attacked by missiles in Handsworth. At different points, often over the top of scenes of unrest in Handsworth, the film's narrator recounts various 'ghost' stories. These include from the riots, when, it is reported, as the Home Secretary Douglas Hurd visited Handsworth, a member of the crowd shouted, 'the higher the monkey climbs, the more he will expose'; from Malcolm X's visit of nearby Smethwick decades earlier; and numerous more abstract, 'poetic' moments that utilised the notion of memory as 'a way of posing questions to…the official discourse'.[40] This involved the narrator recounting various individualised memories over the top of visual imagery apparently unconnected to the memory being evoked. Midway through the film, for example, the narrator recounts a story of 'Coruba cocktails and Coruba sour...secret pregnancies' and 'nappy washing'. 'It's about time', the story

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[38] R. Auguiste, '*Handsworth Songs*: Some Background Notes', in *Framework*, 35, 1988, p. 6.
[39] This is a passage from the accompanying literature to *Handsworth Songs* quoted by Rushdie in S. Rushdie, 'Songs don't know the score', p. 262,
[40] J. Akomfrah, cited in K, Eshun, 'An Absence of Ruins', p. 132.

continues, 'we had our own child, our own Master George Hammond Banner Bark. That night, I moved from an idea to a possibility. *I was born* in a moment of innocence.[41]

For Akomfrah, the aim in *Handsworth Songs*, as with the BAFC's work in general, was to try and forge 'a sense of identity which isn't rooted in an essentialist understanding of one's origin'.[42] Despite this theoretical commitment, however – influenced by the work of Laura Mulvey, Homi Bhabha and others – *Handsworth Songs* struggles to present a view of what this alternative narrative looks like in practice in Handsworth. There is a schism between the pluralistic narrative that the BAFC wants the viewer to hear – encapsulated in the film by the repeated mantra of 'the ghosts of other stories' – and what the viewer actually sees of black Handsworth. In spite of the fractured narrative form that the BAFC create in *Handsworth Songs*, the images of Handsworth that the viewer does see, and those that continue to resonate once the film has ended, are the scenes already familiar from the dominant portrayals of the area from without: groups of uniformed police officers, for example, again emphasising the supposed criminality of the area, looted shops and petrol bombs.

This view was reinforced in an argument about the film between Salman Rushdie, Stuart Hall and Darcus Howe, played out on the letter pages of the *Guardian* shortly after the film's release. Whilst accepting that it was not always successful, Stuart Hall praised the struggle in *Handsworth Songs* to locate a 'new language' with which to tell these themes.[43] However, for Rushdie, in terms of imagery, *Handsworth Songs* actually presents the viewer with

> what we know from TV. Blacks as trouble; blacks as victims. Here is a Rasta dodging the police; here are the old news-clips of the folks in the fifties getting off

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[41] J. Aknomfrah, *Handsworth Songs* (1986).
[42] Cited in P. Gilroy & J. Pines, 'Handsworth Songs: Audiences/Aesthetics/Independence. Interview with the Black Audio film Collective', *Framework* 35, 1988, p. 13.
[43] S. Hall, 'Songs of Handsworth praise', in J. Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain*, p. 264.

the boat…Little did they know, eh? But we don't hear about their lives or the lives of their British-born children. We don't hear Handsworth's songs.[44]

The 'attempt to shape a new language' in *Handsworth Songs*, Darcus Howe suggested, simply 'does not work'.[45] Ultimately, the viewer is left with an image of Handsworth that is almost identical to that of the front page of the *Daily Mirror* – in effect, the viewer is left with the black bomber.

These criticisms of *Handsworth Songs* allude to the dominance of the 'front page' view of black Handsworth in the 1980s, presented in mainstream newspapers, magazines and, indeed, on television news reports. In an analysis into the representation of the inner city on local and national news programmes, for example, Simon Cottle found that references to rioting, crime, violence and race continued to structure how Handsworth and places like it were portrayed almost ten years after the riots themselves.[46] Reflecting upon Rushdie's critique of *Handsworth Songs*, John Akomfrah suggested that it may be impossible to present an image of Handsworth beyond these dominant representations. 'You can't construct other knowledges about Handsworth, other than what you already know'.[47] Yet for Rushdie, this was avoiding the issue. Presenting an alternative picture, finding ways of telling Handsworth's 'ghost stories', was in Rushdie's view of critical importance. The problem in *Handsworth Songs*, Rushdie argued, was one of language. The BAFC were 'describing a living world in the dead language of race industry professionals'. If 'you want to tell untold stories', Rushdie argued, 'you've got to find a language'. Use 'the wrong language, and you're dumb and blind'.[48] The following sections of this Chapter now explore how different forms of photography from within Handsworth – first portraiture, followed by community and finally documentary

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[44] S. Rushdie, 'Songs don't know the score', p. 263.
[45] D. Howe, 'The language of black culture', in J. Procter (ed.), *Writing Black Britain*, p. 265.
[46] S. Cottle, *TV News, Urban Conflict and the Inner City* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p. 162.
[47] Cited in P. Gilroy & J. Pines, 'Handsworth Songs: Audiences/Aesthetics/Independence', p. 14
[48] S. Rushdie, 'Songs don't know the score', p. 263.

photography – have attempted to find a visual language with which to tell the stories that might form part of any alternative history of black Handsworth.

Portraiture

In his contribution to the growing theoretical debates regarding the nature of photographic practice during the late-1970s,[49] John Berger drew a distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' photograph. A public photograph, Berger argues, such as those found in advertisements, or, perhaps, in the pages of tabloid newspapers, present people, products or events of which the viewer can never have a full comprehension. These photographs 'carry no certain meaning in themselves, because they are like...the memory of a total stranger'.[50] Public photographs purport to offer its viewers information – they are political photographs designed to sell a particular product or sell more newspapers. But in reality, Berger argues, public photographs have 'nothing to do with us' because they are 'severed from all lived experience'.[51] Conversely, Berger sees the private photograph as representing something altogether more innocent. 'Lived experience' is at the essence of a private photograph, whether this is 'the portrait of a mother, a picture of a daughter, a group photo of one's own team'.[52] Private photographs are cherished because they convey information that is directly relevant to people's lives, providing 'a memento from a life being lived'.[53] However, as the following section will show, and as Berger himself recognised, the boundary between the private and the public – between the personal and the political – is in practice rarely clearly defined, and the 'private use of photographs can

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[49] Aside from Berger, the other classic texts in this tradition are S. Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) & R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Flamingo, 1984). The latter was first published in French in 1980.

[50] J. Berger, 'Uses of Photography – for Susan Sontag', in J. Berger, *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), p. 52.

[51] *Ibid*.

[52] *Ibid*., p. 51.

[53] *Ibid*., p. 52.

be exemplary for their public use'.[54] In Handsworth, private photographs had their own politics and – as the examples of the Dyche and the Handsworth self-portraits will show – this changed depending on the context in which the photographs were seen. Both sets of images at different points challenge the external definitions of Handsworth in political ways; but what they put in its place is far from clear-cut.

In Bishton, Homer and Reardon's Self-Portrait Project, the power of each image was produced by the fact that the makeshift 'studio' that the photographers had erected was literally on a Handsworth street. Grove Lane is a busy street that leads on to the Soho Road, the main shopping area of Handsworth.   Opposite the photographers' premises was a fish and chip shop. Paradoxically, that these images were created in public helped generate the sense of intimacy that Berger sees as being characteristic of a private photograph. It has been noted that the portrait is a classically self-consciously mode of representation,[55] yet the striking aspect of the Handsworth self portraits is their sense of naturalness. There are photographs of whole families together, friends before nights out, toddlers and old people in the collection, but what is uniform is the sense of ease upon each participants' face. Participants pull faces or wink at the camera (*plate 1.2*), and families and young children featured prominently in the original five hundred images. Susan Sontag argues that 'there is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera' and that the camera is like a 'predatory weapon'.[56] In Handsworth, these power relations were seemingly broken by virtue of the fact that the person taking the photograph was also the one being photographed, and because of the familiarity of participants with the local environment. People were having their photograph taken in the area in which they spent their lives, often on their way to or from something else, 'just

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[55] The portrait is an 'image in which the artist is engaged with the personality of his sitter and preoccupied with his or her characterisation as an individual'. See J. Grere in J. F. Turner, *The Grover Dictionary of Art* (London: Grove/Macmillan, 1996), vol. 8, p. 275.
[56] Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 7.

going about their business on a normal Saturday'.[57] As a result, when people took their own portrait, many brought with them into the studio items from their everyday lives outside – bags of shopping, for example, or skateboards [*plate 1.2*].

For Derek Bishton, the Handsworth self portraits were always 'intended as political photographs in the widest sense'.[58] The project was undertaken at a time when anger at Margaret Thatcher's comments about Britain being 'swamped' by immigrants remained high, comments that, Bishton wrote in a 1980 article about the project – with some hyperbole – 'probably represent the most overtly racist comments by any politician in power since Hitler'.[59] The politics of the Self-Portrait Project centred on the desire to create a different image of Handsworth to the 'front page' view most people in Birmingham and in Britain had in the period. 'We were looking for images which challenged…popular stereotypes about Handsworth', Bishton wrote in 1980, 'we wanted to offer our neighbours a chance to present a different image'.[60]

The concept and style of the portraits was borrowed from the American photographer David Attie, who in 1977 published *Russian Self Portraits*, a collection of images designed to overcome western stereotypes regarding life in Communist Russia during the Cold War and enable both countries to 'see each other a little more clearly'.[61] Attie's set up appealed to Bishton, Homer and Reardon because of problems they were encountering in their everyday photographic work in Handsworth. As white photographers operating in Handsworth, Bishton, Homer and Reardon often found there to be a boundary between themselves and their black subjects. As Bishton recalled,

> as young white guys walking around the streets of Handsworth…trying to engage
> with young black guys…you were inevitably getting a stereotypical response to

[57] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1st February 2009.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] D. Bishton, 'Handsworth Self Portrait Project', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 4, Spring 1980, p. 3.
[60] D. Bishton, 'Local Colour', *the Sunday Times Magazine*, September 21 1980, p. 96.
[61] D. Attie, *Russian Self-Portraits* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), p.4.

your presence. Inevitably, if you've been criminalised in some way, and someone's following you around with a camera, then you're suspicious, that's obvious.[62]

They felt that allowing participants in the Self-Portrait Project to take their own photograph would help ensure that the photographers did not inadvertently end up reinforcing external stereotypes regarding the area. By passing control over the camera-shutter to the subject of the photographs, as Attie had done in Russia, Bishton found he and his colleagues were able to 'get around the problem of allowing people to present themselves to the camera, rather than me [as the photographer] pre-determining the result'.[63]

Attie had used a plain white backdrop in Russia to ensure that the focus of his western audience would be directed solely on the people in the photographs, not on anything that may or may not have been going on in the background. For Bishton, Homer and Reardon, this was another appealing characteristic of Attie's set up that would further enhance the politics of the Handsworth portraits. Above all, the photographers hoped that the Self-Portrait Project would result in images that challenged the mainstream media's portrayal of Handsworth which, as has been discussed, often implied there to be a direct relationship between black people and the area's physical deprivation. 'Handsworth has its share of problems', Bishton wrote,

> but we were looking for images which challenged the simplistic arguments which blame certain sections of people for those problems. Life in Handsworth has its richness too, and the individuals who create it have only a remote connection with popular stereotypes.[64]

The plain white backdrop removed Handsworth almost completely, in order to avoid 'present[ing] people in a context of deprivation and inferiority' and to 'confront and

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[62] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1st February 2009.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] D. Bishton, 'Local Colour', p.98.

challenge racist stereotyping'.[65] Instead, the central aim of the project was to convey what the photographers perceived as being 'the unique richness of a community'.[66] For the photographers, seemingly, this 'richness' could only be conveyed by removing Handsworth from the picture altogether.

Immigrant communities in Birmingham have been using portraiture in altogether different ways, long before the Self-Portrait Project took place in Handsworth. More conventional high street studios than the kind Bishton, Homer and Reardon constructed on Grove Lane have regularly been used by immigrants from the 1950s onwards in order to create photographs that could be sent back to family and friends in the Caribbean or South Asia, places many people still considered to be home. There were two such studios in operation in Handsworth in the 1950s and 1960s, though both closed in the 1980s and left little archival trace behind.[67] In terms of the city as a whole, the most important studio was the Dyche studio in Balsall Heath, a district to the south of the city from Handsworth. The studio was established in 1893, and initially catered largely for local entertainment and acting industries. However by the 1950s, as the photographic historian Pete James surmised, the studio's work 'shifted, almost exclusively, to portraiture and wedding photographs for black and Asian communities'.[68] After its closure in the mid-1980s, [69] James was responsible for rescuing the Dyche studio's vast photographic archive, and as part of a number of exhibitions of the photographs carried out some

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[65] D. Bishton, 'Handsworth Self Portrait Project', p.2; Derek Bishton, Brian Homer, & John Reardon, cited in G. Kenth & V. Osborne, 'Facing the Camera and Seeing Black', in I. Grosvenor *et al* (eds.) *Making Connections: Birmingham Black International History* (Birmingham: Black Pasts, Birmingham Futures Group, 2002), p.78.

[66] D. Bishton, B. Homer & J. Reardon, cited in G. Kenth & V. Osborne, 'Facing the Camera and Seeing Black', p.77.

[67]P. James, personal interview, 12 June 2009; M. Crooks, personal interview, 25 August 2011.

[68] P. James, personal interview, 12 June 2009.

[69] See Internet source, http://www.casbah.ac.uk/cats/archive/69/BCAA00001.htm (accessed 23 May 2010).

research into the nature of the studio's work.[70] James found there to be a mutually beneficial relationship between client and photographer, with the studio on the one hand requiring new business following the decline of Birmingham's theatre industry, and black and Asian clients on the other hand not only needing a professional service but also a studio that would actually take on their custom. James estimates that 'people came to Dyche from city-wide and even beyond Birmingham – [the] studio got a reputation for not only being sympathetic to the clientele but also providing good, professional work…word spread'.[71]

In the first instance, these portraits would seem to contrast markedly with those in the Handsworth Self-Portrait collection [*plate 1.3*]. One difference is that unlike the self portraits, the photographs from the Dyche studio are by no means Handsworth-specific. There is very little biographical information about the Dyche sitters, and almost no way of knowing exactly how many actually came from Handsworth, although it seems inevitable that many did. Another, more striking, difference between the two sets of images is that of form. Whereas the Handsworth self-portraits speak largely of fun and spontaneity, the tone of the Dyche portraits is more serious. In the Handsworth images participants are seen with everyday items; sitters in the Dyche images show off expensive-looking watches or pens. Men appear sitting at writing desks or in chairs, women stand with their hands folded in front of them, often in nurse's uniforms, whilst families appear together in their 'Sunday best' [*plate 1.3*].[72] As one reviewer of the Dyche images put it, the faces in this collection are 'as stiff as the collars from which [they] protrude'.[73]

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[70] The exhibitions, entitled 'Being Here', were housed in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in May 1996. This was followed by two others, the first in the Custard Factory in April 1997 and the final one at the Drum, in May/June 1998.

[71] P. James, personal interview, 12 June 2009.

[72] For a full account of the significance of the clothing of these sitters, see T. Campt, 'Imagining Diaspora: Race, Photography, and the Ernest Dyche Archive', in *The SemiAnnual Newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Centre for the Humanities*, 16:2, 2008, pp. 1-7.

[73] C. Arnot, 'Spaghetti Junction', in *the Guardian*, 18 May 1999, from Internet source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/1999/may/18/artsfeatures1, 12 July 2010.

The most important difference between the two sets of images, however, comes in the contrasting motivations that lie behind each photograph. The Dyche photographs were created, in John Berger's terminology, with far more 'private' motivations than those from the Self-Portrait Project. Somewhat paradoxically, although the Handsworth photographs were technically *self* portraits, in the sense that it was the participants themselves who ultimately had control over the shutter-release, ownership of the portraits in terms of copyright belonged to Bishton, Homer and Reardon. It was they who determined the nature and set up of each portrait, as well as the politicised message of showing black people away from the context of inner-city deprivation. Each participant was required to sign over copyright of the images to Bishton, Homer and Reardon, thereby allowing them to show the images in exhibitions or in magazines.[74]

Conversely, with the photographs from the Dyche collection, although the boundaries between photographer and sitter were far more rigid in terms of photographer and photographed, the sitters themselves ironically exercised greater control over the final image. In preparation for the portrait, for example, sitters would regularly borrow watches, pens and even suits in an attempt to convey to loved ones an image of prosperity and success. As Tina Campt argues, there may be other, more subtle signs within these images, such as a cocked hat or a slightly-too-short skirt, that were designed to resonate with particular friends or family members.[75] The point is that these images were meant as ways of communicating private messages to friends and family in far away places, not overtly political statements regarding the 'authentic' nature of black Handsworth. To apply Berger's terms, the Dyche portraits are 'fragile images' meant to be 'carried next to

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[74] This is a process repeated in the contemporary manifestations of the project, organised by Brian Homer. See http://www.selfportrait.org.uk/ (accessed 10 October 2011).

[75] T. Campt, 'Imagining Diaspora: Race, Photography and the Ernest Dyche Archive', in *The SemiAnnual Newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Centre for the Humanities*, 16:2, 2008, p. 6

the heart or placed by the side of the bed',[76] to be used by individuals as an 'instrument to contribute to a living memory'.[77] Merisse Crooks, who migrated to Birmingham in the 1950s and has lived in Handsworth ever since, remembers receiving such photographs as a girl in Jamaica, and also had her own portrait taken at a Handsworth portraiture studio, which was featured in an article in *Ten.8* magazine (*plate 1.3*).[78] There was 'a lot of excitement to see the mother country' in Jamaica, Crooks recalled, and 'when you got to England people thought [having their self portrait taken] was the thing to do…photography was still very special to people in the Caribbean, it was still very expensive. It was about communicating in a way that words couldn't'.[79]

On closer consideration, however, there are also some important similarities between the Dyche and the Handsworth self portraits. It is necessary to separate the conditions in which these photographs were created in from the changing contexts in which they have gone on to be received. The two collections may have been created under widely differing circumstances, for wholly different purposes, but ultimately they have become seen in much the same light. Bishton, Homer and Reardon were open about the 'political' nature of their Self-Portrait Project.[80] After each participant received a copy of their own portrait to keep, the collection was immediately presented by the photographers at exhibitions and in magazines and newspapers, and copies of the original self portraits have since been deposited in the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG).[81] The Dyche photographs came about for far more personal reasons, yet by 1996, they had ended up in the same place. The first exhibition of Dyche studio portraits

[76] J. Berger, 'Appearances', in J. Berger and J. Mohr (eds), *Another Way of Telling* (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), p. 108.
[77] J. Berger, 'Uses of Photography – for Susan Sontag', p. 52.
[78] Crooks' portrait is featured in S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work', p.108.
[79] M. Crooks, personal interview, 25 August 2011.
[80] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1 February 2009.
[81] See BMAG online catalogue, available from Internet source
http://www.bmagic.org.uk/results?s=adv&who=Brian+Homer&what=+&where=+&when=+&material=+&theme=+&col=, 10 February 2009.

was held at the BMAG in May 1996. Three years later, the exhibition was taken to Milan as part of a 'cultural exchange' to share with Italy England's experiences of immigration.[82] Paradoxically, then, despite the differences in the context of production, they are now being received almost exactly the same places.

The Dyche studio portraits and the Handsworth self portraits are powerful images because both collections act as visual challenges to the dominant portrayals of black people, both in Handsworth and in Britain generally. In both sets of photographs, black people are presented away from the familiar backdrop of inner-city deprivation, and occupy positions that are unfamiliar in the context of post-war British photojournalism. The subjects of the Handsworth self portraits appear not as threats or potential problems, but at ease with themselves both in their surroundings and in front of the lens of the camera. That the images are devoid almost completely of context enables the viewer to approach the subjects of these photographs almost without preconception, simply as people. In the Dyche studio portraits, the formality of each subject contrasts with the Handsworth photographs, but presents black people in equally unfamiliar subject positions: those of respectability and aspiration. The backdrops of these images is crucial in a different way – rather than shifting focus onto the subject alone, in the Dyche photographs attention is purposely drawn to the backdrop as it places each sitter in the context of achievement, whether this is real or aspired to.

Such themes suggest important parts of any 'alternative history' of black Handsworth. The Dyche portraits in particular speak of the desire for respectability, affluence and being seen by people at home to be 'getting on'. As Merrise Crooks recalled, 'it was important to dress up for the pictures. That suit I am wearing [in the

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[82] C. Arnot, 'Spaghetti Junction', in *the Guardian*, 18 May 1999.

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photograph], I can remember buying it. It was from C and A'.[83] Such themes were evidently key to the way in which residents of black Handsworth wanted to narrate their own lives, and were part of the structure of feeling of black Handsworth. Crooks remembers that the 'studios were also expensive in the UK. You used to put a deposit on the pictures, and pay for it weekly, a bit like a Hire Purchase'.[84] These photographs functioned as signs of affluence in the absence of more lavish objects of consumption. As Crooks recalled, 'when we took the photos in the studios we didn't have our front rooms. Once we started to get them, that's where we would take the photographs – we wanted to show them off, and the things in them'.[85] The significance of the domestic space will be explored in detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

Yet in many ways, both examples of portraiture conceal more than they reveal. Both the Handsworth self portraits and the Dyche portraits, whether they appear on art gallery walls or in magazines, challenge, even undermine the dominant representations of black people in Handsworth seen in the previous section, but they do not in themselves spell out what might make up an alternative narrative. In a sense, both sets of photographs have been created in their own artificial vacuums designed to suit certain purposes, and they leave behind only small clues about the wider histories of the people who inhabit each image. In the Handsworth self portraits, despite being taken literally on a street in Handsworth, almost all residue of Handsworth has been forcibly removed. Yet the fashions of some of the participants, for example, or the everyday objects with which they pose, allude to different aspects of their everyday life in Handsworth, outside of Bishton, Homer and Reardon's makeshift studio on Grove Lane. In the Dyche studio, traces of the 'outside world' are equally sparse, but one's attention is also drawn to the sitters' fashions and items such as pens and watches, and it leaves the contemporary

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[83] M. Crooks, personal interview, 25 August 2011.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] *Ibid*.

viewer of such images keen to know more. As Sandra Courtman reflects of the Dyche photographs, something is 'missing' from these images.[86] If this photography does allude to an 'alternative history', the exact terms of this history can only be located, as Hall himself puts it, 'beyond the frame'.[87] The following sections, then, explore the work of photographers who attempted to capture life in black Handsworth away from any artificial studio, in Handsworth itself.

Documentary photography: *Home Front* and community photography

The British documentary photography tradition, classically embodied by the work of Humphrey Spender and Bill Brandt, in publications such as the *Picture Post*, is characterised by an attempt to present people in the context of their everyday lives. There is the overt desire to '*look hard* and *record*', a 'passion to present people to themselves in wholly recognisable terms…caught up in whatever they are doing'.[88] As both this and the following section will show, this was a tradition maintained by a number of practitioners in Handsworth in the period. The focus in the work of these photographers is on what was missing from both the Dyche and the Handsworth self portraits: the Handsworth context. Documentary photographers sought to use photography as a means of recording the stories that took place in Handsworth, and placing them firmly in the Handsworth context. As one local practitioner put it, the aim was to photograph 'people in their environment, struggling to establish themselves in that environment'.[89]

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[86] S. Courtman, 'What is Missing from the Picture?', in *Wasafiri*, 29, 1999, p.10.
[87] S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work', p.108.
[88] Y. Fukunishi, *British Photojournalism in the 1930s: An analysis of selected works by Stefan Lorant, Humphrey Spender and Bill Brandt*, MPhil thesis: University of Birmingham, 2003, p. 83. There have been numerous works that have considered the nature of documentary photography. See J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: essays on photographies and histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988) for a general overview, A. Thomas, *The Expanding Eye: photography and the nineteenth century mind* (London: Croom Helm, 1978). for an investigation into the nature of documentary photography in the Victorian context, and S. Hall, 'The Social Eye of the *Picture Post*, in Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Spring 1972, which uses the case study of the *Picture Post*.
[89] V. Burke, personal interview, 25 March 2008.

However, the photographing of Handsworth's stories was neither a simple nor a neutral process. It was not simply a matter of 'looking hard' and 'recording'. There were complex political decisions made by various practitioners, particularly with regard to the question of *which* stories were to be recorded. The documentary photographs produced by Derek Bishton and John Reardon in their Handsworth photo-journal *Home Front*, alongside the work of amateur photographers who enrolled on a local community photography project, will be discussed in this section. The final section will examine the work of the black documentary photographers Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar. Each body of work, it will be shown, at times revealed a different perspective on black Handsworth. Many photographs captured often-intimate moments from inside houses, churches and pubs. However, decisions about what to photograph were nearly always made in relation to the dominant, 'front page' view of Handsworth. In spite of a desire to move definitively beyond the media's narrative, it will be argued that these external representations maintained a near-continuous influence on the work of internal practitioners.

Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John Reardon's Handsworth Self-Portrait Project was only one part of the group's wider photographic work in Handsworth. The three established and ran Sidelines, a photographic and design agency, out of their shared premises in Grove Lane, and produced the annual reports and other literature for numerous local community groups.[90] In contrast, then, with practitioners such as Spender and Brandt, who gained their reputations because of a talent for documenting people in places that were unfamiliar, Bishton, Homer and Reardon were attempting to photograph people in the place in which they lived and worked. However, this did not make the task of documentation more straightforward. On the one hand, Bishton remarked that they

[90] Sidelines designed and published literature from All Faiths For One Race, the Asian Resource Centre and Handsworth Law Centre. For a discussion of these groups see Chapter Two.

'did not feel like aliens or intruders in Handsworth', and were 'just taking pictures of where we lived'.[91] Yet on the other, the very existence of their Self-Portrait Project is testament to the difficulties the photographers had in photographing the people around them, the issue of 'white guys…trying to engage with young black guys' and 'inevitably getting a stereotypical response'.[92] It was the Self-Portrait Project itself that helped the photographers to overcome some of these difficulties. According to Bishton, working on the project in 1979 helped them to 'become known as photographers. It introduced us to a lot of people, and to a certain extent, broke down broke down barriers about "who are these people, walking the streets, snapping people – are they police spies?"'.[93]

For Bishton, 'there were a lot of stories that we wanted to tell that were very much about the area itself'.[94] In the aftermath of the Self-Portrait Project, both he and Reardon set about attempting to photograph these stories, and a collection of the resulting images were published in a 1984 book entitled *Home Front*,[95] as well as displayed in a corresponding exhibition held at the Photographer's Gallery in London in the same year. Bishton described the collection as 'our personal testament to what we'd experienced [in Handsworth]'.[96]

In keeping with the ambition of the Handsworth self portraits, the tone of the photographs in *Home Front* is marked by a clear desire to present a different side of black Handsworth to the one regularly portrayed in the pages of tabloid newspapers. As the name 'Home Front' suggests, its central theme was an attempt to document the daily struggles of people within black Handsworth from the point of view of those who lived there. Thus the presence of the police in these images, for example, is viewed not over

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[91] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1 February 2009.
[92] *Ibid*.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] *Ibid*.
[95] D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).
[96] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1 February 2009.

the shoulder of officers but from the perspective of local residents. In one image, a young black man is seen arguing with a group of white police officers, who surrounded him as he attempts to make his point. In another photograph, a man stands next to a banner with the slogan 'give us a future – jobs express' in bold lettering. A few pages later there is a march in protest against the proposed deportation of the social worker Mohammed Idrish (*plate 1.4*).[97]

Alongside images that show the effects of various problems in Handsworth from the point of view of residents, leisure activities form another pervasive theme in *Home Front*. This includes important events within the community, such as the reggae artist Peter Tosh performing at a nearby club, or the day Muhammad Ali came to open a Handsworth sports centre, but also the more everyday consumption of leisure in Handsworth. Bishton and Reardon photograph two men sitting in Handsworth Park watching a game of cricket, for instance, the owner of Radar's Records in his shop, a group of men watching television in a barbershop as they wait for a haircut, and a member of 'Jungleman' – one of Handsworth's most prominent 'sound systems' (discussed in detail in Chapter Three) – standing next to one of the group's speakers (*plate 1.4*)

In his critique of *Handsworth Songs*, Salman Rushdie cited *Home Front* as a more effective way of telling Handsworth's stories. He pointed to the photographs in Bishton and Readron's collection that allude to the religiosity of Handsworth, for example, alongside those that depict the 'Toasters at blues dances' and the 'kids' who 'like to dance the Wobble'.[98] For Rushdie, it is 'important to tell these stories; to say, this is England'.[99] It was Rushdie himself who wrote the introduction to *Home Front*. He summarised the photographs as a 'portrait of everyday reality as it is experienced by Britain's Asians and

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[97] For a discussion of anti-deportation campaigns in Handsworth, see Chapter Two.
[98] S. Rushdie, 'Songs don't know the score', p. 263.
[99] *Ibid*.

Blacks'.[100] But the collection, he argued, was also 'part of a struggle'.[101] *Home Front* consists of 'images of peoples who have for centuries been persecuted by images', Rushdie argued, and in Handsworth continue to be 'subjugate[d] and persecute[d]' by 'picture making'.[102] It is the photographic work of practitioners such as Bishton and Reardon, the photographs of a game of cricket or a reggae concert in Handsworth, that for Rushdie act as a process of 'liberation'. The 'new images', he suggests, 'can chase out the old'.[103]

Bishton, Homer and Reardon were aware that this process was not as simple as Rushdie's comments suggested. The photographers were working in a period of intense theoretical engagements with the practice of photography and in particular, a radical questioning of the ethics of documentary photography. This was influenced by the contemporary work of Berger, Sontag and Laura Mulvey, and played out in debates in a number of photography journals that were beginning to be established in this period. The two most important journals were *Camerawork*, a London-based journal established in 1975 with the aim of writing politically about both the practice and theory of the photographic process,[104] and *Ten.8*, a magazine established by Bishton, Homer and Reardon themselves four years later in Handsworth. *Ten.8* ran for over ten years and showcased the work of local photographers, as well as featuring essays from cultural theorists including Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer and Paul Gilroy.

'Community photography' was a response to the widespread anxiety regarding what was seen as the essentially oppressive relationship between photographer and

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[100] S. Rusdhie, Introduction to D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front*, p. 6.
[101] *Ibid*.
[102] *Ibid*., pp. 6-7.
[103] Ibid., p 7.
[104] For a more detailed analysis of the Camerawork approach, see P. Trevor, 1998, 'The *Camerawork* essays', from Internet source: http://www.buildingsoflondon.co.uk/pm/lip/mar98/ptrev.htm, (accessed 6 February 2011).

photographed, perhaps most importantly articulated by Sontag and Berger.[105] The aim of community photography was to make photography accessible to a greater number of people through the staging of workshops in deprived areas, at which participants were taught how to use a camera by a trained photographer.[106] People were encouraged to photograph each other, friends and family in the hope that they would then be able to 'look at the world differently'.[107] For Jo Spence, one of the founders of *Camerawork* and a key exponent of community photography, people would be able to 'relate to themselves and to others more positively when armed with images of themselves'.[108] By passing on first the basic skills of photography, and then more sophisticated techniques such as the use of a darkroom, community photography would 'help communities to express themselves and their own feelings' rather than this being represented by someone else,[109] be it by photographers for tabloid newspapers or documentary photographers such as Bishton and Reardon. In essence, Spence hoped, community photography would 'put photography into the hands of a lot of people who will eventually be able to dispense with the experts'.[110]

In Handsworth throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a community photography project was run at Westminster Endeavour for Liaison and Development (WELD), an educational organisation established by two teachers at Westminster Road Primary School in 1968. Bishton, Homer and Reardon each contributed to the WELD photography workshops, which ran alongside dance, arts and crafts and other workshops.[111] The photography

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[105] In fact, as Susie Linfield argues, there is a 'chronic negativity' in the vast majority of important theoretical engagements with the practice of photography, both in the 1970s and beyond. See S. Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 10.
[106] J. Spence, 'The Politics of Photography', in *Camerawork*, 1, February 1976, p. 1.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] *Ibid*.
[109] L. Tiernan, cited in Z. Hu, 'Community Photography: an assessment of its ideas and practices, with particular reference to Birmingham and the West Midlands', Ph.D thesis, Birmingham City University, 2009, vol. 1, p. 13.
[110] J. Spence, 'The Politics of Photography', in *Camerawork*, 1, February 1976, p. 1.
[111] Z. Hu, 'Community Photography', vol. 1, p. 17.

sessions took place over school holidays, during which 'anybody who wanted to do photography could just sign up', and included facilities such as a darkroom, a light box and six cameras. [112] Jon Stewart was the leader of the photography workshops from 1976. 'Most people have had their photograph taken', Stewart reflected in *Ten.8* magazine. 'But for many this will only have been on special occasions or on holiday. Not very many people see themselves, their friends or people they know at ease with or confronting their environment'. [113] The aim of the WELD photography workshops was to allow 'mediums of expression and communication which previously seemed beyond many people's reach both financially and technologically [to] now become a part of their real lives'. [114] For Larrie Tiernan, who succeeded Stewart at WELD, the workshops were not only about the learning of new skills, but also enabling the local community to present a positive image of itself. Whereas traditional documentary photography was often 'negative about the poor, or deprived', Tiernan hoped community photography would allow people to 'express their own identity…in a positive way'. [115]

A selection of photographs by participants on the WELD photography course were reproduced in the first issue of *Ten.8* magazine.[116] The images are from a day trip organised by WELD to an unspecified location in the countryside. Groups of black teenagers are depicted in the grounds of a church, sitting casually on benches or walls, eating sandwiches and cones of ice cream. In one image, a group of boys pose for the camera sitting on the steps of a tombstone in the church graveyard; in another, a couple are eating a picnic (*plate 1.5*). The photographs are striking because they represent unexpected images of normalcy. The subjects appear in relaxed and often jovial poses.

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[112] *Ibid*., p. 280.
[113] J. Stewart, cited in D. Bishton and B. Homer, 'People Power?', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 1, February 1979, p. 7.
[114] J. Stewart, cited in *ibid*., p. 7.
[115] L. Tiernan, cited in Z. Hu, 'Community Photography', p. 12.
[116] *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, 1, February 1979.

The collection of images almost appear as the kind of family holiday 'snaps' that appear in family photo-albums.

As well as on day trips away, WELD participants also took photographs closer to home, in Handsworth. Participants were often lent a camera for a period of time and encouraged to document their everyday lives. One such image from the WELD group, for example, not published in *Ten.8*, is a portrait of a young woman who is staring directly into the camera whilst smoking.[117] Unlike the Dyche or Handsworth self-portraits, however, there is a clearly visible scene from everyday life in the background of this image. Another figure is present in the backdrop; on a nearby table there is an ashtray and a half-drunk bottle of beer. As with the images taken in the countryside, the photograph is striking because of its normality. In direct contrast to the Dyche images, this is a photograph that is largely unstaged – the subjects have clearly not dressed up for the image, and the flash of the camera appears as a brief intrusion on a group of friends smoking, drinking, and 'doing nothing'.[118]

Yet these photographs also allude to an important problematic within community photography: the role of the 'professional' photographer, and the influence he or she can have on structuring the dominant meaning of a particular image. When published in the pages of *Ten.8*, the photographs of the day-trip to the countryside became politicised. For Bishton and Homer, writing in *Ten.8*, the images were 'startling because they present such a stark contrast between the essentially "white" associations of the English country church and the unexpected intrusion of "blacks"'.[119] Back in their 'normal' setting of the

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[117] The photograph was taken by Hervin Anderson, a participant on the WELD course. Unlike the images taken in the countryside, Anderson's photograph was not published in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, and no copyright has been obtained. The image can, however, be viewed in the Derek Bishton Archive, photographic work and associated material, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2478/A/7/16.
[118] For an assessment into the cultural significance of youths 'doing nothing' see P. Corrigan 'Doing Nothing' in S. Hall and T. Jefferson, eds, *Resistance Through Rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. (London: Hutchinson/CCCS, 1976).
[119] D. Bishton & B. Homer, 'People Power?', p.8.

inner city, an image of a group of black youth on street corners would be designed to portray blacks as menacing aggressors, perhaps as an accompaniment to a newspaper article about mugging. In *Ten.8*, the WELD photographs were meant to problematize both the perceived connection between black populations and urban decay, as well as the view of black youth as violent aggressors. The images proved so unsettling, Bishton and Homer claimed, that when they went on display in Birmingham they provoked a number of complaints for being 'tasteless'.[120]

Just as there was a politics to Bishton and Reardon's documentary work in *Home Front* – that is, a desire to present an image of black Handsworth that challenged mainstream representations – there was also a politics at the heart of the community photography project. There was a central contradiction in community photography: between, on the one hand, a theoretical commitment towards attempting to overcome the power relations seen to be inherent in conventional documentary practices, and on the other, a politicised desire in keeping with the documentary tradition to create images in Handsworth that could 'chase out the old'. It was perhaps the latter that ultimately won out. As Jo Spence surmised, the aim was to produce images that could 'counteract the stereotypes usually seen in the mass media',[121] or as the organisers of WELD put it, to use photography to allow people to express themselves 'a positive way',[122] and to move beyond the external stereotypes that centred on 'the ghetto image of poverty and deprivation'.[123]

Many of the images seen in this section did indeed do this. What was provided was a different perspective of life in Handsworth. Rather than being associated with deprivation or criminality, Handsworth residents were often pictured in conflict with

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[120] *Ibid*.
[121] J. Spence, 'The Politics of Photography', in *Camerawork*, 1, February 1976, p. 1.
[122] L. Tiernan, cited in Z. Hu, 'Community Photography', p. 12.
[123] J. Stewart, cited in D. Bishton and B. Homer, 'People Power?', p. 7.

them.   Alongside the themes of religion or leisure, photographs of political acts are a dominant presence in *Home Front*. This is manifest in marches, community meetings and the recurrence of banners and placards with slogans such as 'stop the criminalisation of black people' and 'stuff community policing'. One of the most striking images of the collection (*plate 1.4*) is a protest outside Handsworth police station, at which a young protester poses for the camera with a placard that reads, 'self defence is no offence'.

The community photographs produced at WELD also provided a different perspective by seemingly moving into the private sphere in Handsworth. This was true in the photograph of the woman smoking, as well as in another set of images taken by Jimoh Folarin, a local resident of Handsworth who attended a community photography course organised by the Trades Union Congress in Sparkhill, an inner-city area of Birmingham to the south of Handsworth.[124] Folarin photographs his friends as they hang around the Acapulco café in Handsworth, drinking cans of lager and kicking a football. The Acapulco had become infamous in the mid-1980s as the venue outside which the incident that led to the 1985 riots took place.[125] In Folarin's photographs, however, it appears simply as the backdrop to a group of friends as they lark about, make signs with their hands and pull faces for the camera.

Yet neither Bishton, Reardon or the participants in community photography groups were fully able to get away from 'front page' view of Handsworth; their photography was not able to fully 'chase out' the more established visual narratives. In *Home Front*, this is apparent in the continual re-emergence of the police: an image of the arrest of a middle-aged woman and her two sons on suspicion of having assaulted a police officer, for example, or officers in riot-gear during the unrest in Handsworth in 1981. Similarly, in spite of the influence of the professional photographers, amateur participants

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[124] J. Folarin, personal interview, 15 December 2010.
[125] See G. Dear/West Midlands Police, *Handsworth/Lozells, September 1985* (Birmingham: West Midlands Police, 1985), p. 19.

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on community photography projects also often ended up producing images that repeated external stereotypes about black Handsworth.

This is made particularly clear with the example of Sharon Smith. Smith was a participant in the WELD workshops, and enjoyed photography because she otherwise found it 'hard to express my feelings'.[126] In the late-1970s Smith recalled being 'on my way to another assignment' when she came across the demolition of a row of houses in Handsworth. Smith stopped to take the photograph: the resulting black and white image depicts a silhouetted male figure standing amongst the rubble of what was a line of terraced houses (*plate 1.5*). The dust from the demolished bricks is all around the figure, who is dwarfed by the presence of a large digger behind him. In many ways, the emphasis on urban deprivation and tone of despondency in the image represents a classic example of traditional documentary photography of working class areas, pioneered by practitioners like Spender and Brandt. The emphasis on such an overt sign of poverty is also in keeping with a strong theme within the mainstream media's representation of black Handsworth, particularly in the earlier period of black settlement.

For Smith, however, this was not the point. She took the photograph because the scene captured her feelings about living in Handsworth. 'The man hanging his head in despair…the drooping figure in the photograph', she argued, 'says it all'.[127] Capturing an 'everyday reality' in Handsworth, therefore, often meant being unable to find images that 'chase out the old'. In many instances, the 'old' – the stereotypes found in the pages of tabloid newspapers – were also part of the present reality. There was often a tension between a desire to faithfully record Handsworth's stories, and an ambition to present a different image, something that was epitomised, the following section will show, in the work of both Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar.

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[126] S. Smith, cited in D. Bishton and B. Homer, 'People Power?', p. 8.
[127] *Ibid*.

Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar

In May 1985, six months prior to the riots in Handsworth, Vanley Burke and Pogus Caesar appeared on the London Weekend Television programme 'Black on Black' to discuss the motives behind their work. 'We realised that no one was making a record of the community, past or present' remarked Caesar,[128] who had emigrated to Birmingham from the Caribbean island of St Kitts when he was five years old. 'So we made it our business to build up a picture of the black community in Handsworth'.[129] For Burke, who had followed his parents to Handsworth from Jamaica in 1965 at the age of fourteen, and who has lived in the area all of his life, people had 'brought with them cultures and traditions' on their arrival in Handsworth, and 'a lot of them got changed in the process…it was just necessary to record them'.[130] Caesar explained that 'the kids today are trying to find a new identity. For some people this means reaching out to other black communities, some in Britain, some abroad. But both Vanley and I are convinced that the answers about our identity lie here in our local history; that's why we think someone has to collect and record that history before it disappears'.[131]

Vanley Burke's ambition to make an authentic photographic record of life in Handsworth was counter-balanced by a wider politics – a desire to foreground a somewhat romanticised conception of everyday life in black Handsworth, and a belief that capturing Handsworth's everyday stories was in some way a political act. Thus, Burke talked of the need to show 'the architecture, the trees, the park, the parked car...everything' in his photography (*plate 1.6*). But he also described the recording of Handsworth's stories as 'vital' in order to 'bring about change in the community, change

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[128] 'Black on Black' postfilm script, London, 1985. Vanley Burke Archive, Black People on Television, Birmingham Central Library, MS2192/C/F/1/2
[129] *Ibid*.
[130] *Ibid*.
[131] *Ibid*.

that is relevant to a specific social and cultural environment.'[132] Like each of the photographers discussed in this chapter, Burke hoped that by photographing scenes of normalcy in Handsworth, such images might replace the 'spectacular' images of rioting that had come to define the area from without. 'I made a conscious decision to shy away from the spectacular' Burke remarked. 'I wanted to concentrate all my efforts on the ordinary, and hopefully let the ordinary become extra-ordinary'.[133]

However, Burke's photography is both striking and powerful precisely because of its ordinariness. Like many of the images produced by participants on community photography groups, Burke's photographs resonate because of their ability to appear, to use Berger's terms, as 'private' images. There is a sense of intimacy within each frame. His subjects are not asked to falsely pose for his camera; they instead appear immersed in their own business – a lone figure placing a bet in a bookmakers, for example, a moment of religious intensity inside a church, a middle aged couple dancing in front of floral wallpaper (*plate 1.6*). Burke focuses on the scenes that make up the reality of a passing day in Handsworth. As Hall puts it, people appear 'absorbed in *their* lives, *their* activities, *their* troubles, sorrows, joys, celebrations [and] griefs'.[134] In one image, a group of friends – who Burke recalls were known locally as 'the wild bunch' – sit together along a seesaw in Handsworth Park; [135] in another, a group of older men wearing pork-pie hats play dominoes in a pub (*plate 3.1*). Burke also documents the events that carry greater significance in community and family life – weddings, for example, or funerals. As it was in *Home Front*, religious spirituality represents a dominant theme in Burke's photography. Alongside scenes of grief – such as a funeral burial – there are

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[132] V. Burke, personal interview, 25 March 2008.
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] S. Hall, 'Vanley Burke and the "Desire for Blackness"', in M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective* (London : Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. 13.
[135] V. Burke, personal interview, 25 March 2008.

moments of elation during worship, a whole congregation singing, and the baptism of a teenage girl.

There is a romantic, almost poetic element to Burke's photography that marks it out from the work of many other photographers who attempted to document the black experience in Britain at this time. Colin Jones, for example, a photojournalist with the *Observer* and the *Sunday Times*, spent three years photographing life at the Harambee project, a hostel for young people in north London.[136] The tone of these images is characterised by a sense of realism and harshness, black-and-white photographs that depict graffiti-covered walls, stained mattresses and boarded-up windows.[137] Burke's photographs, by contrast, are composed of more subtle tones, visually closer to shades of brown than shades of black and white,[138] and as a result appear less definitive than Jones' photo-journalistic style.

Burke's most famous photograph is 'the boy with the flag' (*plate 1.6*). The photograph, of black boy cycling through Handsworth Park with the Union Jack flag attached to his bike, is the image that is most often reprinted and to which Burke is most closely associated. In many ways, it is the photograph that has come to define Burke's career. Taken in the late-1970s, at a time when the Union Jack had become intimately connected with the racist politics of the National Front, the political power of such an image is obvious. However, in spite of the political implications of this and numerous other Burke photographs, there remains a sense that Burke would most like his work to be considered as photographs that belong in a family photo-album. Burke wants 'people to be able to reference themselves in my work...it's for the community themselves...it's about

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[136] The project had the same name and a similar scope to an organisation in Handsworth in this peroid, which will be discussed in Chapter Two. This was not, however, a formal collaboration.
[137] See C. Jones, *The Black House* (London: Prestal Publishing, 2006).
[138] As Hall points out, the colouring in Burke's photographs use the 'lower, deeper end of the range'. S. Hall, 'Vanley Burke and the "Desire for Blackness"', p. 14.

us recording'.[139] Unlike Bishton, Homer and Reardon, who in the 1990s each moved away from the area, Burke still works and lives in Handsworth, and says he 'always try to keep up with my subjects. Because the people, once they are on the pages, are not gone. Their stories are continuous and developing'.[140]

Burke is adamant that he does not wish people to see his work as 'some sort of anthropological, sociological manifesto'.[141] Yet running alongside his ambition to showcase the ordinary in Handsworth, there is in Burke an almost anthropological desire to record – as Burke himself puts it, to 'capture the everyday things that happened in the community'.[142] The 'social eye' that characterised the work of Spender and Brandt was also a part of Burke's motivations; Burke too wanted to 'look hard' and 'record'.[143]

It is this motivation that meant that both he and Pogus Caesar, as they were making their 'record of the community' in Handsworth, were often forced to capture scenes that again mirrored the view found in the pages of tabloid newspapers, scenes that were not intimate, or akin to a family photograph, but 'spectacular'. For Burke, like Bishton and Reardon in *Home Front*, this meant photographing scenes of violence or deprivation. The police, for example, are present in Burke's photography. As they appeared in Bishton and Reardon's work, uniformed police officers are photographed with black youth or grouped behind riot shields. Similarly, Burke also photographed racist graffiti, burnt out cars and littered streets.

Pogus Caesar's photography also documents the changing make-up of both Handsworth and other inner-city areas of Birmingham, and he has also built up an impressive collection of portraits of artists and musicians either from Handsworth or

[139] V. Burke, personal interview, 25 March 2008.
[140] *Ibid.*
[141] *Ibid.*
[142] *Ibid.*
[143] See S. Hall, 'The Social Eye of the *Picture Post*, in Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Spring 1972.

visiting the area, always placed firmly in the Handsworth context.[144] Caesar's work depicts the Jamaican reggae band the Mighty Diamonds on the Soho Road, for example, a local reggae group called Beshara, the director of *Handsworth Songs* John Akomfrah reading the local newspaper, even Vanley Burke, sitting on a staircase with a camera in his hand.

The photographs for which he has become best known, however, are those that he took during the 1985 Handsworth riots. Caesar was present during both days of unrest, and remembered there being 'bottles flying everywhere, there were stones, there were flames, there were cars being overturned'.[145] For Caesar, however, documenting what happened was necessary in order to provide 'a record of those few days in September...not only for the community, but also for the wider public at large'.[146] Thus Caesar's images capture Douglas Hurd as he met an angry crowd, two firemen attempting to put out a fire in an overturned car and a phone box that had been set on fire. He photographed a tractor clearing our rubble from the burnt out shell of Ramesh and Sons off license and a man seemingly 'getting ready to throw a bottle'.[147]

On one level, Caesar's photographs provide a different perspective of the riots to that seen in the mainstream media. Rather than seeing the events over the shoulder of uniformed policemen – the dividing lines between 'law' and 'disorder' clearly marked – Caesar's photographs present what happened as seen through the eyes of Handsworth residents. These are images from within Handsworth, taken in between ordinary people.

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[144] For a more detailed examination of Caesar's work, see Roger Shannon, 'Pogus and the Snapshots of Life are a Beautiful Thing', in *Birmingham Post,* 3 May 2008, p.18, or visit Caesar's website at www.oomgalleries.com.

[145] P. Caesar, cited from Internet source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/birmingham/hi/people_and_places/newsid_9118000/9118723.stm (accessed 12 October 2011).

[146] P. Caesar, on BBC *Inside Out* West Midlands, 25 October 2010.

[147] P. Caesar, cited from Internet source: www.digitalhandsworth.org.uk (accessed 12 October 2011).

In one image, for example, an elderly resident looks out at events from behind a curtain; in another, a group of people are sprinting away from something, or perhaps towards some unknown destination. Caesar shows his viewers a street sign that has been snapped in two, and a 'mug shot' of a man hiding his identity with a balaclava and a pair of sunglasses. When we see the police in these photographs, they are not presented as noble keepers of British law and order, but as alien and aggressive invaders. Caesar's key image of the riots from 'within', then, is not a view from over the police's shoulders but from over the shoulder of ordinary Handsworth people: an officer jabbing his finger in the face of two black youths [*plate 1.7*], for example, or a row of policeman crouching behind their riot shields [*plate 1.7*].

Yet on another level, Caesar's photographs illustrate the problematic that each documentary practitioner working in Handsworth in different ways encountered: the desire of photographers to record Handsworth's everyday stories also necessitated recording events that were out of the ordinary, taking photographs of black Handsworth that were similar to those found on the pages of tabloid newspapers. Documentary photographers were often unable to move away from the kind of images that characterised the 'front page' view of black Handsworth in the 1980s. Caesar's photographs of the riots, for example, may offer a different perspective, but the viewer is nevertheless confronted with images of 'fire', 'helmeted cops' and other photographs reminiscent of the front pages of tabloid newspapers.[148]

As a result of this, photographing Handsworth was as political an act as removing Handsworth from the picture altogether. Each documentary photographer faced important political decisions about what to photograph, and what to share. Caesar did not make public the vast majority of his images of the riots for twenty years because of a

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[148] S. Rushdie, (1986) 'Songs don't know the score' in Procter, J., ed. *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: an interdisciplinary anthology* (Manchester: MUP, 2000), p.263.

concern that his photographs could incriminate people.[149]   Similarly, operating in Handsworth meant that Burke 'became aware of the implications of controlling, or having sensitive material which, if held in the wrong hands, could be harmful to the people who were photographed. So, if that was the case, I wouldn't take the photograph'.[150] The sensitivities of documentary practice in Handsworth in this period is well illustrated by an incident that took place shortly after the 1985 riots.   Vanley Burke was taking photographs inside the Acapulco café, which, as Jimoh Forlarin's community photographs showed, was a popular venue amongst black youth in the period.   Burke describes having gained permission from the owner to take photographs inside, when 'a young man who was there…came over and in no uncertain terms threatened me, detailing what he would do to me should he see a photograph of himself anywhere'.[151] The man accused Burke of taking 'the photograph of a man apparently about to throw a petrol bomb', that which had become the defining, front page picture of the black bomber.[152]

Burke clearly feels a great deal of responsibility towards the people whose photograph he takes.   His unacknowledged politics of being a photographer within Handsworth is to present a side of Handsworth that those without have not seen before, not one they already have.   However, for other photographers, these boundaries were not so rigidly defined.

John Reardon was one third of the group behind the Handsworth Self-Portrait Project, whose aim was explicitly to undermine the 'front page' view of Handsworth. Along with Derek Bishton, he produced the Handsworth-photo journal *Home Front*, and also helped teach participants on the WELD community photography course.   But Reardon was also a jobbing photographer, and makes explicit the problematic process of

[149] P. Caesar, on BBC *Inside Out* West Midlands, 25 October 2010.
[150] V. Burke, 'Here I Stand', in M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective*, p. 31.
[151] *Ibid*.
[152] *Ibid*.

recording Handsworth's 'authentic' history. Like Caesar, he was at the 1985 riots and photographed what he saw happening. But when the opportunity came to sell one of his photographs to the mainstream media, he took it. The image of the black bomber, which made it on to the front page of every national tabloid newspaper, and defined Handsworth from without, was his. Perhaps realising the moral ambiguity of his decision, shortly after the riots Reardon abruptly moved away from Birmingham.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that photographers in Handsworth have, in different ways, been unable to escape race. Whether explicitly or implicitly, the racialised perceptions of Handsworth presented in the mainstream media at least partly structured each genre of photograph. This was manifest both in the political desire of photographers to present a different image and, in some instances, the way in which the conventional image of Handsworth from without – scenes of police barricades and violence – were periodically repeated within.

Paul Gilroy saw photography as being able to contribute towards 'authentic' histories of 'black Britain'.[153] Yet the most problematic aspect of the photography from within Handsworth has been the issue of authenticity. The photographs have clearly been able to provide a different perspective on life in Handsworth. The focus in both the Dyche and the Handsworth self-portraits, for instance, was on the people in each image, rather than on any visual sign of poverty or deprivation in the Handsworth context. The documentary photography offered glimpses from inside pubs and clubs, and during the riots and other moments of conflict, a perspective from the view of local residents as opposed to the visiting police. At the same time as this, however, they cannot be said to

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[153] Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain*, p. 23

provide a wholly authentic representation of black Handsworth from within. The Dyche portraits make this especially clear. Black people fundamentally do not appear as problems or threats in these images – rather, the portraits communicate the desire of a group of people who wish to be seen to be 'getting on'. However, the very point of this message was precisely not to create an authentic photograph. The aim was not to communicate the hardships and the drudgery of daily life in Britain, but rather to highlight achievements and imagine what life could be like. The borrowed watches, pens and suits in these photographs were as much about concealing the reality of life in Britain as they were about presenting a narrative of achievement. As Courtman surmised, what is missing from these pictures is 'any of the social reference points: the subjects' homes and work places, street scenes… clues as to the material reality they inhabited'.[154]

On the surface, the documentary realism of Caesar and especially Burke was focused on such a reality, but this photography too poses issues relating to authenticity. It is difficult not to see the politics inherent within his photography, especially in the context of the 'front page' view of Handsworth. Untold stories, particularly those that have either been ignored or suppressed, inevitably have a political dimension. The documentary photographer's desire to focus on a 'material reality' in Handsworth, to 'look hard' and 'record' rather than remove Handsworth from the picture, was always in tension with their own politics – in the case of Burke, the ambition to focus on the ordinary in Handsworth, 'and let the ordinary become extra-ordinary'.[155] This tension meant that both Burke and Caesar were all the more burdened by decisions about what to photograph, as well as what to share with the public.

A possible solution to these issues might be to produce a representation that alludes to the plurality of people's experiences. Yet this is also problematic. The

[154] Sandra Courtman, 'What is Missing from the Picture?', p. 10.
[155] Vanley Burke, personal interview, 25 March 2008.

example of *Handsworth Songs* illustrated the difficulty in forming a representation of pluralism. In spite of the aim of the BAFC to present an account of the plurality of experience in Handsworth, as the criticisms of Salman Rushdie and Darcus Howe suggested, what in fact often emerged was the familiar image of the black bomber. With photography, one way of presenting a more authentic view of black Handsworth might be to move away from the work of professionals and towards an 'authentic' family photo-album. But this would remain problematic. As Jo Spence has explored, like each example of photography that this chapter has discussed, family albums are in their own way political, being visual records of particularly happy moments in family life, such as birthdays or holidays.[156] Beyond this, more generally, there is also the core issue that a narrative of pluralism often results in the loss of the subject. This is an issue that will be returned to in the conclusion of this thesis.

What the photographs discussed in this chapter show is that poverty, a police presence and social unrest were part of a common black experience in 1980s Handsworth – they were part of the black structure of feeling. But they also suggest a broader notion of everyday life, provoking questions which may lead to a better understanding of this black experience in the long 1980s. The Dyche photographs, for example, alluded to the significance of consumption in an earlier period of black settlement, the way in which items – suits, items of jewellery and even the photographs themselves, which were often paid for on hire purchase – were used to project an image of prosperity and achievement. Alongside this, a recurring theme in the documentary photography was the presence of various forms of leisure practices and institutions in Handsworth. This ranged from reggae performances and sound systems to games of cricket in the park and forms of religious practice. The photographs also depicted forms of politics in Handsworth, the

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[156] In 1979 Spence undertook a project entitled *Beyond the Family Album*, which attempted to highlight what she saw as the hidden gender and class structures behind family photography. See J. Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture* (London: Camden, 1986).

way in which protests, marches and placards formed a presence on the 'home front'. How, if at all, did these themes relate to each other? Who went to church and who went to reggae concerts? What was the basis for the forms of politics in Handsworth, and was there a coherent ideology behind it? The photographs discussed in this chapter have, however fleetingly and problematically, provided brief glimpses of Handsworth's politics and culture and inside its churches and pubs. What is required, and what the remainder of this thesis will attempt to provide, is a move from brief and problematic glimpses to an understanding of how these elements functioned in daily life.

Plate 1.1: Newspaper photography
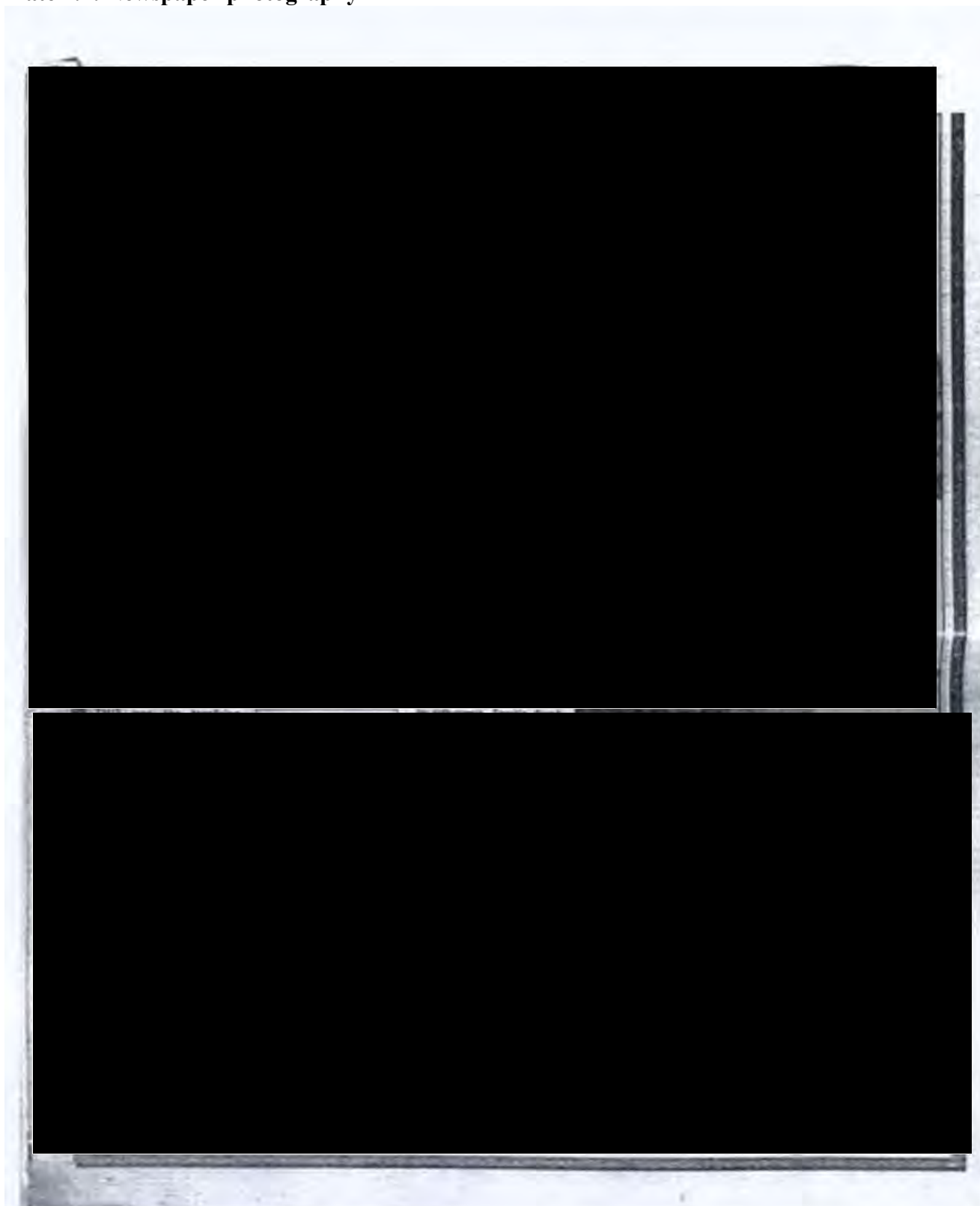
The *Daily Mirror*, 11 September 1985.
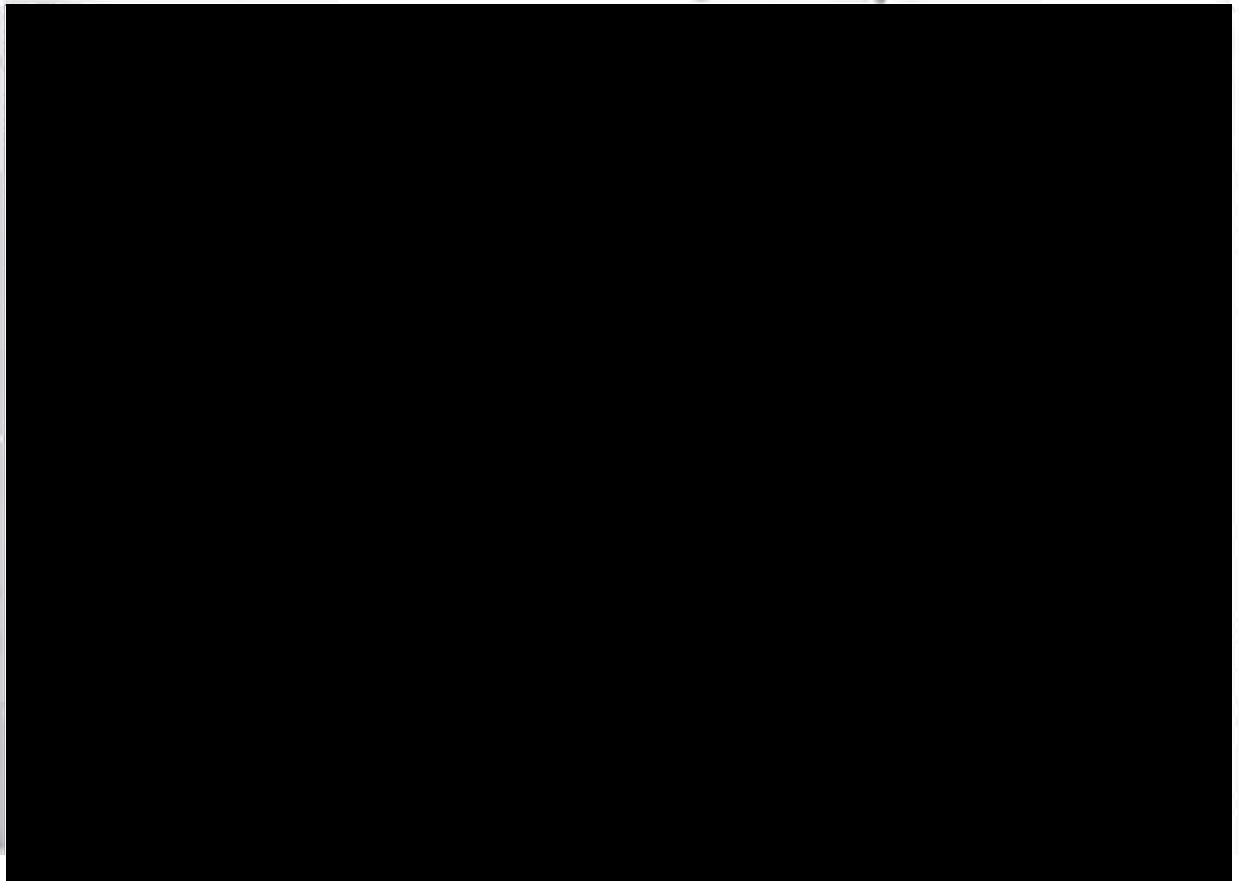
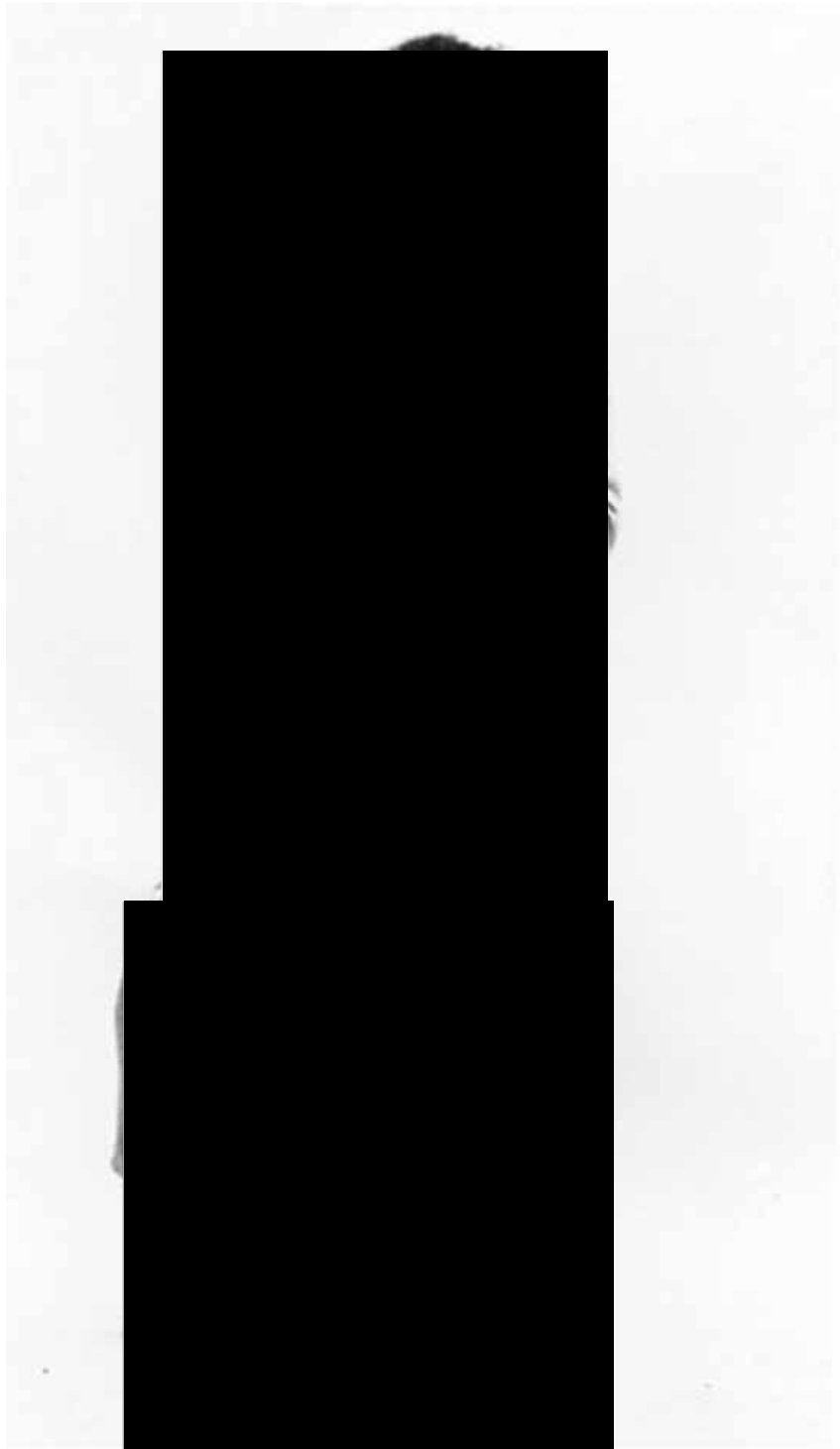From the Birmingham *Evening Mail*, 10 September 1985.
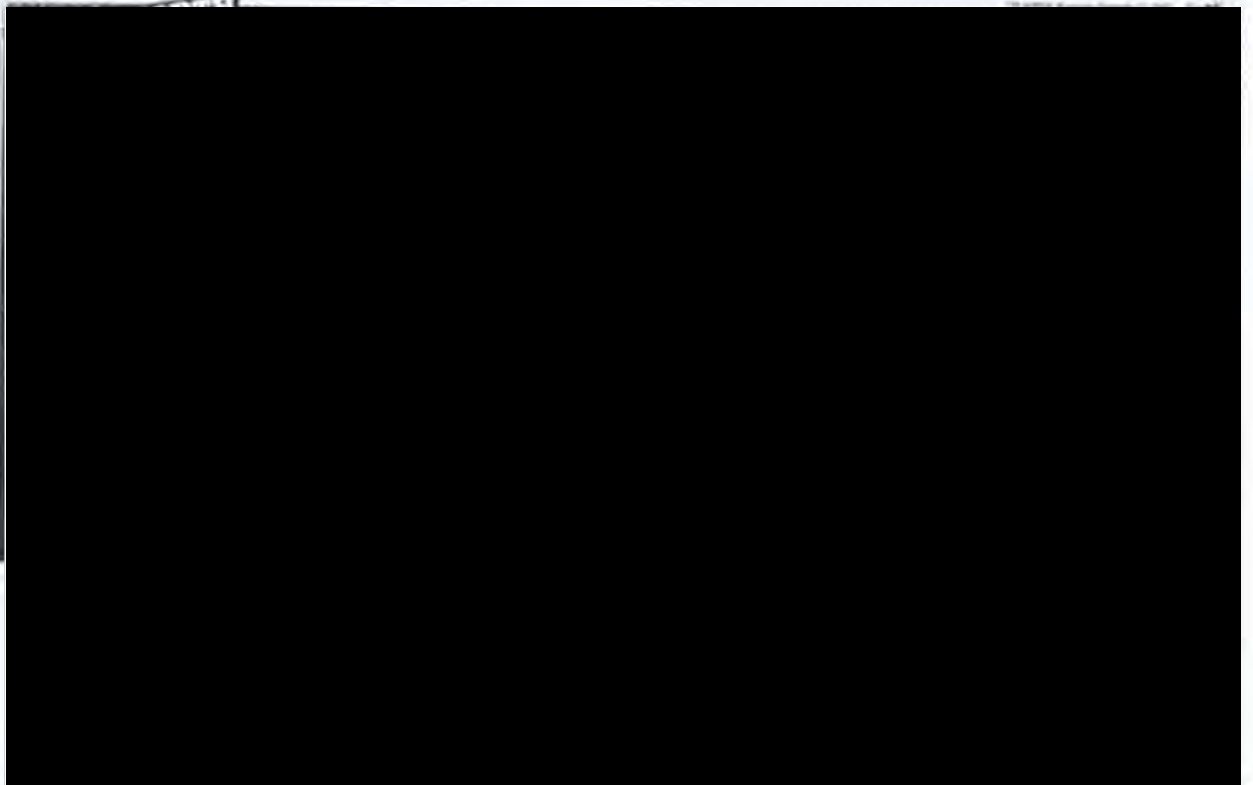
From the *Daily Mirror*, 11 September 1985.
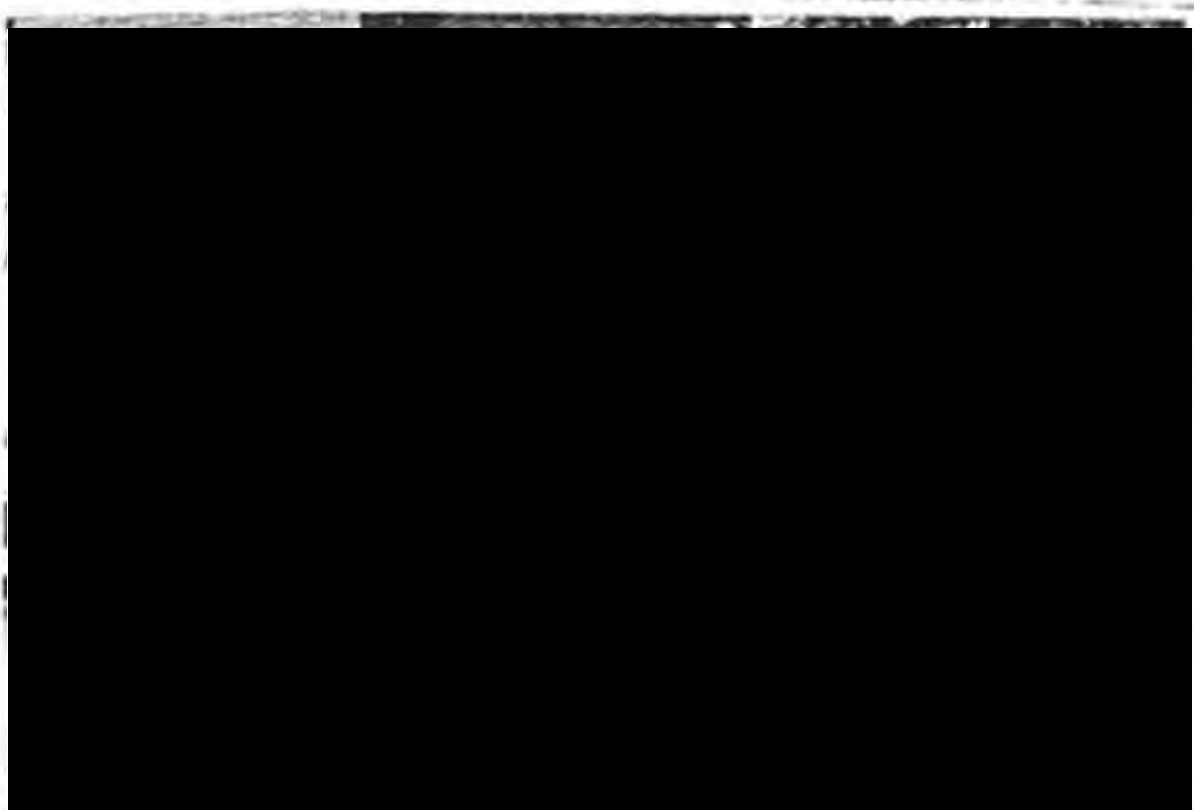
What have I done to deserve this . . . a woman returns to find her parked car overturned with windows smashed.
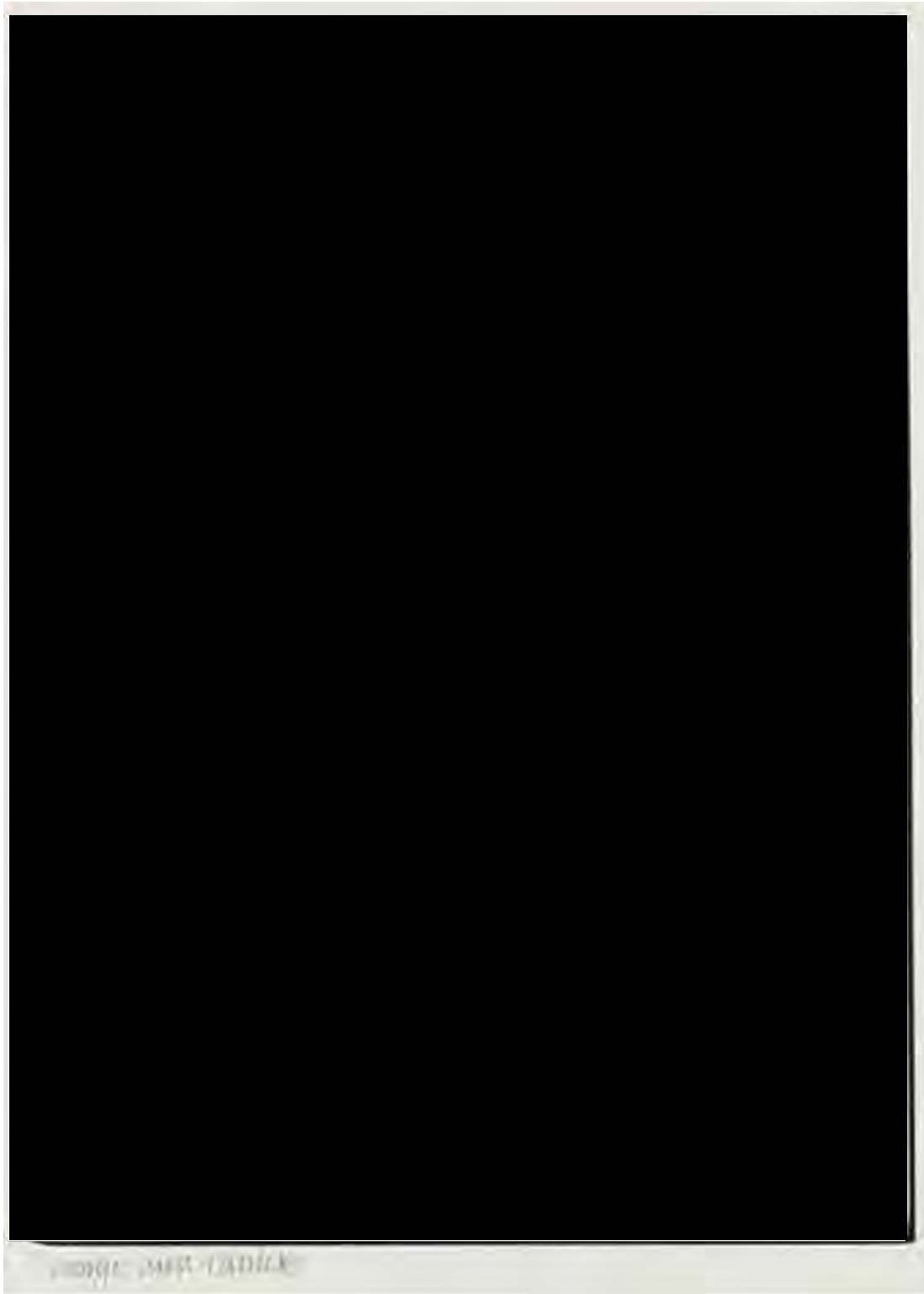
From the *Birmingham Post*, 10 September 1985.

Plate 1.2: Handsworth Self Portraits

Handsworth Self-Portrait Project, 1979. Copyright: Bishton, Homer & Reardo
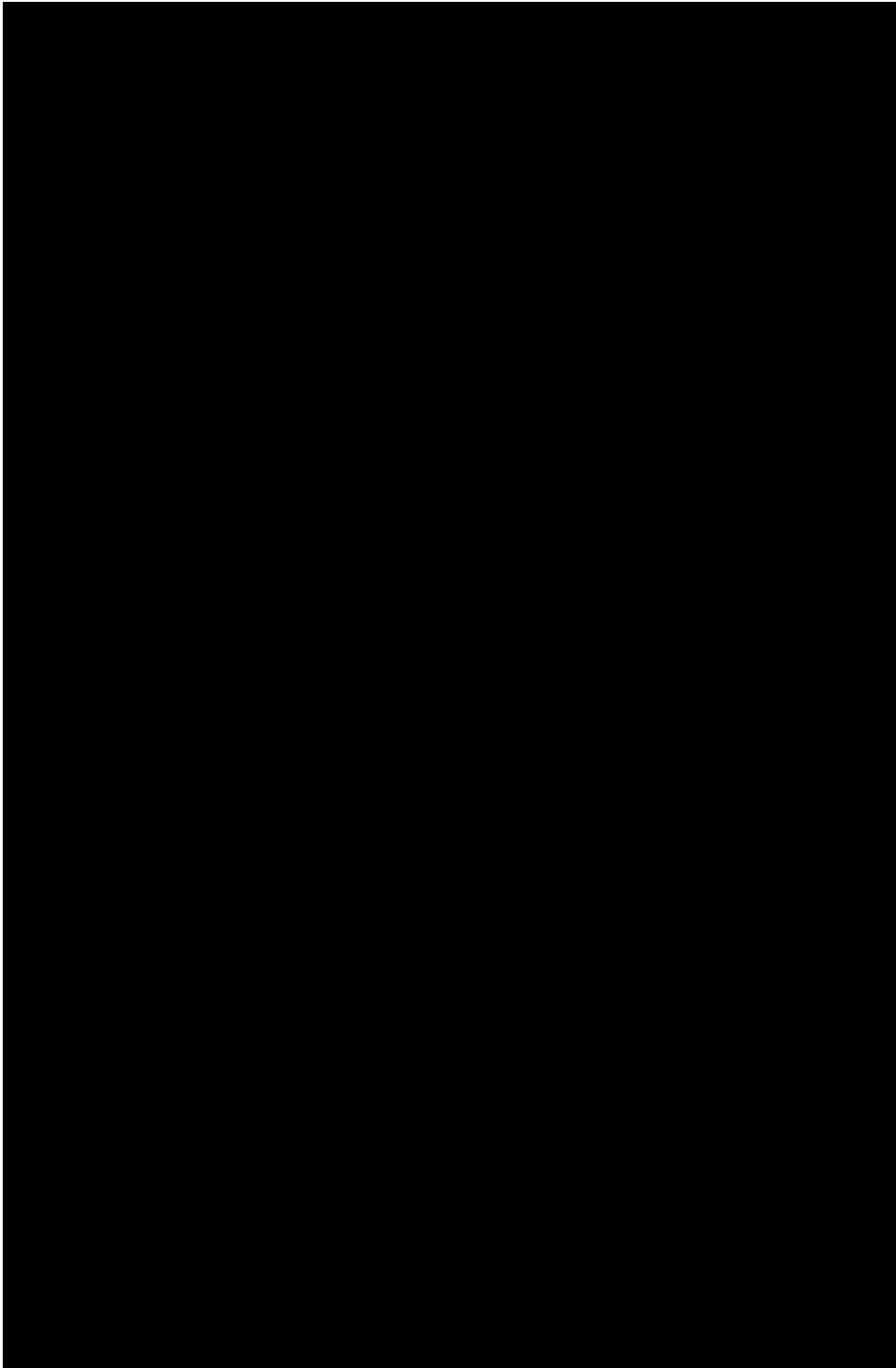
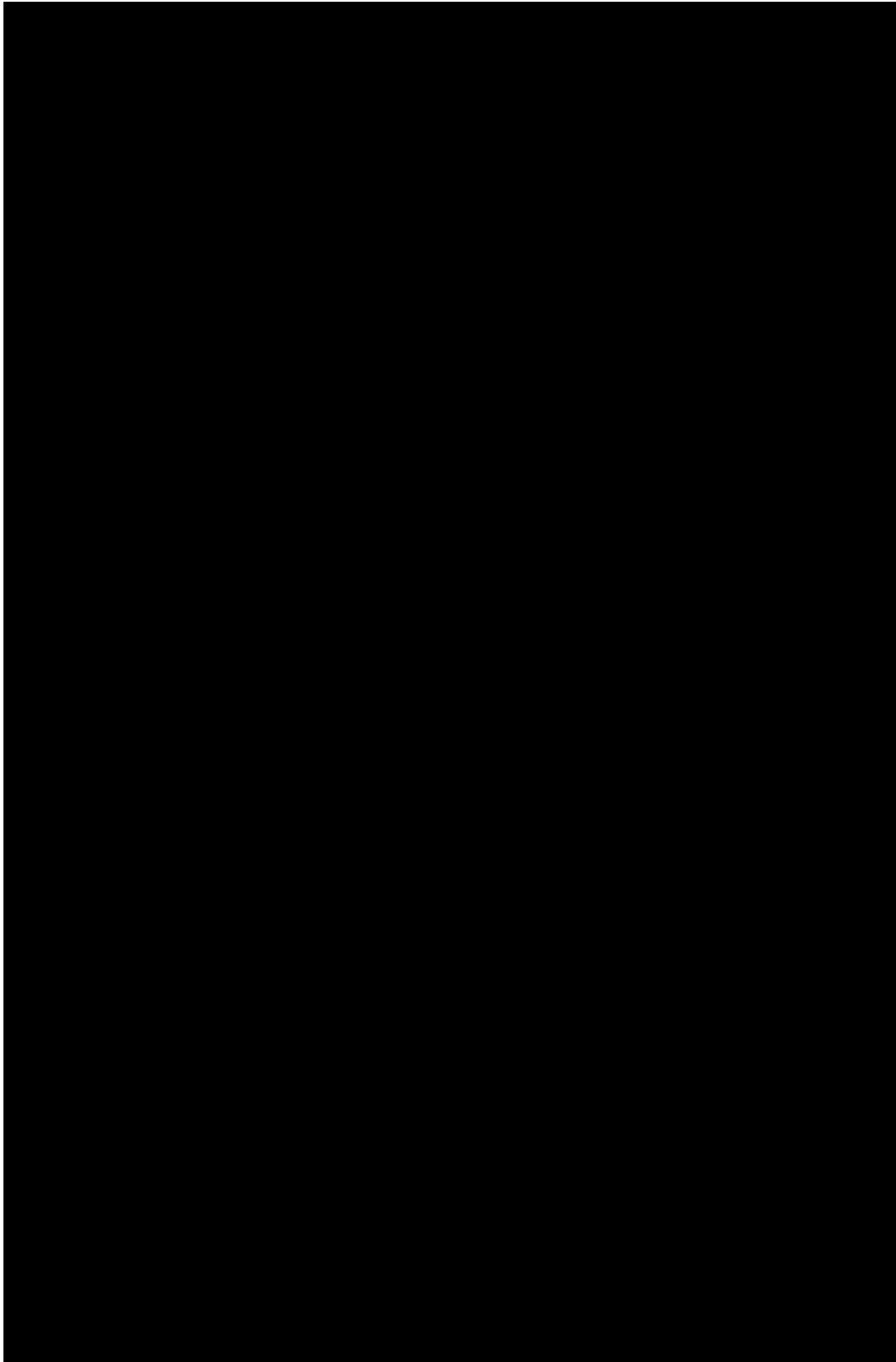Handsworth Self-Portrait Project, 1979. Copyright: Bishton, Homer & Reardon

Handsworth Self-Portrait Project, 1979. Copyright: Bishton, Homer & Reardon
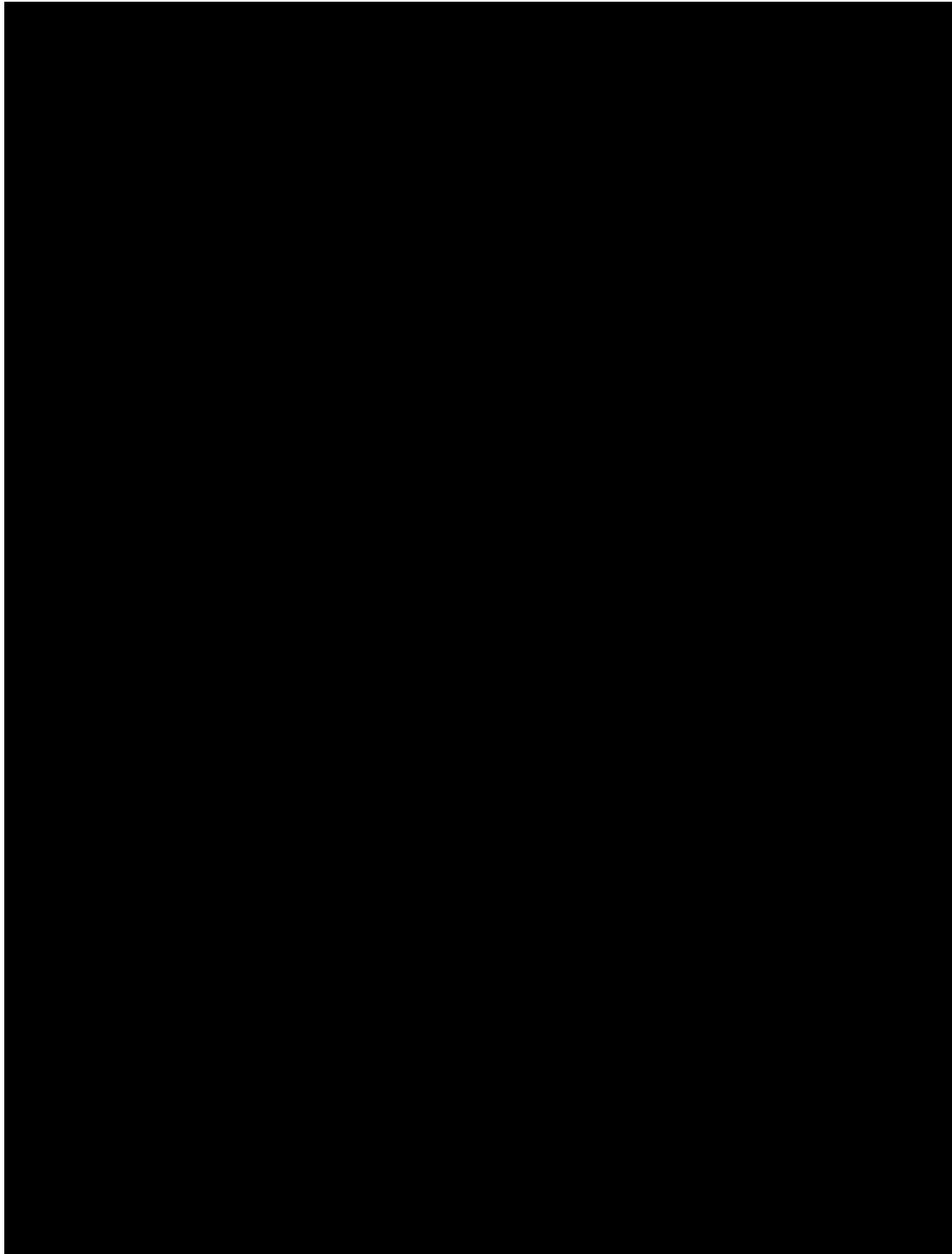
1.3: Dyche portraits

Dyche Studio Portrait, Balsall Heath, c. 1960. Copyright Birmingham Central Library.
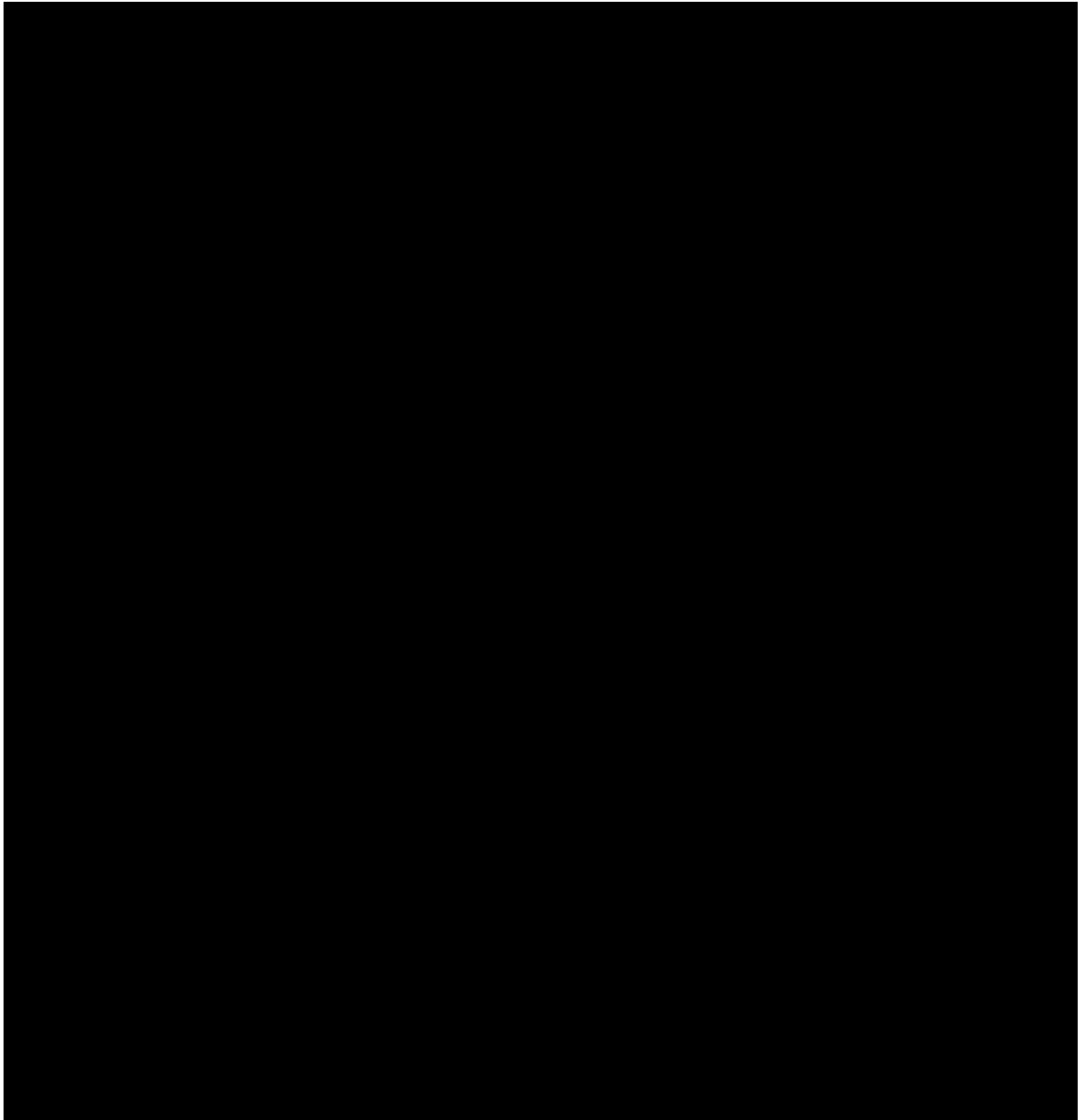
Dyche Studio Portrait, Balsall Heath, c. 1960. Copyright Birmingham Central Library.
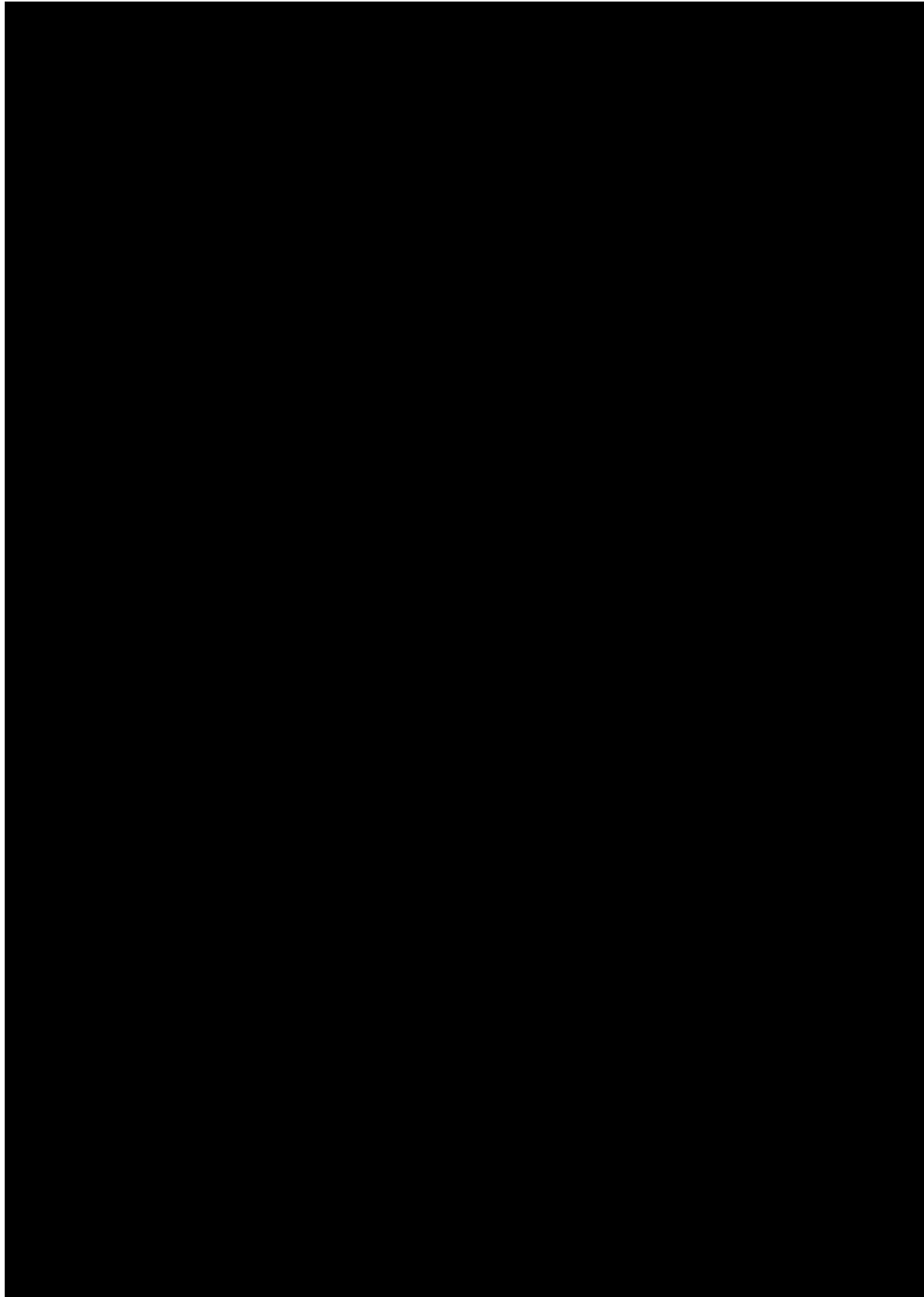
Portrait of Merrise Crooks in unnamed studio, Handsworth, c. 1950s. From S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work: images of black settlement', in B. Highmore, *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 255.
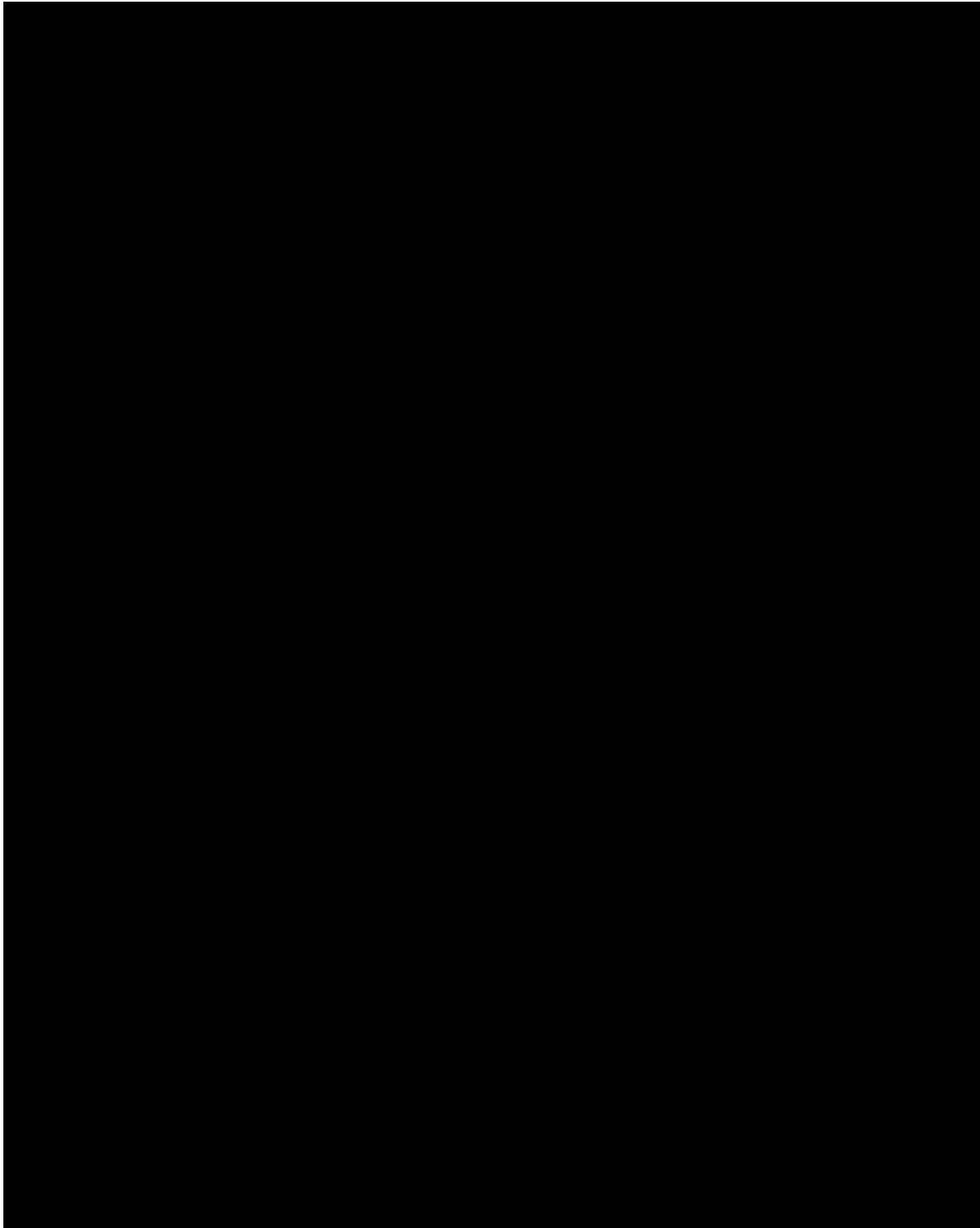
Plate 1.4: *Home Front*

From D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front*, p. 74.

From D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Cape, 1984), p. 49.

From D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front*, p. 119.

Plate 1.5: community photography
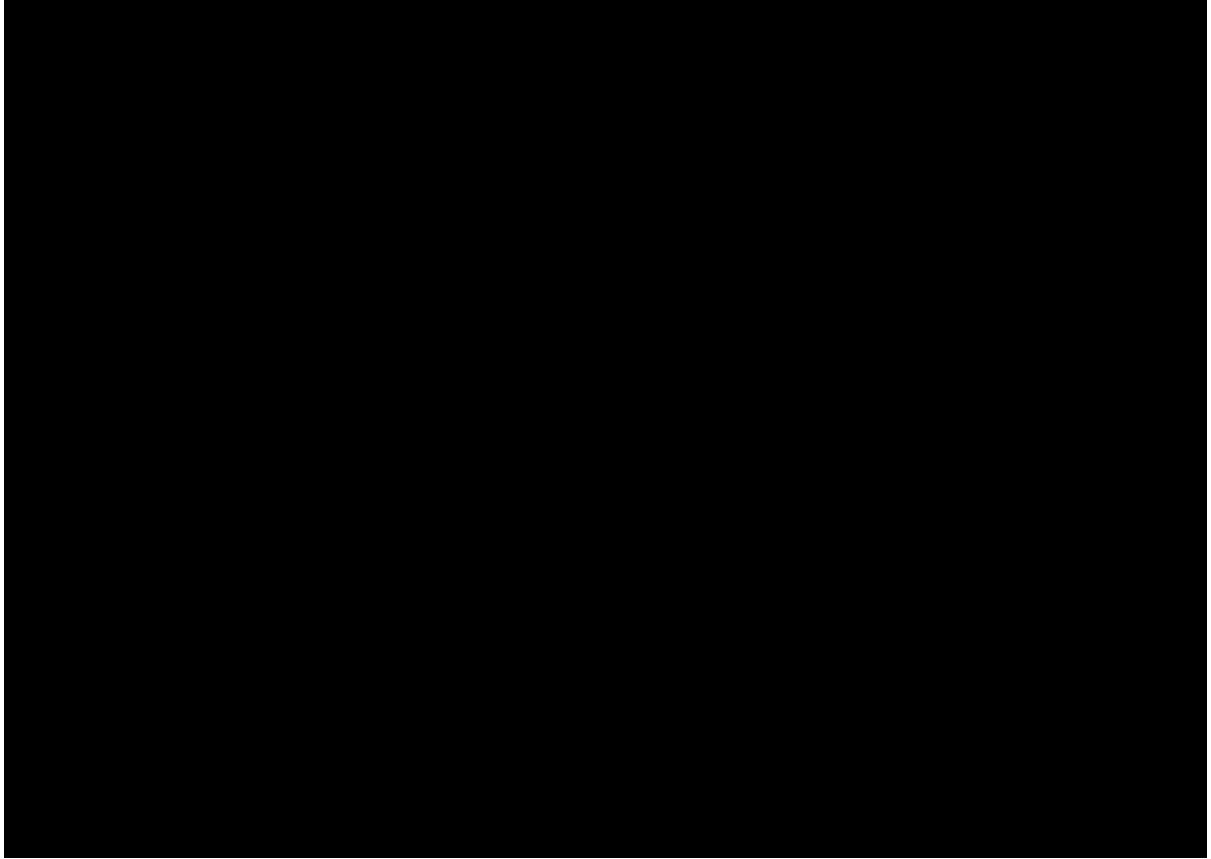
WELD community photography group, 1978, in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, no. 1, February 1979, p. 7.
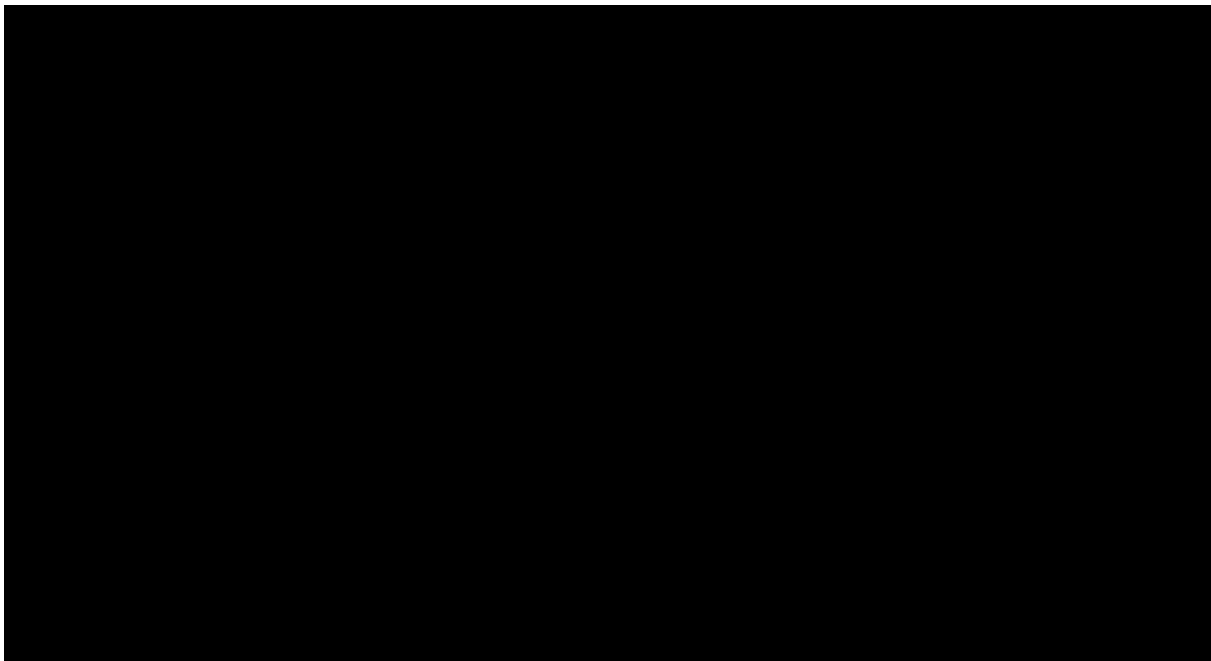
Photograph by Sharon Smith, WELD community photography participant, 1978, in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine*, no. 1, February 1979, p. 9.

Plate 1.6: Vanley Burke
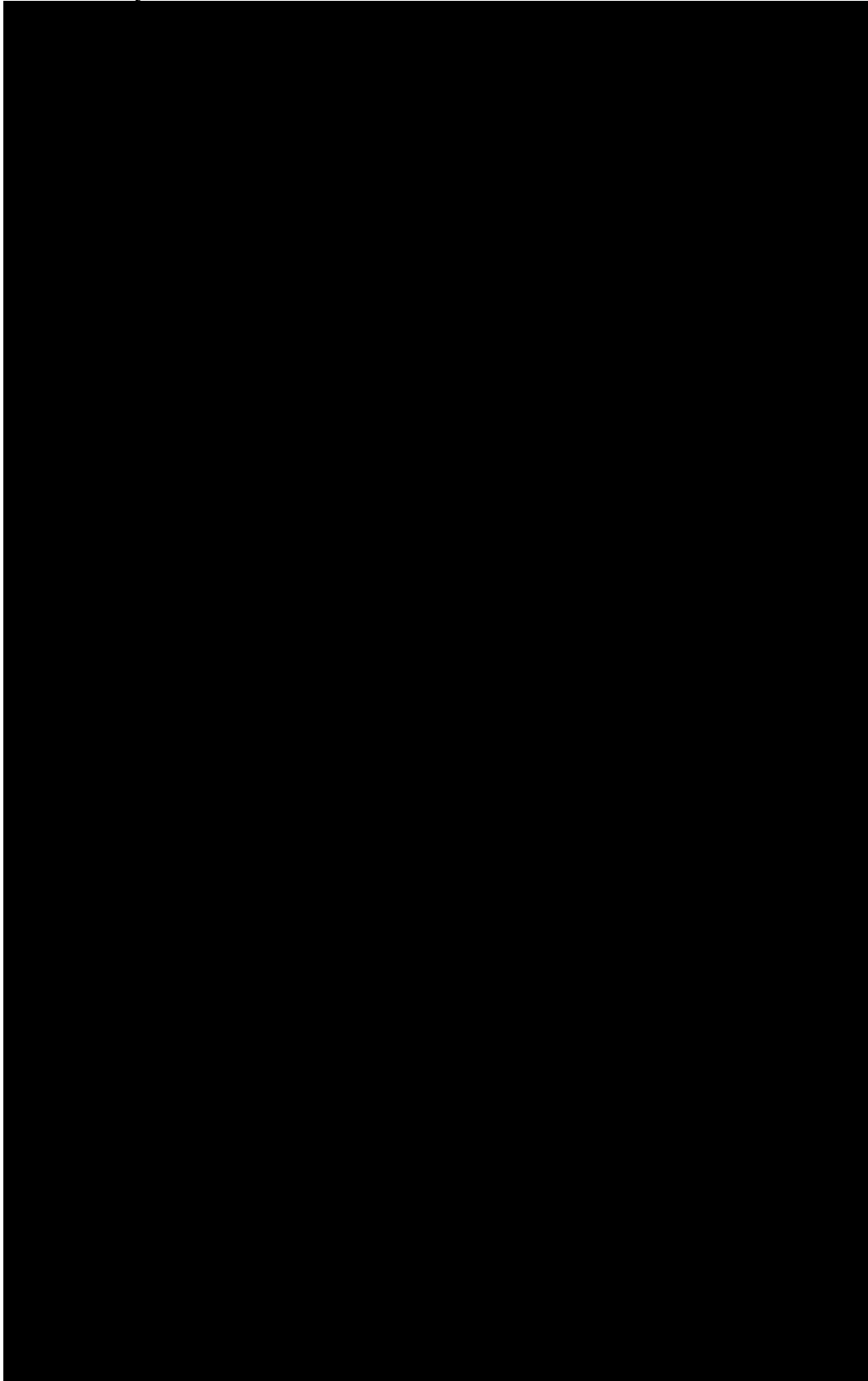
From M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective*, p. 60.

From M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. 29.

From M. Sealy (ed.), *Vanley Burke: a retrospective*, p. 55.

Plate 1.7: Pogus Caesar

Chapter Two: Shades of Black
political and community groups

Introduction

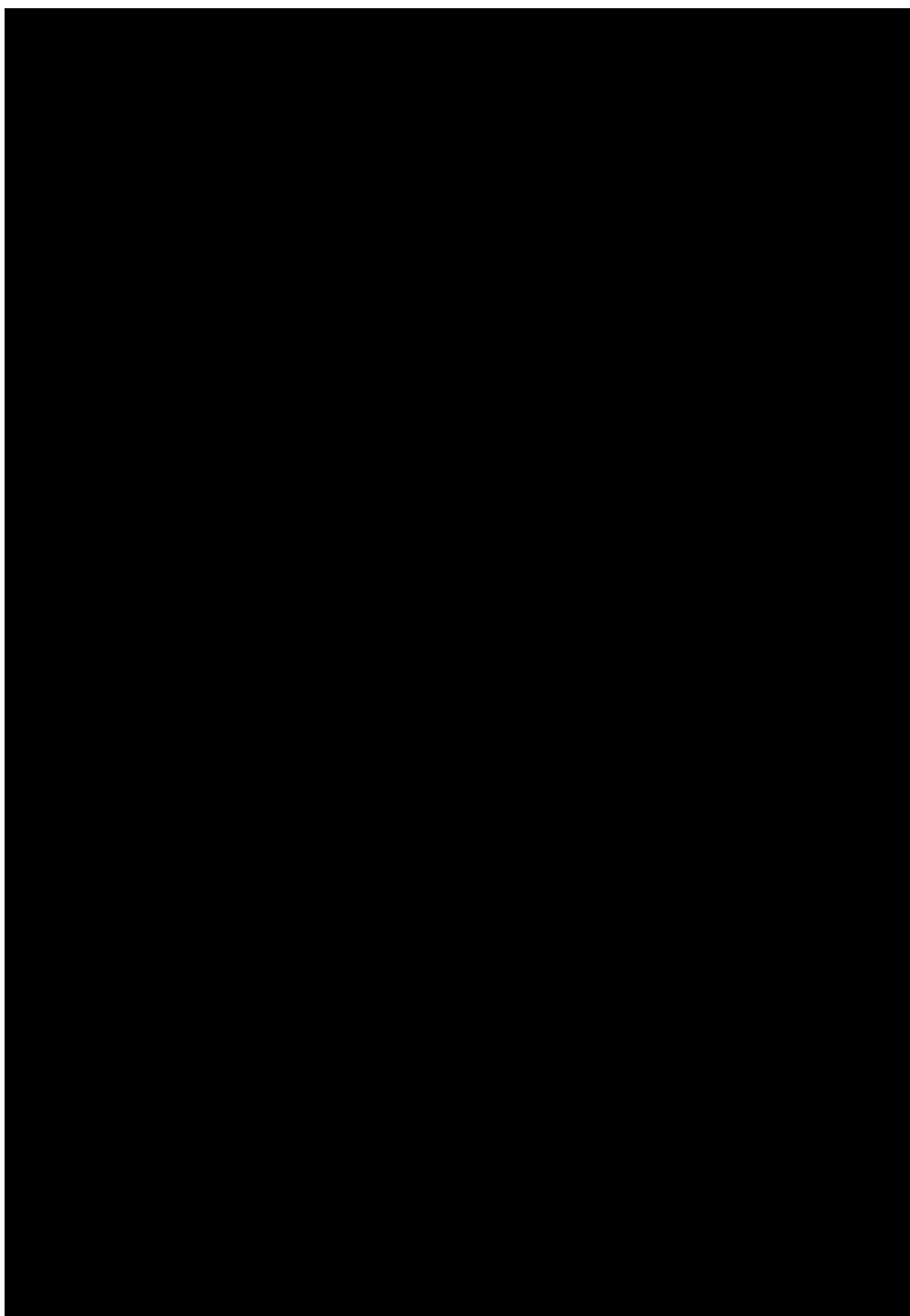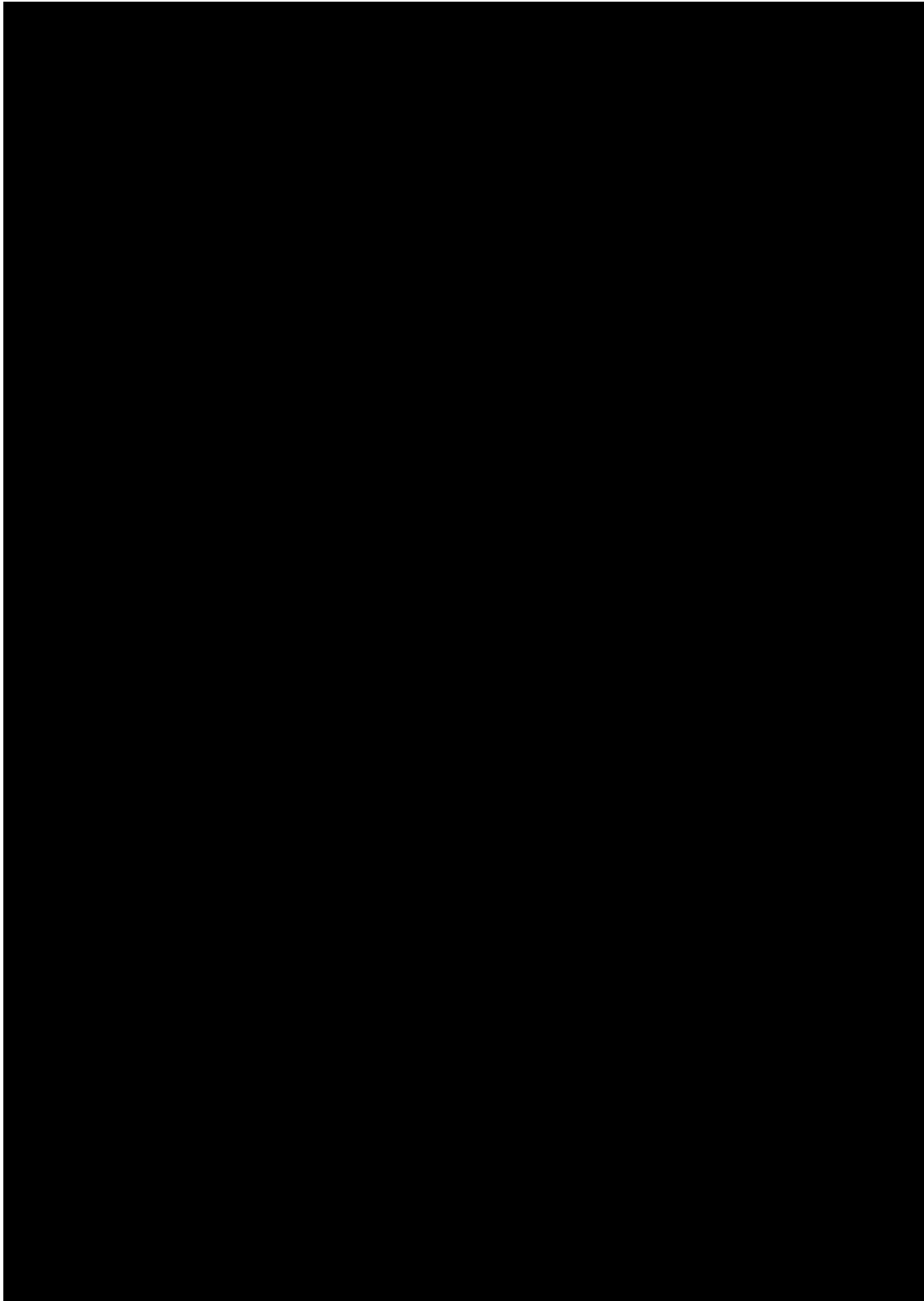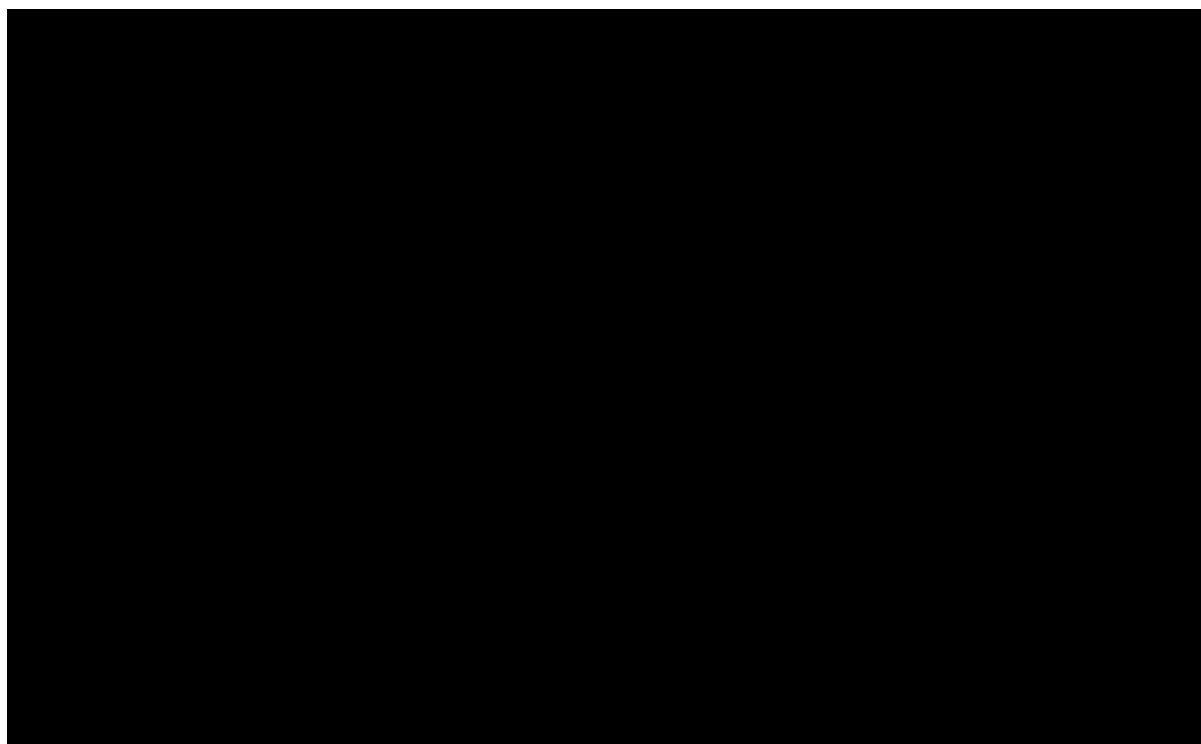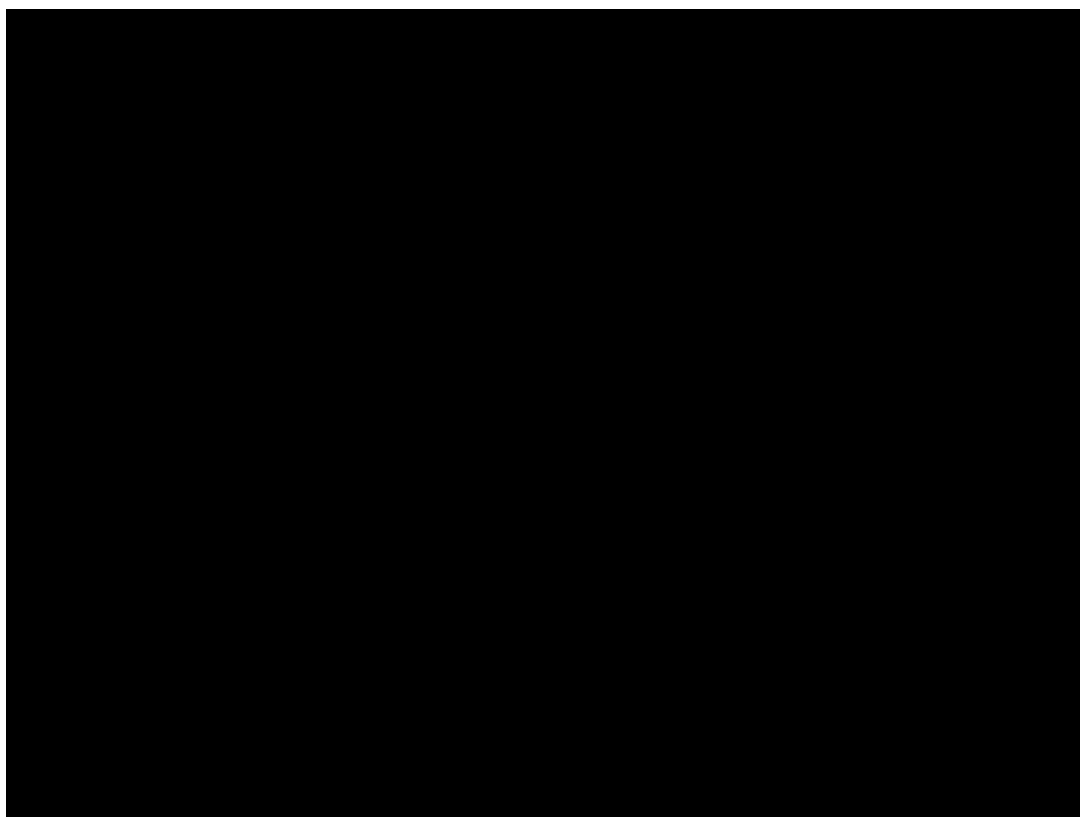In the immediate aftermath of the rioting in Handsworth in 1985, a young Asian man gave his interpretation of the events to a Central Television news crew. 'It's just that they know we've got the money', the man said into the camera as he stood in front of a group of other Asian men. 'That's why they're going after our shops. You notice any of these black shops there, and they ain't been knocked down. Only one shop. Notice, the whole area, only one black shop been knocked down'.[1] According to the report, 'more than fifty' shops in Handsworth and Lozells had been burnt out or looted. After the viewer hears the man's analysis of events in Handsworth, the report then cuts to a scene from the inside of a looted shop, and an Asian family surveying the damage that has been done to their premises. 'For many Asian shopkeepers who had found a new life in Britain', the reporter concludes, 'it's been a night they'll never forget'.[2]

This analysis of the riots as being 'black on black', with Asian shopkeepers the victims of African-Caribbean looting, was widely repeated in the media and also by some politicians.[3] Alongside this, leaders of local community groups that had been politically active for many years in Handsworth also cited resentment between black and Asian communities. For Bini Brown of the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACSHO), for example, speaking shortly after the events,

> the problem is the striving middle class Asians who were in Africa and were
> thrown out of Africa. They've come here and they've set up these shops and some

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[1] R. Barnett, 'Riot', Central Television, 10 September 1985, Media Archive for Central England (henceforth MACE), University of Leicester. For archive details see MACE website: http://www.macearchive.org/Archive/Title/central-news-10091985-handsworth-riot/MediaEntry/46062.html (accessed 22 October 2011).

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] See J. Gaffney, *Interpretations of Violence: the Handsworth riots of 1985* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, University of Warwick, 1987), pp. 8-9.

of these shops have been collaborating with the police and saying they want to put down the black community.[4]

Avtar Jouhl, of the Indian Workers' Association (IWA), took a different view. Writing in the IWA's journal, *Lalkar,* Jouhl emphasised that 'white and West Indian shops were destroyed [in the unrest], as well as Asian ones. It was caused by social deprivation and police harassment…this was an eruption against the whole social order'. Jouhl wrote of the continued 'attempts to set the Asians and the Afro-Caribbeans at each others throats' in Handsworth, and reminded his readers that the IWA 'is for the unity of the West Indians and Asian communities'.[5]

This chapter examines the nature and significance of politics within the black structure of feeling in Handsworth. It will look at the different roles of political and community groups in the area, their aims and activities and their philosophies and ideologies. In doing this, the chapter will unpick a problem that has so far been under-explored in this thesis. The central objective of the thesis is to form an account of the black experience in Handsworth, with 'black' used in its now conventional definition in Britain of people of African-Caribbean descent. However, this has not always been its meaning. At different times in recent history, and in some contemporary contexts,[6] 'black' has been used as a term to refer to everyone in Britain who is not white. In the long 1980s, politically, it was not only African-Caribbean organisations that defined themselves as black. There were also a significant number of south-Asian groups active in Handsworth – including the IWA – that subscribed to a unified 'Black' political

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[4] Cited in *Here and Now* no. 167: 'Handsworth: What Went Wrong', Central Television, 1985. From MACE, University of Leicester: http://www.macearchive.org/Archive/Title/here-and-now-programme-167/MediaEntry/664.html (accessed 22 October 2011).
[5] Cited in *Lalkar,* October 1985, p. 4. Papers of the Indian Workers' Association, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/5/1/1.
[6] The city of Birmingham's 'Black History Month', for example, encompasses all 'minority ethnic communities'. See Internet source, http://birminghamblackhistory.com/about/about.html, 8 March 2010.

identity.[7] In order form an understanding of black politics, therefore, it is necessary to briefly divert from the main focus of the thesis and explore the nature of south-Asian Black politics, alongside the activities and ideologies of African-Caribbean groups such as the ACSHO.

In 2009, almost twenty-five years after the riots, the authors Kenan Mailk and Arun Kundnani gave a joint talk at the Drum, Birmingham's 'centre for Black British arts' in Aston,[8] less than a mile south of Handsworth.[9] Both men were there having written books that explored multiculturalism in Britain, and traced some of the tensions that Bini Brown and Avtar Jouhl had perhaps been alluding to in Handsworth twenty-five years earlier. Malik and Kundnani's books elaborated the notion of a unified Black politics in Britain, the high point of which the authors regarded as being the 1960s and 1970s. In this period, Kundani argues in *The End of Tolerance*, there existed a 'unified black identity' that 'incorporated the Asian, African and Caribbean experiences'.[10] For Malik in *From Fatwa to Jihad*, this was 'a peculiarly British notion of "blackness"', in which 'young blacks and Asians' subscribed to the same 'inclusive identity' that was concerned primarily with resisting the same white racism.[11]

The work of both Malik and Kundnani, as well as that of Ambalavaner Sivanandan – with whom Kundani works as deputy editor of the Institute of Race Relations journal *Race and Class* – points to the 1980s as the period in which Black as a unitary 'political colour' began to fracture.[12] Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, Sivanandan argues, 'in the workplace and in the community, Afro-Caribbean and

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[7] For clarity, in this chapter 'Black' with a capital letter refers to the notion of a unified African-Caribbean and south-Asian politics, and 'black' is used to refer to a narrow African-Caribbean politics (unless quoting from others).

[8] See the Drum's website: http://www.the-drum.org.uk/ (accessed 11 November 2011).

[9] The event was entitled 'Multiculturalism, schism and racism' and took place on the 26th of November 2009, chaired by the Drum's artistic director, Mukhtar Dar.

[10] A. Kundani, *The End of Tolerance: Britain in the 21st century* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 41.

[11] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009), p. 51.

[12] A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism: Strategies for the 1980s', in A. Sivanandan, *Communities of Resistance: strategies for the 1980s* (London: Verso, 1990), p.66

Asian…closed ranks and took up each other's struggles',[13] during the 1980s increasingly narrow definitions of ethnicity began to act as the main stimulus for Black politics. The effect of this, it was argued, was the fundamental fracturing of Black as an encompassing political term. The growing prominence of ethnicity 'delinked [the] black struggle' and separated 'the West Indian from the Asian'.[14] The 1980s witnessed the development of a 'community of communities' in which 'people began to define themselves in terms of their ethnicity, and *only* their ethnicity'.[15] By the 1980s, 'black had been replaced by definitions of ethnicity that were 'rigid, closed and almost biological'.[16]

The consensus amongst these writers is that it was the state's shift towards a policy of 'multiculturalism' in the early 1980s – and in particular, the allocation of state funds on the basis of ethnicity – that prompted the fragmentation of Black politics in Britain. Sivanandan locates the origins of these policies in the onset of a multicultural state educational programme in the 1960s and 1970s,[17] but it was the 1981 inner-city unrest that led to this being extended, particularly by local government. The Scarman Report into the rioting in Brixton – and its call for 'urgent action' to cure the 'disease' in Britain's inner-cities – set the tone for the state's interventions,[18] and it was the Greater London Council (GLC) that was the first local authority to roll out a comprehensive multicultural programme aimed at 'making minority communities feel part of British society'.[19] In 1982 Ken Livingstone, the Labour leader of the council, set up a London Ethnic Minorities Committee, and within three years its budget had been increased threefold.[20] Paul Gilroy has written about the way in which he regarded the Committee as

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 65.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[15] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 68.
[16] A. Kundani, *The End of Tolerance*, p. 45.
[17] A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism: Strategies for the 1980s', p. 68.
[18] Lord Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982),p. 209.
[19] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 58.
[20] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 137-38.

having in effect commodified more organic and oppositional Black and anti-racist movements by encouraging them to access their fair share of the capital's ever-increasing 'ethnic minority' resources.[21] Mike Phillips, who sat on one of the GLC 'ethnic minority committees' in the mid-1980s, recalled in his 'biography of black Britain' how energies that were once directed at a grassroots level towards Black 'political self-discovery' now became 'rechannelled into raising money from the GLC'.[22]

Such themes were mirrored by the approach of local authorities to ethnic minorities across Britain. As a result, it was argued, Black as a 'political colour' had been 'broken down'; the 'community cohesion' that activists such as Sivanandan felt they had 'built up since the 1960s' had been 'destroyed'.[23] The state began to absorb 'a new cadre of ethnically defined "community leaders"' into its machinery in an attempt, Kundnani argues, to 'soften the sharp edges of black politics'.[24] This was about taking Black politics 'off the streets' and 'into the council chamber' where, divided and then sub-divided along ethnic lines, it could be 'institutionalised, managed and commodified'.[25]

The picture painted by Malik, Kundani and Sivanandan, therefore, is of a Black movement that had by the 1980s become corrupted, divided and severely weakened by the actions of the state. The Black collective struggle was undermined, and had become an increasingly fragmented black, Asian, Sikh or Muslim struggle for state funds.

The late-1970s in particular was also a period in which a predominately white-led anti-racist movement was flourishing. Partly in order to provide a point of comparison, the chapter begins with a brief exploration of some of these groups in Handsworth. Nationally, organisations such as Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League

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[21] This was a GLC Ethnic Minorities Committee advertising campaign with the headline 'Which slice of the cake are you are you getting?' See P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p140.
[22] M. Phillips, *London Crossings: A Biography of Black Britain* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 173.
[23] A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism: Strategies for the 1980s', p. 67.
[24] A. Kundnani, *The End of Tolerance*, p. 44
[25] *Ibid*.

mobilised large numbers of people in opposition to the increasing popularity of the National Front in this period. For Paul Gilroy, however, their brand of anti-racism largely failed to engage with the wider inequalities faced by black and Asian communities in the period, with the perception being that 'black liberation was reducible to "anti-racism"'.[26] In Handsworth, however, it will be demonstrated that whilst white groups such as All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) undertook significant anti-racist campaigning at a national level – including the exposing of the Nazi sympathies of members of the NF – this was in contrast to their role at a local level, which was primarily concerned with the provision of ethnically specific services, and in many ways mirrored the work of local black and Asian groups.

This will be illustrated by the remainder of the chapter, which examines the ideologies and practices of the Asian Youth Movement (AYM), the Asian Resource Centre (ARC), Harambee and the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACSHO) and other ethnic minority groups. There is considerable archival material available for AFFOR, largely because a number of its original members have become prominent public figures. John Hick, for example, co-founded the group and was a Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, while Clare Short – prior to becoming a Labour MP – was the group's director from 1976 to 1978. Archival resources for many black and Asian groups are patchier and as a result, this section makes particular use of oral history with key players. It will be shown that some south-Asian groups emphasised the importance of Black as a 'political colour' throughout the 1980s, often directly influenced by the work of figures such as Sivanandan, yet simultaneously accepted state funds. Others forwarded an African-Caribbean identity, and had done so since the 1960s, often independently from state funding. At the same time as this, nearly every group provided

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[26] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 119 .

services at a practical level in Handsworth that catered – in spite of their ideological commitments – for the needs of individual communities. Groups provided translation services, for instance, ran hostels for particular sections of local communities, or campaigned against the proposed deportation of local individuals. Black as an encompassing political colour was, it is argued, broken down not necessarily because of the allocation of state funds, but because each organisation maintained a commitment to meet the needs of the Handsworth community which were, it will be shown, often manifest in ethnically distinct ways.

Anti-racism

In 1970, as part of a series of co-ordinated nationwide protests against the proposed tour of England by an all-white South African cricket team, a group of protestors including the Handsworth-based businessman John Plummer, John Hick and Leslie Mitton, principal of Handsworth Methodist College, organised a large march on Edgbaston cricket ground in Birmingham, where one of the tests was due to take place.[27] In the event, the national Stop the Seventy Tour campaign, which was organised by Peter Hain,[28] caused the Government to pressurise the Cricket Council into abandoning the tour, but the march in Birmingham went ahead and was redirected to the City Centre, now with the aim of the 'promotion of better community relations in the city'.[29] The march was attended by nine hundred people, and out of it a formal organisation – All Faiths For One Race (AFFOR) – was established, partly influenced by the philosophy of religious pluralism advocated by Hick.[30] AFFOR operated out of offices in Handsworth, where it continued to be active throughout the 1980s. Initially, AFFOR was dismissed as 'angry young men intent on

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[27] See J. Hick, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: One World, 2002). P. 170.
[28] For a full account of the 'Stop the Seventy Tour' campaign see P. Hain, *Don't Play With Apartheid: the background to the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).
[29] J. Hick, *An Autobiography*, p. 170.
[30] *Ibid*. See also J. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

stirring up trouble'.[31] Not everyone active in AFFOR was either male or young, Hick

recalled, but 'it is true that we were angry – about the injustices of racism'.[32]

     The Stop the Seventy Tour campaign was a prelude to what had by the mid-1970s

become an 'anti-racist mass movement' in Britain.[33] The movement was prompted by the

growing presence of the far-right National Front (NF) which, having been formed in

1967, was by the 1970s gaining increasing electoral support.[34] The response was initially

provided by the formation of Rock Against Racism (RAR), a coalition established by the

Socialist Workers' Party that organised numerous concerts featuring white punk bands

performing alongside black reggae acts such as Steel Pulse. This culminated in a carnival

in London in 1978 that was attended by 70-100,000 people.[35] By this point, RAR had

been joined by the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), a group formed in 1977 to give the anti-

racist movement a formal political voice. The ANL helped organise RAR concerts, but

predominately functioned as a single-issue pressure group similar to the Campaign for

Nuclear Disarmament. [36] Its single aim, through the organisation of protests, marches, its

affiliated magazine *Searchlight* and the distribution of some nine million leaflets, was to

expose and raise awareness of the Nazi sympathies of the NF.[37] According to Dave

Renton, between 1977 and 1979 there were 250 ANL branches in Britain and more than

40,000 members.[38]

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[31] J. Hick, *An Autobiography*, p. 172.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 115.
[34] In 1973 in a by-election in West Bromwich, for example, a district neighbouring Handsworth, a NF candidate retained his deposit for the first time with sixteen per cent of the vote. Three years later roughly half the NF candidates put forward in the May local elections won ten per cent of the vote. See N. Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 26 & M. Walker, *The National Front;* (London: Fontana, 1978), p. 198.
[35] D. Renton, *When We Touched the Sky: the Anti-Nazi League, 1977-1981* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2006), p. 38.
[36] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 131.
[37] D. Renton, *When We Touched the Sky*, p. 175.
[38] *Ibid*.

Paul Gilroy has been particularly critical of the tactics deployed by the ANL. RAR, he argues, was a movement that operated at a grassroots level, and was thereby able to form a critique of the way in which racism was 'lived out' by people on an everyday basis.[39] Conversely, the ANL's focus was solely on exposing the Nazism of the NF and the perceived affront this represented to British patriotism. For Gilroy, 'it is almost as though the activities of the National Front…only become a problem when they threaten democracy' and only become 'visible where a sham patriotism is invoked'.[40] The ANL closed down the broader concerns of RAR, and the emphasis on exposing the Nazi and fascist tendencies of the NF was 'to the exclusion of every other consideration'.[41] Furthermore, the ANL implicitly accepted the terms of the NF's nationalist politics by engaging in an argument about what constituted 'true' British patriotism.[42] In the ANL, the NF's 'record of racial violence against black individuals and communities', alongside the experiences of black and Asian communities away from the activities of a relatively small – if committed – fascist group, 'remained unseen'.[43] As a result, following the collapse of the NF's electoral support at the 1979 general election, the scale of the ANL's activities greatly receded. As two activists told Renton, 'there was actually very little Nazi activity to be "anti"'; the ANL 'had won'.[44]

Both RAR and the ANL were relatively quiet in Handsworth. An attempt in 1978 to organise a 'musical march' against racism, for example, failed, and the local branch of the ANL was, according to one activist, 'weakened by the sectarian interests of constituent groups and a lack of support from blacks'.[45] Yet AFFOR – alongside other

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[39] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 129.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[44] Cited in D. Renton, *When We Touched The Sky*, p. 162.
[45] G. Weaver, 'Political Groups and Young Blacks in Handsworth', discussion paper for the Faculty of Commerce & Social Science, University of Birmingham, 1980, p. 16. Also available from Internet source, http://www.theplebeian.net/docs/newyoungblacks.pdf (accessed 10 March 2010).

white-led anti-racist groups such as the Handsworth Law Centre (HLC) and the Westminster Endeavour for Liaison and Development (WELD) – continued into the 1980s. This was because groups such as these were part of the anti-racist movement of RAR and the ANL only in one sense. Whilst AFFOR undertook anti-racist campaigning and attempted to uncover the Nazism of local NF members even after 1979 and the NF's electoral demise, this was always counterbalanced by a localised politics that was explicitly focused on attempting to meet the needs of black and Asian communities in Handsworth, often along ethnic lines. Thus the group's twin ambitions were explicitly stated as being, on the one hand, to eliminate 'racism and fascism in all its forms', and on the other hand, to argue that 'people of whatever creed or colour deserve and must receive equal treatment and opportunities'.[46]

Having 'got an embryo organisation together' as part of the Stop the Seventy Tour campaign, John Hick recalled, it was 'decided we should continue it', and AFFOR set up offices in Handsworth with a charitable grant from the Cadbury Trust, 'enough to pay a very low rent, a director and a secretary'.[47] It is clear that there was some degree of tension within AFFOR regarding the extent to which priority should be given to localised community work or campaigning against fascism. The 1976-77 annual report, for example, summed up the 'basic dilemma' facing AFFOR as being 'to what extent it should concentrate on casework and to what extent on "campaigning"'.[48] To some in AFFOR, it was campaigning against racism that needed to be given priority. The first issue of AFFOR's newsletter appeared in spring 1978 and led with an editorial highlighting that 'the most demanding aspect of our work…is the continuous struggle

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[46] AFFOR Annual Report, 1976-77, p. 1, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, All Faiths For One Race publications, MS 2478/B/3/2.

[47] J. Hick, personal interview, 6 May 2009. By 1984 AFFOR received a total of £40,265 from grants and other donations, including Cadbury's and the Birmingham Inner-City Partnership Fund. See See AFFOR Annual Report 1983-84, p. 4, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, All Faiths For One Race publications, MS 2478/B/3/2.

[48] AFFOR Annual Report 1976-77, p. 1.

against the rising tide of racism and Fascism in our society'.[49] In 1977, David Jennings,

who was until 1976 director of AFFOR, argued that campaigning should be the central

focus: 'campaigning should be our priority', he argued, 'because through such activity

one can aim to change basic policies and attitudes'.[50]

In a manner similar to the ANL and *Searchlight*, therefore, AFFOR mounted a

campaign to expose the fascism inherent within the politics of the NF. Clare Short

succeeded Jennings as director in 1976 and described the group's remit as being to

encourage 'respect [for] each other's religious institutions, but to be absolutely

uncompromising on anti-racism'.[51] AFFOR was a 'hub of anti-racist activity' in

Handsworth, and, indeed, 'there were close links between AFFOR and *Searchlight*'.[52]

The group published articles discussing the nature of fascism and an exposé of a local NF

leader's comments regarding the supposed 'swamping' of Britain by so-called 'coloured

invaders', comments which, as AFFOR highlighted, mirrored those later made by

Margaret Thatcher in the run up to the 1979 general election.[53] As with the ANL, this

tactic of exposing the fascism or Nazism of the far-right often had less to do with

countering the effects of racism on minority communities and more to do with appealing

to as broad a white audience as possible.[54] In a pamphlet entitled *So what are you going*

to do about the National Front?, for example, its author Tony Holden argued 'white

society' had to 'admit' that 'compared with the hurt and bitterness and anger of many

black Britons, our hurt is minute'.[55] AFFOR's newsletters included articles that

highlighted the 'legal problems of the ethnic minorities' in Handsworth and called for the

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[49] AFFOR *Newsletter*, Spring 1978, p. 1, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, All Faiths For One Race publications, MS 2478/B/3/2.
[50] AFFOR Annual Report 1976-77, p. 1.
[51] C. Short, personal interview, 13 February 2009.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] Cited in AFFOR *Newsletter*, Spring 1978, p. 8.
[54] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 131.
[55] T. Holden, *So what are you going to do about the National Front?* (Handsworth: AFFOR/Sidelines, 1978), p. 3.

Commission for Racial Equality 'to look at the needs and requirements of the ethnic minorities in Birmingham'.[56]

Yet in spite of the comments of Jennings and others, and unlike either RAR or the ANL, AFFOR was from the beginning firmly rooted in the locale. The initial decision to base AFFOR in Handsworth, for instance, was made because it was felt that this would be the area in which AFFOR would best be able to make tangible improvements in the lives of disadvantaged black communities. John Hick, for example, writing from his own perspective in 'white and leafy Edgbaston', saw 'multi-racial Handsworth' as being the centre of 'excitement and turmoil'.[57] Situating AFFOR in Handsworth, Tony Holden wrote in a 1979 pamphlet for the group, was about 'taking sides…with the black communities…choosing an innercity [sic] area and trying to cope with the advantages and disadvantages of such a place'.[58]

Beyond this, throughout its existence AFFOR maintained a commitment to attempt to 'respond to the local community's diverse needs' through day-to-day 'case work'.[59] Initially, as Short recalls, the focus was primarily on 'family work with immigrants'.[60] The group offered assistance to those seeking work permits to allow family members to enter the UK, a requirement of the 1971 Immigration Act. Following the establishment of the Asian Resource Centre in 1976 – discussed in detail in the following section of this chapter – the emphasis shifted to providing 'social security advice', though in practice AFFOR continued to deal with a wide range of cases. As was made clear in AFFOR's 1977-78 annual report,

> one cannot turn away individuals who turn to you for help…the door remains
> open and people arrive when they choose to arrive with problems ranging from

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[56] AFFOR Newsletter, Spring 1980, p. 2, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, All Faiths For One Race publications, MS 2478/B/3/2.
[57] J. Hick, *An Autobiography*, p. 173.
[58] T. Holden, *From Race to Politics*, p. 3.
[59] AFFOR Annual Report, 1976-77, p. 1.
[60] C. Short, personal interview, 13 February 2009.

social security, to immigration, to conflicts with the police, the need for a job, a divorce, a death certificate, etc.[61]

In the same report, AFFOR's community worker describes having to represent an elderly Asian man who had been refused re-entry into the UK on the grounds that his face looked 'too young' for his passport photograph;[62] helping a recently widowed black woman who was unable to pay her energy bills 'because her husband had always taken care of it';[63] and enabling a man whose union was on strike to gain access to benefit money.[64] By the 1980s AFFOR was also becoming increasingly active in local education. The group ran workshops and seminars for local teachers on 'multicultural education' and at the same time 'racism and its impact upon white people's perception of black people's tradition and heritage'.[65]

Various other white-led organisations provided similar advisory services in Handsworth in the period. The Handsworth Law Centre (HLC), for example, opened in 1971 out of premises on Grove Lane. Its central aim was to provide 'the legal services and assistance that is [sic] needed for the people of Handsworth'.[66] The Centre's first case, for example, involved representing a group of black teenagers who had been arrested on the top-deck of a bus following an altercation. The police 'arrested the bus' and had it driven to Thornhill Police Station in Handsworth. Eventually, with the aid of HLC lawyers, 'the charges were dropped and the case was closed'.[67] HLC also ran a day course – attended by over 100 people – on the workings of the 1976 Race Relations Act,[68]

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[61] AFFOR Annual Report, 1976-77, p. 1.
[62] AFFOR Annual Report, 1977-78, p. 6, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, All Faiths For One Race publications, MS 2478/B/3/2.
[63] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[65] AFFOR Annual Report 1983-84, p. 8.
[66] HLC Newsletter, *Action!*, no. 1, May 1977, p. 1, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, Handsworth Law Centre Publications, MS 2478/B/3/21.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
[68] *Ibid.*.

and published three editions of a handbook on British immigration law. [69]   Other
organisations offering similar services to HLC included, as discussed in the previous
chapter, Sidelines, a publishing agency run by Derek Bishton, Brian Homer and John
Reardon that offered reduced rates to local community organisations for the production of
reports or leaflets,[70] and Westminster Endeavour for Liaison and Development (WELD),
which alongside its 'community photography' workshops ran a nursery, a free advice
centre, and arts courses.[71]

In contrast with either RAR or the ANL, then, the anti-racism of AFFOR and
similar organisations in Handsworth always corresponded with a local programme that
aimed to cater for the 'needs of individuals within the local community'.[72] At times, there
was a direct relationship between AFFOR's local case work and its wider anti-racist
campaigning. For instance, it was AFFOR that commissioned the academic John Brown
to write *Shades of Grey* – the 1977 report into the relationship between the police and the
black community in Handsworth. As Short puts it, 'the police were terrible at the time,
[they] treated black kids terribly',[73] and AFFOR hoped Brown would suggest ways of
improving the situation. In the event, *Shades of Grey* contributed to the moral panic
around the black inner city in the period. It pointed to a 'hard core' group of black youth
who had 'taken on the appearance of followers of the Rastafarian faith' as being
responsible for the high crime rates in the area – the victims of which were identified as
being white elderly women – and shunned the issue of police harassment.[74] For Gilroy,
the report was 'intermittently Powellite in language and argument' and helped to frame

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[69] HLC, *Immigration Law Handbook: a comprehensive guide to immigration law and practice*
(Handsworth: HLC/Sidelines, 1979; 1980; 1985).
[70] D. Bishton, personal interview, 1st February 2009.
[71] WELD Annual Report, 1980, p. 6, Derek Bishton Archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2478/B/4/6.
[72] AFFOR Annual Report 1983-84, p. 20.
[73] C. Short, personal interview, 13 February 2009.
[74] J. Brown, *Shades of Grey: police- West Indian relations in Handsworth* (Cranfield: Cranfield Institute of
Technology, 1977), p. 3.

anxieties about the black inner city in collective terms, as well as suggest 'cultural' reasons for black criminality by drawing attention to what was perceived by Brown as the dysfunctional black family.[75]

AFFOR disowned *Shades of Grey* and commissioned a new 'review of policing methods in Handsworth by someone who did not belong to the West Midlands Police'.[76] The group obtained a small grant sufficient to buy a tape recorder and a transcribing machine, and commissioned Carlton Green, a local bus driver, to 'spend time with various sections of the black community' and record their feelings about their relationships with the police.[77] The result was *Talking Blues*, a 47-page pamphlet summarising local opinion. 2,200 copies of *Talking Blues* were sold in the first year, and copies were distributed to senior officers in West Midlands Police.[78] Its aim, Clare Short wrote, was to 'attempt to communicate…the experiences, frustrations and sense of bitter injustice of black people concerning police behaviour'.[79] Five years later, the group produced a follow-up, this time detailing black people's disillusionment with the education system.[80]

In spite of the tensions articulated by some activists within AFFOR, anti-racist campaigning was able to co-exist alongside attempts to respond to the needs of local black and Asian communities. If the anti-racism of particularly the ANL often took little account of the wider problems faced by minority communities, AFFOR attempted to respond directly to them, often explicitly along multi-cultural lines. For instance, AFFOR ran 'language recognition' classes for teachers on Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and Patois, as well

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[75] P. Gilroy, 'Police and Thieves', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: race and racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 160-161. For Brown's observations about the West Indian family, see J. Brown, *Shades of Grey*, p. 11.
[76] AFFOR Annual Report, 1976-77, p. 3.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] AFFOR Annual Report, 1977-78, p. 4.
[79] Cited in AFFOR/C.Green, *Talking Blues*, p. 4.
[80] AFFOR *et al*, *Talking Chalk: black pupils, parents and teachers speak about education* (Handsworth: AFFOR, 1982).

as an 'interpretation and translating service'.[81] It produced leaflets in four Asian languages to promote awareness regarding issues such as unemployment benefit rights.[82] As the following section will show, many of the services provided by AFFOR were, by the mid-1970s and 1980s, strikingly similar to those being offered by groups such as the Asian Resource Centre. The 'one dimension' that united the people who came to AFFOR for help, the group concluded in 1977, was that they have 'almost always tried the normal channels and have come to the point where they do not know what to do next'.[83] The desire to meet this need sat relatively comfortably with AFFOR's wider political ambition to 'fight' or, to use the RAR slogan, 'smash' racism.[84] However, as the following sections will show, for those groups that maintained an ideological commitment to Black as a 'political colour', this was often far more problematic.

State intervention

Kenan Malik argues that in Birmingham, the process of state intervention in Black politics occurred later than in London, and followed the rioting in 1985 rather than in 1981. Whilst there was unrest in Handsworth in 1981, it was not on the scale of Brixton and took place in the context of city-wide disturbances. The events of 1985, however, were far more concentrated, and both locally and nationally Handsworth became firmly established as Birmingham's Brixton. The local council's response to the 1985 unrest, Malik argues, was to 'borrow from the GLC blueprint to create a new political framework through which to reach out to minority communities'.[85] The council funded nine 'umbrella groups' including the Council of Black Led Churches, the Hindu Council and the Sikh Council of Gurdwaras, which were each headed by a 'community leader' or

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[81] AFFOR Annual Report 1983-84, p. 20.
[82] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
[83] AFFOR Annual Report 1976-77, p. 1.
[84] AFFOR *Newsletter*, Spring 1978, p. 1.
[85] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 65.

'ethnic representative'.[86] For Malik, the aim in the creation of these groups was simple: 'the council hoped…it could draw minority communities into the democratic process and so keep anger off the streets'.[87]

The local authority's intervention in fostering minority community relations in Birmingham can in fact be traced back to a much earlier period. In 1950, for example, Birmingham City Council established the Birmingham Co-ordinating Committee for Coloured People – featuring representatives from religious and voluntary organisations – and four years later, the post of Liaison Officer for Coloured People, which 'played a crucial role in mediating debates around race and immigration in Birmingham'.[88] The 1966 Local Government Act introduced a funding package for local authorities with large numbers of immigrants from the 'New Commonwealth', and was used primarily to employ teachers with the relevant skills to teach English to Asian pupils in schools.[89] Alongside this, an 'urban programme' was set up to divert funds into inner-city areas to 'head off a possible mobilisation of anti-immigrant sentiment'.[90] Whilst it suited government in this period not to allocate this money explicitly to ethnic minorities, the Race Relations Act ten years later formally made it a statutory duty for local authorities to legislate to end racial disadvantage and encourage equality of opportunity.[91]

However, as Ken Young argues, because of a lack of a clear direction from central government, the period following the 1976 Act was characterised by diverse and sometimes confused responses from local authorities.[92] In Birmingham, this largely continued into the 1980s. In 1984, for example, the new Labour administration created

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[88] J. Solomos & L. Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 45-46.
[89] K. Young, 'Approaches to Policy Development in the Field of Equal Opportunities', in W. Ball & J. Solomos (eds.), *Race and Local Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1990), p. 24.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[92] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee, but rather than – as Malik contends – simply aping the policies of the GLC, the Labour council, headed by Dick Knowles, made a conscious decision to avoid being associated with the policies of what was widely characterised as the 'Looney Left'.[93] The Committee focused on the process of defining the council's equal opportunities policy and even as late as 1985, did 'not have a specific fund for supporting organisations of ethnic minority people'.[94] Two years later, because of concerns that its work was an electoral liability for Labour, the Committee was abolished and replaced by the Personnel and Equal Opportunities Committee.[95]

In spite of such ambiguity, during the 1980s funds were set aside specifically for ethnic minority groups and projects. The Community Relations Council (CRC), which originated in the 1960s as voluntary body concerned to help immigrants assimilate into British society,[96] by the 1970s and 1980s received some funds from local authorities and distributed them to black and Asian organisations through a bidding process. In 1973, for example, the CRC received a bid from a 'black self-help group in Handsworth' for funds towards establishing a playgroup for the children of young black mothers in the area.[97] Alongside this, the West Midlands County Council (WMCC) had an active Race Relations Committee that also allocated funds, but was dogged by allegations of corruption, particularly against the Handsworth councillor James Hunte who served as its

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[93] J. Solomos & L. Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, p. 78.
[94] Report of the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee, 'Funding of projects aimed at the ethnic minority communities and disabled persons in Birmingham', presented 20 September 1985, Birmingham City Council Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee minutes, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/C/4/70.
[95] J. Solomos & L. Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, p. 77.
[96] K. Young, 'Approaches to Policy Development in the Field of Equal Opportunities', p. 24.
[97] The bid was from the Black Community Workers' Association, which would eventually become Harambee, an organisation that will be discussed later in this chapter. 'Black Community Workers' Association application for funds', Birmingham Community Relations Council papers, National Archives at Kew, CK3/79.

Vice Chairman,[98] and the WMCC as a whole was abolished in 1986.[99] Funds were also

distributed by charitable organisations, particularly the Cadbury Trust.   Following the

abolition of the WMCC, the trust was aware of the shortfall in the funding of many 'black

run organisations', and in 1985-86 distributed a total £186,933 to 'race relations' projects

in Birmingham in an attempt to help fill this gap.[100]

Birmingham City Council did also allocate funding to black and Asian groups in

the period, usually under the euphemism of 'inner-city aid'.   The Birmingham City

Council's Economic Development Committee, for example, in March 1985 reported that

it had made £400,000 available to projects that aimed to improve 'the job prospects of

those living in the inner parts of Birmingham', and noted that 75 per cent of the city's

'ethnic population' lived in such areas.[101] Grants made included more than £10,000 given

to AFFOR in order for them to run a training initiative to meet the particular needs of the

'black unemployed'.[102]   Prior to its closure in 1987, the Race Relations and Equal

Opportunities Committee distributed £125,000 for projects that would take place in the

1986 Easter and summer holiday periods, including initiatives run in Handsworth by

organisations such as the Bangladeshi Women's Association, the British Association of

Muslims and the Midlands Vietnamese Association.[103]

National Government, too, increasingly began to direct funds towards ethnic

minority communities in Handsworth, particularly after 1985.   The aim, according to

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[98] Hunte was 'in charge of the small grants committee' and accused of 'giving money to his friends'. See anonymous interview in J. Solomos & L. Back, *Race, Politics and Social Change*, p. 71, and P. Johnson, 'Frauds Alleged Over Race Harmony Grants', in the *Guardian*, 1 February 1983.

[99] The archives of the West Midlands County Council are currently inaccessible because of Birmingham Central Library's forthcoming move to a new premises.

[100] Barrow and Geraldine S. Cadbury Trust, 1985-6 Annual Report, p. 11, Cadbury Trust Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS2142/D/6.

[101] Report of the City Planning Officer to the Economic Development Committee, 27 March 1985, in Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee minutes July 1984-April 1986, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/C/4/70.

[102] *Ibid*.

[103] Report of the Director of Development/Inner City team leader, Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee, 18 April 1986, in Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee minutes July 1984-April 1986, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/C/4/70.

David Waddington, who was Home Office minister responsible for 'racial minorities' between 1983 and 1987, was to 'try and identify the leaders of the various communities, with whom the government could deal. If there was a problem, well, [we] asked so-and-so how best he thinks it should be tackled'.[104] Following the 1985 riots, Kenneth Clarke, then Minister for Employment, chose Handsworth as the pilot area to receive the attention of an 'Inner City Task Force', a scheme conceived by the Government for areas that were 'showing acute signs of economic and social distress'.[105] Almost £5 million of central Government money was made available to different projects in Handsworth with the object of increasing the employability of people in 'Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities'.[106] This was to be a 'pro-active project' developed along 'with representatives of local communities', and was to be 'highly targeted' at 'ethnic minority groups': in particular, 'the Black Business Community, the Asian Business Community, and the Rastafarian Community in Handsworth'.[107] The Task Force was regarded as a success, with 73 per cent of projects funded regarded as meeting the targeted groups,[108] and in 1987 further funds were made available for Task Forces in 16 inner-city areas nationwide.[109]

For Malik, in the first instance, a major problem with this system was that 'there was precious little democracy in the process', and the groups chosen to receive funding had 'no democratic mandate' to represent the needs of those living in a particular area.[110] Unelected 'community leaders', Arun Kundnani argues, became 'the surrogate voice for their own ethnic fiefdoms' and were given a 'free reign' by the authorities as long as they

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[104] D. Waddington, personal interview, 16 June 2011.
[105] Dept. of Trade & Industry, *The Government's Handsworth Task Force: An Evaluation Report* (London: Dept for Trade & Industry, 1989), p. 5.
[106] *Ibid*., p. 6.
[107] *Ibid*., pp. 7 & 96.
[108] *Ibid*., p.95.
[109] G. Andrews, 'Inner-City Schemes to get 10m Cash Boost', in the *Guardian*, 28 April 1987.
[110] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 66.

agreed to 'cover up and gloss over community resistance'.[111] The issue of whether an individual was as representative within his or her own community as they claimed was something that was recognised by David Waddington. 'We were often mistaken', he admitted, as to 'who the real community leaders were. We would always get these noisy chaps who claim to be terribly influential within a particular community, but then you dig below the surface and they probably aren't at all'.[112]

For Malik, however, the consequences of such policies were considerably more far-reaching. Because the state allocated funds on the basis of ethnicity, people began to see their ethnic identity – as opposed to a more inclusive notion of Black – as the only way to obtain 'power, influence and resources'.[113] Ethnic identities had come to make up the 'social reality' in places like Handsworth. The state's policies 'did not respond to the needs of communities, but to a large degree *created* those communities by imposing identities on people'.[114] As the remainder of this chapter will now show, in Handsworth Black politics did indeed fragment along ethnic lines in the period, but this was not simply because of the way in which state funding had come to be distributed. In fact, it will be argued, within many organisations, this was a process that was already occurring at a grassroots level.

'Black' as a political colour? South Asian Groups in Handsworth

It is the Asian Youth Movement (AYM) that Malik highlights as a prime example of the unified Black politics that he and others argue existed in Britain prior to and away from the state's interventions in the 1980s. The first AYM was established in Southall in London following the racist murder of the Asian teenager Gurdip Singh Chagger in

[111] A. Kundnani, *The End of Tolerence*, p. 46.
[112] D. Waddington, personal interview, 16 June 2011.
[113] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 69.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

1976.[115] Branches were soon set up all over the country, including in Bradford – where Malik was himself an active member – and, in 1981, in Handsworth. Each AYM made the conscious decision not to seek the various forms of state funding that were by the beginning of the 1980s beginning to be made available.[116] In the 1970s and 1980s the AYM ran parallel to the Indian Workers' Associations (IWA), which were originally established to agitate for Indian independence in the 1930s but in the 1950s re-emerged to support the increasing number of immigrants settling in Britain from the Punjab.[117] IWAs were initially local organisations, but in 1958 a national co-ordinating body was established.[118] The AYM emerged partly out of a disillusionment with the politics of the IWA, which was run primarily by an older generation and was seen as hesitant in its response to racist street attacks such as the Chagger case, as well as the continuing presence of the NF.[119]

There were, however, also some significant similarities between the two groups. One of the first AYMs in Bradford was originally called the Indian Progressive Youth Association, partly to refer to the influence of the older organisation on their politics.[120] The IWA and AYM had similar objectives. The IWA pledged to 'wage militant…struggle in every possible way against racialism and fascism' and to 'support the national liberation struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples',[121] while the AYM promised to 'fight against racism in all its forms' and 'to support all anti-

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[115] A. Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', in *Race & Class*, 48: 2, 2006, p. 42.

[116] B. Basi, personal interview, 20 January 2010.

[117] S. Josephides, 'Principles, Strategies, Anti-racist Campaigns: the case of the Indian Workers' Association', in H. Goulbourne (ed.), *Black Politics in Britain* (Hants: Gower, 1990), p. 116

[118] In the late-1960s the IWA split following differences in response to the Naxalite uprising in India in 1967. Those sympathetic to the Communist Party of India established an alternative IWA led by Prem Singh. The larger IWA was led by Avtar Jouhal, and it is this group that is being referred to throughout this section. See S. Josephides, 'Principles, Strategies, Anti-racist Campaigns: the case of the Indian Workers' Association', p. 118.

[119] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 50, See also A. Deol, 'The Myth of a Black Consciousness', M.A. dissertation, Social & Economic History, University of Birmingham, 2008, p. 44.

[120] K. Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad*, p. 48.

[121] Constitution of the IWA, c. late-1970s, papers of Avtar Jouhl and the Indian Workers' Association, IWA Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/A/1/7/1.

imperialist and national liberation struggles'.[122] The two groups also took part in many of the same campaigns – both, for example, were active members of the Stop the Deportations committee in Handsworth.[123]

Perhaps most importantly, the IWA and the AYM were equally explicit in their commitment to Black as a political colour. In the IWA, this came from the group's particular interpretation of Marxism-Leninism. Avtar Jouhl, general secretary of the IWA in Handsworth, commented that it is important for 'black people to unite with each other, because they are at the forefront of the struggle' against capitalism.[124] The Black working class were regarded as playing a particularly important role in this struggle, in part because of a recognition of the racism of parts of the white working class, and also from the conviction that Black workers were able to draw directly on their own experiences of struggle against empire and colonialism abroad, as well as against racism in Britain.[125] Unless Black workers 'raise their voice', Jouhl argued, 'the solidarity will not be there, because they are the victims….black people's unity is of utmost importance'.[126]

For the AYM, a unified Black identity was necessary because, according to one activist, it would allow 'a solidarity to develop in the struggle against both the racism of the street and the institutional racism of immigration laws'.[127] Thus in the aftermath of the 1985 riots in Handsworth, the AYM's newsletter, *Asian Youth News*, argued that the 'police are now trying to divide our community by making a pretence of sympathy towards the Asian shopkeepers', and warned people not to let this affect 'relations

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[122] *Asian Youth News*, December 1985, p. 1, Tandana Asian Youth Movement Archive, http://www.tandana.org/archives (accessed 22 October 2011).
[123] See minutes from committee meeting, 5 July 1981, papers of Avtar Jouhl and the Indian Workers' Association, Anti-Deportation campaigns, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/A/1/4/15.

[124] Cited in *Lalkar*, June 1981, p. 8, papers of the Indian Workers' Asssociation, Newsletters and Journals, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/5/1/1.
[125] S. Josephides, 'Principles, Strategies, Anti-Racist Campaigns: the case of the Indian Workers' Association', p. 119.
[126] Cited in *Lalkar*, June 1981, p. 8.
[127] T. Mehmood, cited in A. Deol, 'The Myth of a Black Consciousness', p. 46.

between Asian and African communities where they live side-by-side'.[128] The AYM placed the events of 1985 in a much broader context of resistance movements in 'Asia, Africa and South America', and argued the riots were a result of the continuing 'racism of white domination'.[129]

However, the AYM's commitment to Black was often clearer theoretically than practically. Theoretically, following the usurpation of the Institute of Race Relations in 1976, it was directly influenced by the work of intellectuals such as Ambalavaner Sivanandan. Thus, just as Sivanandan viewed the 'ethnic policies and programmes' of the Race Relations Board, the Runnymede Trust and the Urban Aid Programme as tools to 'blunt the edge of black struggle',[130] Bhopinder Basi – who was active in the Handsworth AYM throughout the 1980s – recalled that the AYM 'recognised that the real purpose behind multiculturalism wasn't to help us all live together better, but to create the necessary divisions in our communities so that an oppressive process could be maintained'.[131] Just as in the 1982 *A Different Hunger* Sivanandan wrote that Asian and Afro-Caribbean activists in the 1970s were united over their 'parallel histories of common racism',[132] the Handsworth AYM in 1985 pledged to 'work for black unity…against divisions based upon caste, religious, national and cultural prejudices'.[133] Basi even recalled quoting directly from Sivanandan at AYM meetings.[134]

It is at the practical level that some contradictions emerge both in the IWA and the AYM's politics. Despite their ideological commitments, ethnicity retained at least an implicit influence on the politics of both organisations. Arbitrarily, for instance, there

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[128] *Asian Youth News*, September 1985, p. 2, Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.
[129] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[130] A. Sivanandan, 'Challenging Racism: strategies for the 1980s', pp. 67-68.
[131] B. Basi, personal interview, 20 January 2010.
[132] A. Sivanandan, 'From Resistance to Rebellion', p. 47.
[133] *Asian Youth News*, December 1985, p. 1, Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.
[134] B. Basi, cited in A. Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', p. 46.

was the decision not to reference the shared commitment to Black in the names of either organisation. Both the IWA and the AYM printed much of their campaign literature in south-Asian languages and used Punjabi slogans on demonstrations.[135] There was an ambivalence towards ethnicity within these organisations: on the one hand, there was a clear emphasis on the necessity of an inclusive Black politics that went beyond ethnicity, but on the other, at times ethnically distinct themes emerged. An IWA memo from 1982 makes this ambivalence particularly clear. The memo was issued by the IWA leadership to reprimand its members for what it described as their 'absolutely disgraceful' behaviour in not attending a specifically inclusive conference of all 'the various organisations of black people in Britain'.[136] Yet the memo also illustrated that the IWA in the 1980s continued to mobilise at least in part around issues of ethnicity in India. The memo warned of the 'extremely serious challenge' posed by the 'fanatical separatists' of the Akali Dal, a Sikh party committed to the independence of the Punjab which, it was claimed, exercised influence over 200 Sikh temples in Britain.[137]

The continual influence of ethnicity in the IWA's politics was illustrated in 1978 when the group opened its own Welfare Centre in Handsworth. The IWA named it after the Indian anti-colonialist Shaheed Udham Singh – a figure who also featured prominently in AYM literature [138] – and the Centre provided services that were particularly needed by Indian immigrants in Handsworth. For example, it provided 'free welfare and legal advice' on issues relating to immigration, police harassment, housing

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[135] A. Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', p. 47.
[136] Memo from A. Brar to all branch secretaries of the IWA, 23 October 1982, papers of Avtar Jouhl and the Indian Workers' Association, IWA Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2142/A/1/3/3/7
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] Issue 5 of *Asian Youth News* featured a front page article on Singh. See *Asian Youth News*, April 1986, no. 5. Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.

difficulties and passports.[139] The latter was important because many Indian migrants had arrived in Britain on forged passports, a situation that required bilingual negotiations with both British and Indian officials.[140] The IWA was able to make the complexities of British bureaucracies somewhat more transparent by offering this kind of logistical support in the native language of Indian immigrants. The group also played an important role in speaking out against issues of particular significance within the Asian community. The IWA were involved in campaigning against domestic violence in the Asian community, for example, issuing a leaflet expressing its concern 'about the mounting violence against women'.[141] In March 1986, the IWA organised a public meeting to discuss these issues with the intention of drawing attention to the 'feudal customs within the Asian community' which, the IWA stressed, 'must not be tolerated'.[142]

Both the IWA and the AYM made ideological statements that committed themselves to the feminist campaigns of the period,[143] with the IWA pledging their support for 'equal rights for women'[144] and the AYM committing to 'fight [women's] oppression and exploitation'.[145] In spite of this, however, it was men who occupied leadership positions in these groups and both parties were 'distinctly masculine in their organisational culture'.[146] Birmingham Black Sisters (BBS) was established partly in response to these issues. Although the group had some African-Caribbean members, the vast majority were south Asian women who felt excluded, both from existing feminist

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[139] S. Dar, 'Welfare and other activities' of the IWA, from 'Connecting Histories' website: http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/Learning%20Packages/Social%20Justice/social_justice_lp_02c.asp, (accessed 24 March 2010).

[140] S. Josephides, 'Principles, Strategies, Anti-racist Campaigns: the case of the Indian Workers' Association', p. 116.

[141] IWA leaflet, 3 October 1986, papers of the Indian Workers' Association, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/5/3/8.

[142] *Ibid*.

[143] See A. Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 64-78.

[144] IWA leaflet, c. March 1986, papers of the Indian Workers' Association, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2141/A/5/3/8.

[145] *Asian Youth News*, December 1985, p. 2.

[146] A. Ramamurthy, 'The Politics of Britain's Asian Youth Movements', p. 51.

groups which were predominately white in makeup, and the Black but predominately male politics of the IWA and AYM.[147] Here, argued Surinder Guru, who was active in BBS in the period, 'if women were incorporated, they were incorporated as the secretaries or the food makers, rather than being represented in their own right in terms of what was best for women'.[148]

BBS 'made the singular decision at the beginning that we weren't going to go for any state funding because we thought that state funding would take our independence away'.[149] Like the IWA and AYM, BBS also mobilised over an encompassing definition of Black. For Guru, this was because of an appreciation of the shared histories of African-Caribbean and Asian people on the one hand, and their shared experiences of racism in Britain on the other. 'We came under the banner of "black"', she recalled, 'because our responses were to white racist society, to organise around the histories of our people'.

> There was a commonality of experiences with racism…we recognised that if there was a trajectory to organise separately, with different groups for Africans, Caribbeans, Asians…we weren't going to get anywhere. It was that recognition that brought us together to make us strong.[150]

The first BBS newsletters appeared in 1988 and were distributed 'only to black women'.[151] In the second issue, the newsletter encouraged contributions in languages other than English, and stated that it was important for 'black women of Asian and African-Caribbean descent to come together and express the sort of oppression which we as black women face in this racist, patriarchal, capitalist society'.[152]

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[147] See A. Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, p. 154.
[148] S. Guru, personal interview, 9 March 2011.
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] *Ibid*.
[151] Birmingham Black Sisters, *Newsletter*, no. 2, May-June 1988, p. 1. Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.
[152] Birmingham Black Sisters, *Newsletter*, no. 2, May-June 1988, p. 2.

However, as with the AYM and IWA, it was political work at a grassroots level that brought to the fore tensions within BBS between an ideological commitment to Black and a *de facto* emphasis on more ethnically narrow issues. BBS, for example, invested particular energy into the case of Iqbal Begum, a Kashmiri woman who had been arrested on suspicion of murdering her abusive husband. Begum's dealings with the police had been prejudiced by the fact she spoke little English and by the consistent failure of the police to find an interpreter who spoke in her native Mirpuri dialect.[153] At her trial, when asked to enter a plea, Begum was reported to have responded with *gulty*, which in Mirpuri Punjabi translates as 'I made a mistake', but at the trial was recorded as 'guilty'.[154] BBS 'organised in her defence, visited [Begum] in prison, got her legal defence together and fought a campaign for her within our own communities'.[155]

Following the 1979 General Election, a central part of the practical politics undertaken by BBS – alongside the IWA and AYM – was to campaign against the growing number of deportation cases brought by a Conservative government that had placed a strict immigration policy at the heart of its election campaign.[156] Yet as Adam Lent points out, although there were cases – such as that of Joy Gardner in London – that affected African-Caribbean women,[157] during the 1980s it was predominately 'Asian women [who] were fighting to keep their immediate relatives together'.[158] As Guru admitted, the preoccupation within BBS with cases such as Begum's led to a perception that the group 'were only tackling south Asian women's issues'.[159] In the aftermath of the

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[153] Birmingham Black Sisters, 'Free Iqbal Begum' leaflet, 1982, p. 2, Tandana Asian Youth Movement Archive, http://www.tandana.org/archives (accessed 22 October 2011).
[154] *Ibid*.; S. Guru, personal interview, 9 March 2011.
[155] S. Guru, personal interview, 9 March 2011.
[156] See Z. Layton-Henry, 'Race and the Thatcher Government', in Z. Layton-Henry & P. B. Rich (eds.), *Race, Government and Politics in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 91.
[157] Gardner died in 1993 after being detained by deportation officers. See J. Wilson, 'Joy Gardner's son issues writ over immigration case death', the *Guardian*, 15 February 1999, cited from internet source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1999/feb/15/jamiewilson?INTCMP=SRCH (accessed 20 October 2011).
[158] A. Lent, *British Social Movements Since 1945*, pp. 156-157.
[159] S. Guru, personal interview, 9 March 2011.

Begum case, 'rifts' and 'tensions' had developed within BBS, and its few African-Caribbean members left the group.[160] Shortly afterwards, BBS folded.

In 1976 an organisation was established in Handsworth with the sole focus of providing ethnically specific services to Asian communities. According to its co-founder, Ranjit Sondhi, the Asian Resource Centre (ARC) was established out of 'a growing belief…that it was necessary and desirable for Asian residents in Handsworth to have their own autonomous and physically distinct base for community activity'.[161] As Anil Bhalla, who worked at the ARC during the 1980s, explained, the existing agencies in Handsworth – such as, for example, AFFOR – did not have staff with the 'necessary linguistic skills' to help the diverse range of prospective clients from across the south Asian diaspora.[162] As a result, such agencies had only a 'limited attraction' for 'Asians who operated within distinct cultural and linguistic frameworks'.[163]

Sondhi described what he saw as the need for an ethnically-specific service in the area:

> Just imagine a villager coming from India, who had not even been to the big cities in India like Delhi, and comes straight out of a rural way of life to a big city in England…finding themselves [living] next door to people they had never before seen in their lives. Not just the English, but the Caribbeans and the Chinese and the Vietnamese, and the Pakistanis if you were Indian, and visa versa. People never really developed an in-depth understanding of [the significance] of different cultures.[164]

The ARC attempted to fill this perceived gap by providing services that were specifically tailored to needs of different Asian communities 'through the use of their own mother-tongues, with a deep understanding of the religious, cultural and national aspirations of

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[160] *Ibid*.
[161] R. Sondhi, *Asian Resource Centre: problems, perspectives and progress* (Handsworth: ARC, 1979), p. 3.
[162] A. Bhalla, personal interview, 6 February 2010.
[163] R. Sondhi, *Asian Resource Centre*, p. 3.
[164] R. Sondhi, personal interview, 11 May 2009.

the people it serves'.[165] On the first day the ARC opened, Sondhi recalled, 'forty people lined up outside. Soon we had 500 visitors a week. Suddenly we had created a little cocoon, a little oasis in which people could move around with ease. We had opened the floodgates'.[166]

The ARC offered advice and assistance on issues – amongst others – relating to social security, debt, immigration, nationality, asylum and housing, and provided practical help with letter reading and form-filling. It also responded to broader issues within Asian communities, running, for example, a hostel in Handsworth for victims of domestic abuse.[167] In the early 1980s, the ARC was getting an 'increasing number of elderly people coming in and saying that they were homeless because their extended family had kicked them out'.[168] Running counter to assumptions regarding extensive south Asian family networks of care for the elderly, homelessness amongst Asian elders in this period was an increasing problem, often 'due to family tensions arising in a cramped house'.[169] Despite being criticised 'for bringing shame on the community' by highlighting such issues, the ARC responded by working with a local housing association to set up an eleven bed, self-contained hostel 'for the Asian elderly' on St Peter's Road, Handsworth.[170] 'We were responding to a very real need', Bhalla – who helped establish the hostel – concluded. 'We respond to what is required on a case-by-case basis'.[171]

Unlike BBS and the AYM, the ARC has from the outset survived on grants from the state and various charitable bodies. Although the ARC 'celebrated the ethos of self-help', it was explicit in its 'wish to provide suitable services for the Asian population',

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[165] 'Asian Resource Centre', cited in Internet source: http://www.asianresource.org.uk/, 31 March 2010.
[166] R. Sondhi, personal interview, 11 May 2009.
[167] A. Bhalla, personal interview, 6 February 2010.
[168] *Ibid*.
[169] N. Mays, 'Elderly South Asians in Britain: a survey of relevant literature and themes for future research', *Ageing and Society*, 3: 1, 1983, p. 83.
[170] A. Bhalla, personal interview, 6 February 2010.
[171] *Ibid*.

and 'this required funds'.[172] In 1979, the ARC received funds from, amongst others, the City of Birmingham Social Services Department, the Inner-City Partnership and the Barrow-Cadbury Trust,[173] and in 1991 received a total of £114,729 from Birmingham City Council.[174]

Yet this chapter has so far illustrated that there is not a direct correlation between the decision of a group to accept state funding and the emergence of ethnicity in their politics. The AYM and BBS refused to accept any form of state funding and subscribed to a macro politics of Black as an inclusive term, but at a micro level, both found themselves engaged in the provision of services and campaigns that were primarily about responding to the requirements of ethnically specific communities. There was a recognition within the ARC that a reliance on state funding made it vulnerable. In a memo from the early 1980s, for example, it was noted that the 'grants are barely paying [the staff] salaries' and that there was 'a need to raise more money' and to 'write to charitable organisations requesting financial aid'.[175] Yet the ARC's reliance on state funds did not make it any weaker than any of the other organisations operating in Handsworth. In fact, perhaps because of a willingness to accept the need for ethnically based service provision in Handsworth, and base a politics around it on a 'case-by-case basis', the ARC remains active in 2011. By the end of the 1980s, the AYM, like BBS, had ceased to exist.

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[172] G. Bhattacharyya, *Across All Boundaries: 25 years of the Asian Resource Centre in Birmingham* (Asian Resource Centre: Handsworth, 2003) p. 12. Available from internet source: http://www.asianresource.org.uk/anniv-book.pdf (accessed 22 October 2011).
[173] Asian Resource Centre Annual Report, 1978-1979, Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.
[174] Asian Resource Centre, Management Committee minutes, 2 April 1991, Asian Resource Centre records held at ARC premises at 101 Hamstead Road, Handsworth.
[175] Asian Resource Centre, Management Committee minutes, 30 September 1980; 6 June 1981, Asian Resource Centre records held at ARC premises at 101 Hamstead Road, Handsworth.

African-Caribbean politics

The issue of homelessness provides a useful example of how the same root problem in Handsworth often required different responses from different organisations, depending on the particular way in which various ethnic groups were affected. For the African-Caribbean community in Handsworth, homelessness was an issue that primarily affected not the elderly, but young people. In a sociology thesis completed at the University of Birmingham in 1974, Beresford Henry mapped 'the growing problem of homelessness' amongst 'black youngsters' in Handsworth,[176] arguing that there was a particular tension in black households between teenagers and parents that was not manifest in other ethnic groups.[177] This, Henry argues, led to many young people becoming 'temporarily or permanently alienated from parental or home situations' and in some cases, being 'rejected from their families'.[178]

Harambee, a community group named after the Swahii word for 'all together', was formed in Handsworth in 1972 and adopted a specifically African-Caribbean politics of self-help. It was established in order to respond to the particular issue of youth homelessness amongst the black community. Maurice Andrews was one of the group's founding members, and observed that there was 'phenomenal tension' in many black families, 'especially where step-children were involved'.[179] As a result, many 'kids at fourteen or fifteen were being thrown out of their home… [and] sleeping rough in parks, or with friends in bed-sits'.[180] Harambee was established because it was felt that the 'time has come to take a positive initiative in order to begin to retrieve the situation'.[181] It

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[176] B. I Henry, 'Homelessness and a Particular Response Among Young West Indians in Handsworth, Birmingham', dissertation presented to the University of Birmingham in part fulfilment of the requirement for the degree M.Soc.Sc, University of Birmingham, Autumn 1974, p. 15.

[177] *Ibid*., p. 18.

[178] *Ibid*., p. 30.

[179] M. Andrews, personal interview, 16 June 2010.

[180] *Ibid*.

[181] Harambee aims and objectives, cited in B. I Henry, 'Homelessness and a Particular Response Among Young West Indians in Handsworth, Birmingham', p.30.

obtained funds to purchase a three-story property on Hall Road, less than half a mile from

the ARC refuge for elderly women on St Peter's Road, and 'set it up as a hostel to take

the young people off the street'.[182]   The intention was to not only 'house and feed

homeless youngsters', but also to 'make the youngsters feel more aware of themselves,

their situation and the role they can play in society' as well as 'offer[ing] opportunities to

black adults to regain the trust of the younger generation'.[183]   According to the group's

1974 annual report, there were three stages to the group's intervention – the provision of

short-term accommodation as part of a 'rescue operation', the allocation of long-term

homes, and education, 'intended to make the youngsters more socially aware and self-

reliant'.[184] Within seven days of the hostel's opening, and 'without any advertisement',

all fifteen places in the house had been filled by local homeless young people.[185] By

March 1974, seventy young people had stayed at the Harambee hostel, from periods

ranging from one night to ten months.[186]

Throughout the 1980s Harambee expanded its activities in response to 'practical

issues' within the black community.[187]   It purchased other disused properties in

Handsworth and turned them into hostels for black youth, and set up its own housing

association to provide low cost housing in the area. It established an advice centre

'similar to the ARC' that dealt with what were regarded as problems particular to the

black community in Handsworth.[188] The advice centre particularly focused on providing

legal advice, and every Saturday afternoon lawyers would hold open surgeries specifically

relating to issues with the police. Harambee provided a nursery 'to solve the problem of

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[182] M. Andrews, personal interview, 16 June 2010.
[183] Harambee aims and objectives, cited in B. I Henry, 'Homelessness and a Particular Response Among Young West Indians in Handsworth, Birmingham', p. 34.
[184] Harambee Annual Report, 1973-1974, Birmingham Community Relations Council papers, National Archives at Kew, CK3/97.
[185] B. I Henry, 'Homelessness and a Particular Response Among Young West Indians in Handsworth, Birmingham', p. 34.
[186] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[187] M. Andrews, personal interview, 16 June 2010.
[188] *Ibid*.

single mothers in the area', and Saturday schools to 'help explain racism' to black youth.[189] These services were named not after south Asian revolutionaries like Udham Singh, but African-Caribbean figures such as Marcus Garvey and Harriet Tubman. 'We had to find our own place in society', Andrews stated. 'Harambee insisted that we had to manage our own affairs. We had our own problems, and it was important *we* solved them'.[190]

Like the ARC, Harambee also accepted state funding, but justified this ideologically. 'Our theory was', Andrews recalled, 'we pay taxes, we are a part of this society', therefore it was 'the state's responsibility' to respond to social problems such as homelessness in the black community.[191] Amongst other bodies, Harambee received funds from the Community Relations Council, which in 1975 described the Harambee hostel as 'one of the best pieces of self-help work' in the area, and saw the group as being 'ideally placed to work effectively with young West Indians'.[192] Accepting state funding was not seen as compromising Harambee's core 'spirit of togetherness and self-help'.[193] Rather, as Maurice Andrews concluded, Harambee's politics was 'self-help backed up with the demand that the state must pay'.[194]

The African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation (ACSHO), which was established in 1964, is one of the oldest black organisations in Handsworth. On the issue of funding, the group's perspective was at odds with both Harambee and the ARC, and more similar to the AYM and BBS. In the context of state funding cuts to black and Asian organisations in Handsworth in 1989, for example, the ACSHO urged organisations to

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[189] *Ibid.*
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] *Ibid.*
[192] Memo from Senior Community Relations Officer of CRC to Mrs. T. Hasnain, Regional Development Officer, 29 April 1975, Birmingham Community Relations Council papers, National Archives at Kew, CK3/106.
[193] Harambee Annual Report, 1973-1974, Birmingham Community Relations Council papers, National Archives at Kew, CK3/97.
[194] M. Andrews, personal interview, 16 June 2010.

learn the bitter lesson of the enemy's politics. [The state] use their economic strength to divide and rule our people…we should become self-sufficient and not rely on our enemy's funds. We were branded as extremists for not wanting to collaborate…the lesson we should learn is never rely on your enemy for liberation.[195]

As the ACSHO's co-founder and chairman Bini Brown put it, 'we don't like going with our hand begging, begging, begging. If you have to keep on begging somebody for something, what kind of human being are you? If you always have to stretch your hand out and beg? You have no dignity. When you're self-reliant, you do what you do, you're proud of what you are'.[196] Yet in spite of, as Sivanandan and others argued was necessary, refusing to 'collaborate' with the state, the ACSHO maintained one of the most ethnically-specific politics of any of the groups discussed in this chapter, and did so at both a practical and an ideological level.

The ACSHO was formed in reaction to the racism that many first generation immigrants experienced in their everyday lives. 'We came from the Caribbean and we went to school here, and there was a lot of racism', recalled Brown.

We used to get a lot of harassment…to a level where children couldn't take the pressure of being called 'wog', 'nigger', 'coon', and so on. If you didn't fight back then you'd suffer serious emotional and psychological problems. So in '64 myself and many other people from the area formed the organisation. We wanted to deliver a programme that would allow us to survive in this [the British] environment.[197]

The ACSHO put on a number of community activities in Handsworth. In *Race in the Inner City*, for example, one of the first sociological investigations into Handsworth, Gus John describes the ACSHO programme in Handsworth as 'the most hopeful growing-

[195] 'Joint Attack by the Labour Party and Conservative Party', cited in *Jomo*, Issue 2, March 1989, p. 11, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[196] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[197] *Ibid*.

point for an active and relevant community self-help effort' in the area, and reprinted the group's aims in full.[198]

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, the ACSHO programme centred on educational activities. 'We talk about developing minds', Brown says. 'You must be able to think [in order to] help yourself'.[199] There was a particular emphasis on educating young people in the community, who were regarded as being the victims of 'mis-education'.[200] The school system was seen to fundamentally neglect black history in schools by 'making out that we had no civilised culture of our own',[201] and its central function was defined as being to 'oppress and brainwash black children into forging the cheap labour force for this capitalist society'.[202] To correct this, the ACSHO demanded 'a representative number of black teachers' in 'all schools where there are black children',[203] and have since their inception also run what Ian Grosvenor describes as 'probably the oldest black Saturday school in Britain', which during the 1970s was attended by 120 pupils.[204] The school is open to all black children aged between three and sixteen, and runs lessons in English, maths and 'all African history – Caribbean, African, American African,...the true history of our people'.[205] Children attended the school unable to read or write, and Brown clamed that 'in no time we turned them around'.[206] This was about 'teaching a sense of identity which is African';[207] about, in Brown's words, 're-educating and liberating our people'.[208]

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[198] G. John, *Race in the Inner City*, p. 33.
[199] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[200] *Ibid*.
[201] *Ibid*.
[202] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, c. late-1970s, p. 5, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[203] *Ibid*.
[204] I. Grosvenor, *Assimilating Identities: racism and educational policy in post-1945 Britain* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), pp. 157-158.
[205] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, c. late-1970s, p. 5.
[206] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[207] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, late-1970s, p. 4.
[208] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.

Education was part of a wider ACSHO programme aimed at 'uplifting our community'.[209] The group demanded 'an end to the racist discrimination acts in housing' and 'an end to the exploitation of black (African) people by unscrupulous landlords and estate agents'.[210] In employment, it called for separate 'sections for black people',[211] and declared 'that it is very wrong for black people to join the armed forces of this racist capitalist country…which are used to repress us and maintain imperialist interest in Africa and the Caribbean'.[212] Throughout the 1980s the group was also involved in a campaign against the police in Handsworth. Its journal *Jomo* – named after Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister of Kenya – regularly reported incidents of alleged police brutality, and the ACSHO mounted legal defence of people it believed were wrongly arrested. Posters were distributed around Handsworth under the title 'Dem Invade Handsworth Again Me Friend', advising people who had been arrested to demand the 'right to a telephone call' and in the event, contact the ACSHO, who would provide 'trustworthy and dedicated black lawyer'.[213] ACSHO also called for the introduction of all black juries for black defendants in the British court system and, failing this, the release of 'all black people presently incarcerated across this country' as a result of their 'wrongful' imprisonment.[214] 'If these rights are refused', the ACSHO concluded, 'then it is apartheid'.[215]

The ACSHO was also able to marry this practical, community work with an ideological emphasis on a specifically African-Caribbean political ideology. This centred on a political identity based around the idea of Africa. The group was originally called the Afro-West Indian Caribbean Society 'because you couldn't just say "African"'.

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[209] *Ibid.*
[210] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, late-1970s, p. 5.
[211] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[212] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, late-1970s, p. 5.
[213] ACSHO, 'Dem Invade Handsworth Again Me Friend', 1985, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[214] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, c. late-1970s, p. 5.
[215] ACSHO, 'Dem Invade Handsworth Again Me Friend', 1985.

Eventually it changed its name to first 'Afro-Caribbean', then 'African-Caribbean', and the ultimate aim is to call it simply the 'African Self-Help Society'.[216] The ACSHO's political ideology was developed at their 'Tuesday seminars', which were held every week at the ACSHO premises at 104 Heathfield Road, Handsworth. The seminars, according to Bini Brown, were part of the ACSHO's 'consciousness-raising programme for the African Race',[217] and each seminar was advertised as being 'strictly an African occasion'. The group defined this as 'all of us that are called by a variety of names: West Indian, Nigerian, Batian, Trinidadian, Jamaican, Bantu… negro…black British, etc etc'.[218] The topics of the seminars ranged from themes such as 'racism in education' and a 'history of black organisations in Britain'[219] to 'the Islamic "fundamental" threat to Africa,' and 'Is there a superior race?'[220] The 'continuous tradition of Tuesday meetings' was regarded by the ACSHO as being 'part of our schooling' and a way of 'stop[ping] our dependency syndrome'. These were both aspects of the group's ultimate ambition: 'the liberation of all African people worldwide…political and economical, in sum, the total cultural control over our lives'.[221]

The ACSHO's politics was thus rooted around the figures of Marcus Garvey and Africa and was indicative of an increasing radicalism amongst Pan-Africanist groups in Britain during the late-1960s and 1970s.[222] The group summed up its philosophy as being 'in the tradition of the honourable Marcus Mosiah Garvey; race first, nationhood and self-

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[216] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[217] B. Brown, letter to Tuesday seminar attendees, 12 December 1995, Vanley Burke Archive, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS2192/C/D/1/1/1.
[218] Undated ACSHO promotional leaflet, c. 1980, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[219] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings', c. late-1970s, p. 4.
[220] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings', 1994, p. 3, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[221] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings', c. late-1970s, p. 4.
[222] See R. Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain*, p. 371.

reliance together'.[223] In Bini Brown's words, the ACSHO emphasised a commitment towards 're-taking our land and making sure that we actually go back home there. Our organisation has always been connected with Africa because that's our homeland. We have the right to the minerals in the ground'.[224] Membership of the ACSHO was limited to the group's own definition of 'Africans'.[225] A promotional leaflet summed up this understanding, arguing that 'the world today is a world divided into groups and races', all of which 'aspire to be on top'.[226] The 'European' was held to 'compete' using a brand of 'physical and psychological warfare' called 'white supremacy', whilst the 'Arab' competed under 'Arab supremacy', a 'religious ideology that recognises his race as the "chosen people"'.

> The ACSHO also competes. As Africans, we compete under the banner of Pan-Africanism. A cultural, spiritual and political ideology that is wholly African: An ideology dedicated to the African way of life…firmly rooted in our African heritage.[227]

'How do you compete?', the leaflet ends by provocatively asking.[228] For Brown, 'the racial group is clear. We are one people. We don't need anyone imposing their culture on us. No one has the right to dominate us. We want to move to a level where we govern ourselves. We must have the right to determine our own destiny'.[229]

The case of the ACSHO shows particularly clearly that the arguments made by Malik, Kundnani and Sivanandan – that it was the state's intervention that resulted in the fragmentation of a unified black politics – are too simplistic. The ACSHO consistently

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[223] ACSHO, 'Pan African Congress Movement', promotional leaflet, 1990, p. 3, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[224] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[225] The ACSHO wrote that 'all distinct human groups on earth [are defined] on the basis of their supposed place of origin…Caucasoid from the Caucasus mountains (commonly called whites), Mongoloid form Mongolia (commonly called Chinese)…we can do no less than define ourselves racially from our place of origin which is Africa'. See ACSHO, 'Pan African Congress Movement', promotional leaflet, 1990, p. 4.
[226] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, c. late-1970s, p, 2.
[227] *Ibid*.
[228] *Ibid*.
[229] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.

refused to accept state funds, yet for more than forty years has adopted a specifically African-Caribbean politics, on both a practical and an ideological level. Conversely, many Asian groups sought to maintain a commitment to 'black as political colour', yet found it undermined by their desire to respond practically to the needs of local communities.

There is the sense that it is south-Asian groups in particular that have been unable to develop a radical politics that is consistent with the provision of ethnically specific services at a grassroots level. For Ranjit Sondhi, whilst 'the Afro-Caribbean community has preserved the political definitions of "black"', it is 'the Asians [who] have lost it'.

> When people move from one conceptual framework to another they tend to leave behind some of the best aspects of the previous framework. The Asian community, partly in order to distinguish themselves from the Caribbean community, have said, 'we're not black', but in the process they lost the political power that came with being 'black'.[230]

BBS, the AYM and the IWA were unable to tally their firm ideological commitment to 'black' with their service provision in Handsworth. Ethnicity continued to emerge, whether this was in the range of linguistic services provided by the IWA at the Shaheed Udham Singh Welfare Centre, the Punjabi slogans sung on AYM marches or the campaigns mounted by BBS in protest against the deportations that particularly affected Asian communities in the period.

It was at this practical level of service provision in Handsworth that the fragmentation of black politics occurred, whether organisations accepted state funding or not. As Sondhi continued, 'talking politically, coming together on the ticket of a common blackness became absolutely understandable. [But] when we talked about service delivery at a cultural level, discrimination at a cultural level, then it was right to see how African-Caribbeans might be discriminated against in a different way to Asians…whether

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[230] R. Sondhi, personal interview, 11 May 2009.

it was the police, whether it was hospitals giving service delivery, the courts'.[231] The ACSHO was seemingly able to maintain a radical politics whilst at the same time attempting to respond to the needs of the African-Caribbean population. For Asian communities, however, there was a sense of disempowerment. 'We always saw ethnicity as a temporary measure', Sondhi concluded, 'as a means of giving people the self-confidence to participate in wider society. That process of ethnification…was okay in this respect, [but] it was not necessarily a great move in terms of getting people political power…we have actually disempowered ourselves through fragmentation'.[232]

Conclusion

The sometimes contradictory nature of Black politics in Handsworth is illustrated by the reactions of different groups to the 1985 riots. Both the IWA and the AYM issued statements calling for black unity in Handsworth. The IWA pledged to support the 'unity of the West Indian and Asian communities',[233] while the AYM criticised 'the minority of business people (mainly Asians)' who 'appear on television making the damaging statements about Afro-Caribbeans attacking Asians',[234] an example of which was documented in the introduction to this chapter. For the AYM, 'the fact is' that during the unrest 'the majority of our people were not touched. In fact many Asian youths took part in clashes with the police'.[235] The Handsworth community, the AYM concluded, 'cannot allow the British state to divide us. We must stay united'.[236]

Given the separatist nature of the ACSHO's black politics, it is perhaps unsurprising that Bini Brown also appeared on television in the aftermath of the unrest

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[231] R. Sondhi, cited in G. Bhattacharyya, *Across All Boundaries*, p. 40
[232] R. Sondhi, personal interview, 11 May 2009.
[233] Cited in *Lalkar,* October 1985, p. 4.
[234] *Asian Youth News*, September 1985, p. 3, Tandana Asian Youth Movement Archive, http://www.tandana.org/archives (accessed 22 October 2011).
[235] *Ibid*.
[236] *Ibid*., p. 2.

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and made comments that went against the IWA and the AYM, accusing the 'middle class Asians' of attempting to 'put down the black community'.[237] Yet the riots also resulted in the ACSHO reaching out to the IWA and AYM. On the 10th of September 1985, a day after the first day's rioting, the ACSHO established the Handsworth Defence Campaign. The Campaign's intention was to 'ensure that people who have been charged' during the unrest 'receive sound legal advice' by providing a 'list of solicitors and barristers who it feels will be sympathetic towards those who have been charged'.[238] It also aimed to 'build support in the Handsworth community for the defence of all those who have been charged'.[239] At a later meeting, attended by both the IWA and the AYM, the Campaign released a statement claiming that Handsworth 'was united in condemning the actions of the police' and 'in the aim of building up the unity of Asian and African-Caribbeans'.[240] A leaflet was circulated, 'issued by the Asian members of the Defence Campaign', which attempted to counteract what was perceived as 'the lies and mis-information put out by the police and media…in trying to create a split between the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities'.[241] The leaflet stressed that the riots were 'directed against property and the police', and urged the Asian community to remember that 'our temples and mosques are side-by-side with Afro-Caribbean social centres and churches. We have lived together peacefully all these years'.[242] In response to a particular, practical situation, therefore, a unified Black politics was – however fleetingly – seemingly possible in Handsworth.

However, this chapter has shown that it was also at the practical level that fragmentation largely occurred. South Asian groups such as the IWA, AYM and BBS, often directly influenced by the work of writers such as Sivanandan, found it easy to

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[237] Cited in *Here and Now* no. 167: 'Handsworth: What Went Wrong', Central Television, 1985
[238] ACSHO, Handsworth Defence Campaign leaflet, October 1985.
[239] *Ibid*.
[240] *Ibid*.
[241] Handsworth Defence Campaign leaflet, c. October 1985. Institute for Race Relations Black History Collection, 'Handsworth, Birmingham' file, 1980-1985, 01/04/04/01/14/07.
[242] *Ibid*.

express Black as a 'political colour' in theory, but difficult to carry it out as a practical politics in Handsworth. The theme that unites each of the organisations that this chapter has discussed was a common desire to respond in practical ways to the needs of the Handsworth community which, as various sociological reports showed, remained acute well into the 1980s.[243] The issue was that many of these needs were manifest in ethnically distinct ways. AFFOR – running counter to the arguments made by Gilroy – was relatively unproblematically able to undertake anti-racist campaigning whilst providing ethnically specific services, perhaps precisely because the group did not have a commitment to a unified concept of Black. There is the sense that Asian groups, however, realised that fragmentation along ethnic lines could lead to a loss of radical politics. BBS, the IWA and the AYM were characterised by a running tension, between a political commitment to the radicalism of Sivanandan's Institute for Race Relations on the one hand, and a practical desire to make a difference in Handsworth on the other.

It was the ACSHO that was best able to maintain both an ideological and a practical politics in Handsworth. This was largely achieved – somewhat paradoxically – through an emphasis on Africa in Handsworth. The ACSHO provided a programme that was tailored to what was perceived as the needs of the local 'African' population, and matched this with a political ideology that borrowed from Marcus Garvey and the 'back to Africa' movement. This politics was sustained well into the twenty-first century. In 2009 the ACSHO launched its 'African Building' campaign. Its aim is to raise funds to purchase a piece of land – next to their premises on Heathfield Road – which had formerly been owned by James Watt, whose family had been involved in the slave trade.

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[243] See, for example, R. Bhavnani, *et al; A Different Reality: An Account of Black People's Experiences and their Grievances Before and After the Handsworth Rebellion of September 1995* (Birmingham: West Midlands County Council, 1986).

The idea is to build on this land 'the first African-designed building in the UK in the 21st century',[244] something that would become a 'beacon of hope for generations to come'.[245]

The wider significance of Africa within the black structure of feeling in Handsworth will be explored in the following chapter. This chapter has shown that the emphasis placed on funding by Sivanandan, Malik and others in the breakup of an encompassing Black politics was exaggerated. A reliance on state funding undoubtedly made some organisations vulnerable. In 2010, for example, Harambee was forced to close many of its operations following the decision of Birmingham City Council to withdraw its funding.[246] But as the examples of BBS and the AYM show, independence from the state was far from a guarantee of longevity. Indeed, as Surinder Guru now reflects, 'looking back on it, I wonder if we made the right decision. I've come to the conclusion that state funding can take your independence away, but if your organisation is strong, this is not necessarily the case'.[247] The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the process of fragmentation in Black politics was something that was occurring organically in Handsworth, largely independently from the state.

Following the rioting in 1985, the police identified the Villa Cross pub as being one of the major sources of unrest.[248] An application was made to have its license revoked, and Birmingham City Council purchased the premises from the brewery with the intention of giving it to a local community group. The Council approached the ARC and advised them that they should 'move into the building'.[249] After an internal discussion, however, the group refused. Perhaps illustrating that the issue of funding remained

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[244] ACSHO, 'Yaa Asantewa Nanny Project', promotional leaflet, 2009, p. 1, leaflet acquired by the author from ACSHO premises at 104 Heathfield Road.

[245] *Ibid*.

[246] See P. Brady, 'The Fight to Save Harambee', in The *Voice*, 18 January 2010. From internet source: http://www.voice-online.co.uk/content.php?show=16929 17 March 2011.

[247] S. Guru, personal interview, 9 March 2011.

[248] In *Tales From Two Cities*, Dervla Murphy's travelogue of time spent in Manningham in Bradford and Handsworth, Murphy describes the Villa Cross as 'flamboyantly "Rasta" territory'. See D. Murphy, *Tales From Two Cities: travels of another sort* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 155.

[249] M. Idrish, cited in G. Bhattacharyya, *Across All Boundaries*, p. 31.

resonant in Handworth, this was partly because of a worry that 'people will think we are siding with the government'.[250] But there was also a further reason. The Villa Cross was seen by the ARC as 'a black people's pub', a 'black institution' in Handsworth.[251] ARC members believed that 'it should remain a black institution in whatever shape or form'.[252] Ethnicity led to the fragmentation of a unitary Black politics at a practical level in Handsworth. However, as the remainder of this thesis will demonstrate, away from the relatively small if committed pool of political activists, race was nevertheless something that was experienced, in pubs such as the Villa Cross and other institutions of everyday life. In order to assess the wider significance of race in Handsworth, it is necessary to move beyond the realm of formal politics and into the realm of the cultural, to examine the significance of cultural institutions, events and practices as they took place in everyday life in black Handsworth.

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[250] *Ibid.*
[251] *Ibid.*, p. 32.
[252] *Ibid.*

Chapter Three: From the Caribbean to Africa

Performance, Culture and Identity

Introduction

C.L.R James, the Trinidadian essayist, Marxist and lifelong cricket fan, regarded cricket in Caribbean society as intimately connected with questions of politics and identity. Indeed, for James, such questions helped contribute to the immense popularity of the game in the Caribbean.[1] In the context of the shift from colonialism to post-colonialism, James saw race as being of particular importance. For James, cricket embodied, and often found, imaginary solutions to a search for identity in Caribbean society. Reflecting on the 'remarkable' style of play of the batsmen Rohan Kanhai, for example, James argued that it represented 'a unique pointer of the West Indian quest for identity, for ways of expressing our potential bursting at every seam'.[2] Race was thereby inseparable from the game – it was seemingly embedded in every shot. For it to have been any other way, James argues, 'we would have had to divest ourselves from our skins'.[3]

The previous chapter explored the competing definitions of 'black' politically in Handsworth. In this and the following chapter, the emphasis will be on documenting the black structure of feeling outside the political domain, through an exploration of various forms of cultural practice in Handsworth. The intention is to explore how race was experienced in these examples, and, as James did in the Caribbean context, show that this was also necessarily connected with wider questions of identity in Handsworth and in Britain.

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[1] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1963), p. 88.
[2] C.L.R. James, 'Rohan Kanhai: a study in confidence', in *New World*, 1966. Obtained from internet source. http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/leaders/kanhai.htm (accessed 9 May 2011).
[3] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 88.

The focus in this chapter is on formal, performance-based cultural institutions: two cricket clubs established in the mid-1970s in Handsworth Park; Banner Theatre group and Kokuma Dance Company, established in 1974 and 1978; and the various reggae acts that were active in Handsworth throughout the long 1980s. Aside from Banner, which, it will be shown, was an important influence on other black arts companies in Handsworth, the vast majority of participants in these institutions were black, and the prime function was the production of a spectacle for an audience, however big or small. The final chapter of this thesis, by contrast, focuses on culture in its pervasive and broadest sense, in everyday institutions such as pubs and churches. In practice, however, any such distinction between 'formal' and 'everyday' culture is somewhat arbitrary – for those active in formal institutions, performances were also a part of everyday life, and the practices involved at the cricket club, for instance, often overlapped with those that took place in the pub. It is inevitable, therefore, that may be some degree of crossover in the following chapters.

Raymond Williams defined the notion of a structure of feeling as something that was a fundamentally fluid or 'living' entity. One of the ways in which he regarded this to be manifest was through the adaptation by new generations of particular aspects of a structure of feeling, in order to respond 'to the unique world it is inheriting'.[4] New generations may 'reproduce aspects of the organisation', he argues, yet feel 'its whole life in certain ways differently' and as a result of this different perspective, respond 'in its own ways'.[5] In the black structure of feeling in Handsworth, this chapter argues, this was manifest through a shift in emphasis from the Caribbean to Africa.

The previous chapter ended with the example of the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation, which maintained a radical black politics by evoking the concept of Africa.

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[4] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 65.
[5] *Ibid.*

Away from the commitment of a relatively small number of activists like Bini Brown, however, in the realm of the cultural, a commitment to an African identity was far from universal. It will be demonstrated that for each of the performers in this chapter – whichever stage they were on – cricket, dance, theatre and music provided a source of culture, an identity that helped people come to terms with their position in Handsworth and in Britain. However, this did not always occur with the same ideological emphasis. The chapter provides a practical example of what has been described as the 'gap' between the first generation of migrants from the Caribbean, and their children,[6] the majority of whom spent their key formative years in Britain, in places such as Handsworth. In cultural terms, this chapter will argue, this gap was played out through the shifting of the location imagined as generating identity, from the Caribbean to Africa.

What will be articulated here are different examples from within black Handsworth of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the 'invention of tradition'.[7] Hobsbawm notes how in circumstances where communities require the establishment of certain values or identities, 'traditions' are 'sometimes invented'.[8] For Hobsbawm, this is about the 'human relation to the past' in which history is often turned to as 'a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion'.[9] As Stuart Hall elaborates, this turn to a historical past for legitimisation in the present is of particular importance when it comes to the construction of identities. For Hall, 'the discourse of identity' suggests there is always the need to try to find a 'kind of ground for our identities, something to which we can return, something stabilized, around which we can organize our identities and our sense of belongingness'.[10] Whereas societal customs, Hobsbawm argues, are changing and

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[6] D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Grafton Books, 1991), pp. 75.
[7] See E. Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1983), p. 1.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 1.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[10] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', in the *New Left Review* 209, 1995, p. 4.

continually modified, traditions are often invented out of a desire for a 'fixed' and stable sense of belonging, and are evoked through rituals and the 'conscious manipulation of symbols'.[11] This chapter documents some of the different rituals and symbols that were deployed in Handsworth in the 1980s and in doing so, charts the moment in which Africa became the critical source of identity amongst a young black generation in Britain.

The chapter begins with an analysis of Handsworth Cricket Club. For the predominately older generations who attended the club, a 'sense of belongingness' was found through reference to the Caribbean, despite the fact that most of them had spent more than two decades living in Britain. Cricket and its associated activities – the game of dominoes, for example, or regular tours away – helped its members articulate a Caribbean 'tradition' in Handsworth.

For younger generations, who felt alienated not only from British society, but in many cases also from the perceived conservatism of their parents, the Caribbean could not provide such a straightforward solution. The chapter moves on to show the various ways in which Africa emerged in Handsworth amongst this generation, through theatre, dance and music. The central aim is to provide practical examples in Handsworth of what Hall describes as this generation's 'renegotiation' and 'rediscovery' of Africa.[12] For these young people, somewhat paradoxically, given that the great majority of them had never been to the continent, Africa provided the key 'sense of belonging' in Handsworth.[13] Unlike their parents, who could draw upon fond, often romanticised memories of their own childhood in the Caribbean, the examples of theatre, dance and music show that young people turned towards the figure of Africa. However, in a manner similar to the various photographic representations of Handsworth discussed in Chapter One, the narrative that emerges from these different forms of performance is not necessarily a

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[11] E. Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', p. 9.
[12] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', p. 9.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 4.

more 'authentic' representation of black culture in Handsworth. The Africa to which they referred to, it will be shown, was not Africa in any literal sense. Rather, it was, as Hall put it, an 'imagined community',[14] albeit one which had very real effects in Handsworth.

Cricket

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, James Brown, who had migrated to Britain from Jamaica in the 1950s, captained Handsworth Continental Cricket Club. Having retired from playing in the 1980s, Brown, in collaboration with a local arts centre, attempted to write his memoirs of his time at the club. The memoirs were never published, but the transcripts are testament to the dominance of cricket in Brown's life, a passion for the game that was manifest in a seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge of every shot, catch and wicket to have been taken in Handsworth. 'I have watched the Continental cricketers demolish and drive many teams out of the park', Brown begins his memoirs, before moving on to recall how one particular game 'started off with glorious shots and boundaries' from the opposing team, but that this 'soon came to a stop. Campbell took a glorious catch to dismiss Erick the flashy captain. They did not stand a chance. We won the game by 71 runs'. [15]

Continental Cricket Club was founded in Handsworth Park alongside its sister club Rangers in the mid-1970s. Francis Nation, who was born in Manchester, Jamaica and migrated to England at the age of seventeen in 1960, was one of the key figures in the establishment of Continental (*plate 2.1*). He recalls that the club had originally been formed in Calthorpe Park in Balsall Heath in 1960, but in 1976 'recruited some brilliant young cricketers from the Handsworth area. Boys like Len Gidden, Bartley Hay [and]

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[14] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', p. 4.
[15] J. Brown, *Continental Cricket Club* (c. 1980 – unpublished), p. 1. The memoirs were submitted in handwritten form to Trinity Arts Centre in Small Heath, Birmingham in the early 1980s, and were obtained by the author from John Dalton, a former employee of the centre.

Densil Dennis, [who] used to practice in Handsworth Park after work then travel over to Calthorpe Park on a Sunday and play for Continental'.[16]   However, it was decided that travelling to the other side of the city was not good for 'team bonding', and after 1976 the team relocated to Handsworth Park.[17]   Len Gidden, who in 1957 also migrated to Birmingham from Jamaica, and not only played for Continental but also captained Handsworth Rangers, reflected that the decision to base both clubs in Handsworth was made largely for logistical reasons, because of the large Caribbean, and particularly Jamaican, population 'living in the Handsworth, Winson Green area'.[18]   It was a shared passion for the game that ensured the development of both clubs. As Nation recalled, 'a young man in Jamaica wanted to be a professional cricketer, and if you can't be a professional cricketer, you become a professional supporter. All my life I've loved cricket, and when I came to Birmingham I thought it was a fantastic opportunity to start my own club'.[19] In 1983, after 'playing without changing-rooms for several seasons', the clubs constructed a shared pavilion and club house, and both joined the Birmingham Parks League.[20]

The development of competitive cricket in Britain is largely associated with class. It was not until 1963 that competitive cricketers ceased to be divided into the categories of 'gentlemen' amateurs, who in theory did not receive a match fee, and working class professionals, who played for money.[21] However, the players at both Continental and Rangers in fact formed part of a long-standing tradition, particularly in the midlands and the north of England, of working class participation in one-day league cricket. This included both players and spectators, with matches in the Birmingham League in the

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[16] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.
[19] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] J. Williams, 'Cricket', in T. Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: a social history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 119.

1930s, for example, one of the oldest cricket leagues in the world,[22] regularly drawing crowds of over five thousand people.[23]

For the black cricketers in Continental and Rangers in the 1960s and 1970s, cricket played an important role in helping its participants to 'settle in England'.[24] Former players talked about cricket in relation to the problems they faced on their arrival into Britain. Forming a cricket team was seen as a way of establishing alternative entertainment in the face of what were effectively colour bars across many mainstream places of leisure in Birmingham and beyond. In the 1960s, Nation recalled that 'we weren't accommodated' and that 'there was a lot of racism', and remembered dressing 'smart in ties and go[ing] to the club and they'd say, "we don't have blacks in here". We had to create our own entertainment at weekends. Cricket was essential in that respect'.[25]

Race has been a central component in cricket's make-up since the spread of the game to the colonies during the nineteenth century, when it was considered a means of encouraging indigenous populations to accept the supposedly 'white English qualities of sportsmanship and fair play'.[26] In the Caribbean, cricket had become a 'fundamental element of…identity, partly because the culture of imperialism relentlessly fragmented local and traditional games'.[27]

Throughout the twentieth century, test matches against England were seen as a way of challenging the 'established beliefs about racial superiority' that had been at the heart of Empire, and from the 1950s also became an important focal point for Caribbean immigrants in Britain.[28] In Trevor and Mike Phillips' *Windrush*, for example, one

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[22] J. Williams, 'Cricket', p. 139.
[23] J. Hill, 'League Cricket in the North and Midlands, 1900-1940', in R. Holt (ed.), *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 130.
[24] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] J. Williams, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p. 28.
[27] T. & M. Phillips, *Windrush: the irresistable rise of multi-racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), p. 101.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

respondent described the first test victory by a West Indian team over England at Lord's in 1950 as 'very important [because] we didn't have anything else',[29] while another recalled that it 'gave the impetus of forming [our own] West Indian cricket team'.[30] Racial tensions continued to characterise matches between the two sides into the 1970s. In *Fire in Babylon*, for example, the 2010 documentary of the 1976 tour of England by a particularly talented West Indian side, Viv Richards, the West Indies' star batsman, described the series as chance to 'get up and stand up [and] show how equal you are'.[31] The ensuing West Indian victory was for Michael Holding, another prominent member of the team, a way of 'showing the Englishmen, "you brought the game to us, and now we are better than you"'.[32]

Thus when in 1976, as Nation recalled, the Handsworth teams had to 'fight' to get into the Parks League, struggled to get a 'white team' to 'come to play in Handsworth Park' and experienced 'a lot of racism during games',[33] they did so in an immediate context of heightened racial tension in the professional game. When Continental 'had a match against a pure white team, and we were very vocal and shouted, "how is that, umpire?"', Nation remarked that 'the umpire would take offence to it. It was tough'.[34] One way of coming to terms with any racial abuse was by attempting to rise above it. As Nation put it, 'we accepted it because we were like professionals'.[35] Another, however, like the touring West Indian party of 1976, was to try to ensure success on the field. Thus as Brown wrote in his memoirs, perhaps somewhat subjectively, opposing teams 'believed we were just a walkover', but they 'did not really know what our bowlers were

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[29] J. Richards, cited in *ibid*., p. 102.
[30] L. Philpots, cited in *ibid*., p. 102.
[31] V. Richards, cited in S. Riley, *Fire in Babylon* (2010).
[32] M. Holding, cited in *ibid*.
[33] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] *Ibid*.

like',[36] and Nation recalled that Continental 'would always win' because 'we had fast bowlers'. [37]

From the beginning, both Continental and Rangers were overtly black spaces. Various former players have observed that even as immigrants from South Asia began to arrive in Handsworth in significant numbers, with many coming from countries in which there was a comparable passion for cricket to that in the Caribbean, 'Asians would not come to play with the black club'.[38] This may in part be the result of the discriminatory attitudes of individuals at the clubs who regarded Asians as 'disruptive types of people…very difficult to control'.[39] Tony Martin, who was involved managerially with Rangers, argued that Asian players were 'drawn away by their own Asian clubs. They believe in a holistic approach, that is, if they're given the chance they want to have eleven Asian players and that's it'.[40] Attock Cricket Club, for example, was founded in the early 1970s in south Birmingham and named after the district of Pakistan where most of the original members were born, and has since its inception maintained a Pakistani identity.[41] However, another reason that Asian players did not join either Handsworth club in the period was undoubtedly precisely because, as Martin recognised, they were 'black clubs'.

This 'blackness' was manifest in a variety of ways. In a study of Caribbean Cricket Club, a black club founded by Caribbean immigrants in the late-1940s in Chapeltown near Leeds, the sociologist Ben Carrington defines cricket as primarily a means of players contesting the stigmatisation of the local black community and resisting the forms of racism that the players regularly encountered. The club, Carrington argues,

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[36] J. Brown, *Continental Cricket Club*, p. 2.
[37] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[38] T. Martin, personal interview, 12 March 2010.
[39] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.
[40] T. Martin, personal interview, 12 March 2010.
[41] Attock's team logo, for example, is taken from the Pakistani national flag. See Attock Cricket Club website, http://www.attockcc.co.uk/index.php/en/about-attock (accessed 24 October 2011).

allowed its members to escape the 'strictures imposed by the white gaze',[42] and matches against white opposition enabled its players to achieve 'black cultural resistance to racism'.[43] However, alongside these themes, in the Handsworth cricket clubs at least, a black identity was also manifest in ways that were largely unconnected to cricket's colonial legacy, racism or the 'white gaze'. This was through a series of practices that made symbolic reference to the Caribbean that, allowing for the diverse ethnic make-up of many islands in the Caribbean, and the presence of some Caribbeans of Asian descent in Britain, would have been difficult for immigrants from the Indian sub-continent to embrace. In Handsworth, one of the ways in which this black identity was manifest was through the various social activities that took place at the clubs, away from cricket itself.

For Nation, 'the social scene was part of Caribbean cricket, and we wanted to bring it here with us'.[44] Central to this was the game of dominoes, which remains one of the most popular games played in the Caribbean.[45] The nature of the game, its practices and the position it occupied in everyday life in black Handsworth will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. There was, however, a close association between dominoes and cricket both in the Caribbean and in Handsworth, and even before the pavilion was constructed in Handsworth, 'people used to come [to the cricket club] and play their dominoes outside on the grass'.[46] Following its construction, during the cricketing close season in the autumn and winter months, dominoes would be the primary game played at the clubhouse. 'You used to come down the club in winter and there would be five tables with dominoes on. It was pretty competitive, people played as if they were playing in a tournament. Everyone would have a partner who they would play

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[42] B. Carrington, 'Sport, Masculinity and Black Cultural Resistance', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 22: 3, August 1998, p. 284.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[44] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009

[45] D. J. Austin, 'Culture and Ideology in the English-Speaking Caribbean: a view from Jamaica', in *American Ethnologist*, 10: 2, 1983, p. 231.

[46] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.

with'.[47] There was an attempt to form a dominoes team that would represent the shared Handsworth clubhouse during the off-season, with the idea being that 'you would pay an entrance fee, and we travel to other cities to play different teams'.[48]

These attempts, however, failed. A central part of competitive dominoes is the learning of various 'codes' or signals in order to be able communicate to team mates messages about the particular dominoes that have been dealt, thus gaining an advantage over the opposition.[49] Winning dominoes are then slammed down on the table in order to rile and jeer at opponents.[50] This was at odds with the Victorian values of 'gentlemanly' conduct and fair play that have become intimately associated with cricket. In *Beyond a Boundary*, for example, James describes how through his embrace of cricket at a young age he had 'acquired a discipline for which the only name is Puritan… I never cheated, I never appealed for a decision unless I thought the batsman was out, I never argued with the umpire, I never jeered a defeated opponent…this code became the moral framework of my existence'.[51] In Handsworth, the managerial boards of both Rangers and Continental did not want either club to be officially recognised as being competitively involved in anything other than cricket, and dominoes was played only informally at the clubhouse.[52] To those who ran the Handsworth teams, if not necessarily to every ordinary member, the central tenet of competitive dominoes – using hidden codes to gain advantage over the opposition – was anathema to the idealised notion of the way in which sport should be played; it was 'just not cricket'.

The game of dominoes on the one hand, and the cricketing values of gentlemanly conduct that led to its rejection in a competitive form on the other, both contributed

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[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.
[50] A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub: the pub games of Britain* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2009), p. 148.
[51] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 34.
[52] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.

towards a black identity based around the Caribbean in Handsworth. By the 1970s, both Continental and Rangers began to embark on annual summer tours away from Birmingham to play matches against local teams, initially 'in places like Cornwall' and other areas of England.[53] The tours, which were paid for by the players themselves with the help of local sponsors, provide an insight into the position of cricket in each player's life. 'The whole family' would regularly go on such tours; a coach would be hired and 'we'd take our chicken and our curried goat with us', Nation remembered.[54] On one particular tour, out of a party of forty-five only seventeen were players.[55] One of the players had eleven sons and one daughter who all would accompany him on annual tours.[56] 'The kids, they knew the game, and they would be shouting, "run dad"', something that helped to generate a particularly vibrant atmosphere. As Nation reflected, it was 'fantastic…a really nice experience'.[57]

The playwright and author Caryl Phillips, who spent his teenage years in Birmingham, has dramatised the experiences of black cricket teams playing on tour in predominately white areas of England such as Cornwall in a television play for Channel 4 entitled *Playing Away*. Phillips represents some of the misunderstandings and prejudices at work when an urban black team meet a rural white team, and plays on the irony that many of the first generation immigrants actually came from similarly rural settings in the Caribbean. The tensions come to the surface during the final scenes, when the visiting black side takes on the white home side in a match, the centrepiece of the village fete. Players from the home team become increasingly abusive as the visitors gain the advantage, and accuse the umpire of adopting a ploy 'to be nice to the darkies'.[58]

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[53] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] C. Phillips, *Playing Away* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 71.

Midway through the match, half of the home team abandon it in protest, leaving them to carry on playing with just five fielders. There is a suggestion from one of the younger players in the black team that they should 'give them a chance and stretch [the match] out a bit', but it soon becomes apparent that this is out of the question.[59] In the first instance, the notion of not fully competing runs counter to the 'spirit of the game'. However, in the context of the racial tensions between the two teams, even the spirit of the game was abandoned in favour of a simple desire to win at all costs. As the captain of the black team put it, there should be 'no gentlemen shit out there. We play, we win, and we gone. But most of all we win, you hear?'[60]

By the 1980s both Continental and Rangers began to undertake occasional tours to the Caribbean. Such tours attracted the support of a particularly large number of black businesses, including locally-based organisations such as Gent's Continental Hairdressing, Hope's 'wholesale distributors of American & Continental Cosmetics' (each based on Soho Road), West Indian Fig Tree Ltd (based on Lozells Road), and Caribbean-based corporations such as Red Stripe Lager.[61] For some, such tours provided a rare opportunity to go back to the Caribbean. For others, particularly younger family members, it was a chance to go there for the first time. There was an emphasis on communicating both the style of cricket and way of life in the Caribbean to those who had not been previously been there. In Continental's 1986 tour of Trinidad to play a series of matches against the National Police Cricketers, for example, the 'official tour brochure' contained an article that identified the 'typical Trinidadian batsman' as being 'patient, sensible and fully aware that the easy paced wickets are a bowler's purgatory'.[62] Alongside this there was an article providing an overview of 'the history of Trinidad and

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[59] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[61] Handsworth Cricket Club, *Handsworth Cricket Trinidad Tour: official tour brochure* (Birmingham: Handsworth Cricket,1986), pp. 47 & 53. The brochure was obtained from Francis Nation by the author.
[62] *Handsworth Cricket Trinidad Tour*, p. 13.

Tobago'.[63] Nation remembered that in Jamaica, 'we played six games and lost them all. But it didn't matter. We played them in the right way'.[64]

Tours such as these provided for the players and their families a direct, more explicit link to the Caribbean in a way that a game of dominoes in Handsworth never could. Unlike a match against white opponents, the point on these tours was not so much success on the cricket field – it was seemingly enough to just be there. However, given the financial cost of organising an extended stay in the Caribbean, often for parties of more than forty, it is inevitable that such trips were a relatively rare occurrence. In the context of daily life in Handsworth, it was the more mundane practices that offered an enduring point of reference to the Caribbean. Of such practices, cricket itself was perhaps the most significant. Writing in the official brochure of a 1986 tour of Trinidad, for example, Viv Richards, by now captain of the West Indies, praised what he saw as the particularly Caribbean style of play on offer at the Handsworth clubs. 'The lads even play cricket like they do back home', he remarked.[65]

For C. L. R. James, when writing about cricket it is important 'never to take your eyes…off the ball'.[66] Just as any investigation into cricket also necessitates wider sociological and historical questions, in James' view this should always return to what he describes as 'actual cricket' – the 'strokes, the lengths and the catches',[67] the way a player 'bats, bowls or fields'.[68] For James, in the Caribbean context, a great cricketer embodies in his play 'some essence of that crowded vagueness which passes for the history of the West Indies'.[69] Above all else, it was the style of play of the batsman and

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[63] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[64] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009
[65] V. Richards, cited in *Handsworth Cricket, Trinidad Tour*, p. 11.
[66] C.L.R. James, 'Rohan Kanhai: a study in confidence', in *New World*, 1966. Obtained from internet source. http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/leaders/kanhai.htm (accessed 9 May 2011).
[67] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, pp. 71 &
[68] C.L.R. James, 'Rohan Kanhai: a study in confidence', in *New World*, 1966. Obtained from internet source. http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/leaders/kanhai.htm (accessed 9 May 2011).
[69] *Ibid*.

former West Indian captain Rohan Kanhai that James saw as best encapsulating this essence. Rather than following an established pattern of batting, Kanhai 'created his own' by toying with bowlers in a prolonged game of 'cat and mouse'.[70] Having played defensively to a bowler's length ball, for example, pushing it for one or two, Kanhai would force the bowler into altering his style, which often resulted in him pitching the ball up. Kanhai would then dispatch such balls for a boundary, in James' view, hitting the ball to places that even the great Don Bradman 'never knew'.[71]

For the West Indian touring party of 1976, a common complaint was the perceived way in which the West Indian style of play was characterised as being entertaining but ultimately unsuccessful.[72] 'Calypso cricket', as it became known, according to Michael Holding had 'bad connotations because it meant that, OK you were fun…but you had no real substance'.[73] One article in the Birmingham *Evening Mail*, for example, reporting on a 1973 tour of England by the West Indies, commented on the 'colourful carnival to support the sunshine cricketers', and described the West Indian style of play as 'volatile' and 'explosive'.[74] The same newspaper described Kanhai – who himself played county cricket for Warwickshire between 1968 and 1977 – as the 'irrepressible entertainer who got himself out too often'.[75] For James, however, Kanhai's cricketing style – like, perhaps, the onset of West Indian fast-bowling attack in 1976, which would help the West Indians dominate the international game throughout the 1980s – made a statement about West Indian identity. At the moment he regards Kanhai as having perfected this 'West Indian' style, at a test match in Edgbaston in 1963, 'the West Indian could strike from his

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[70] *Ibid*.
[71] *Ibid*.
[72] This was summarised as the 'image of rag-tag cricketers playing with smiles on their faces, brilliant one day, shocking the next'. See D. Tossell, *Grovel! The story and legacy of the summer of 1976* (Studley: Know the Score Books, 2007), pp. 27-28.
[73] M. Holding, cited in S. Riley, *Fire in Babylon* (2010).
[74] W. G. Wanklyn, 'Tough Now for England', in Birmingham *Evening Mail*, 8 August 1973, p. 1. Wanklyn was writing the day before the start of the second Test match between England and the West Indies on the 9th of August 1973.
[75] W. G. Wanklyn, 'Maestro Kanhai Battles On', in Birmingham *Evening Mail*, 8 August 1973, p. 1.

feet the dust of centuries. The match did not impose any burdensome weight of responsibility', and Kanhai 'was free as few West Indians have been free'.[76]

For James, therefore, Caribbean cricket was characterised by an aspiration towards a sense of liberation on the cricket field. As Viv Richards suggested, this was mirrored in the style of play at both Handsworth clubs. Taking into account the potential for exaggeration in such evidence, instances in which Continental players, for example, adopted innovative, often overtly attacking shots or bowling styles appear throughout the memoirs of James Brown, as well as the official brochure of the 1986 tour of Trinidad (*plate 2.1*). In an example perhaps not in keeping with James' strict adherence to the 'spirit of the game', Brown recalls how Steven 'upset the bowlers by turning the back of his bat, pretending he was not ready'. Then Steven, 'the little man, would jump down the wicket [and] drive Robinson for two beautiful fours right over his head'.[77] On another occasion, a 'large crowd watched Claud Miller score his first 62...Murphy got 38, Price 11, Longer 31 in sixes and fours. We were all out for 121 [and] decided to play some of our faster bowlers...they started off with glorious shots and boundaries but it soon came to a stop'.[78] Players in Handsworth were defined by their particular ability on the field – a 'specialist slip fielder' who is 'not afraid to hit the new ball for six';[79] a 'utility player' who is also 'a potential match winner';[80] a lower order batsman who 'gives the ball a good thump'.[81] It was recalled how in one away game Continental's batsmen hit 'at lest ten sixes and were amused at the way many shots had to be retrieved from the river adjoining the...ground.'[82] As Brown summarised, the Continental players were a

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[76] C.L.R. James, 'Rohan Kanhai: a study in confidence', in *New World*, 1966. Obtained from internet source. http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/leaders/kanhai.htm (accessed 9 May 2011).
[77] J. Brown, *Continental Cricket Club*, p. 6.
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] *Handsworth Cricket Trinidad Tour*, p. 5.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 7.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 20.

'shining glory of batting and bowling. [They] moved around the field like they were sixteen years old'. [83]

Those in Handsworth emphasised this form of cricket as being a particularly Caribbean style. Attempting to 'hit the ball at every opportunity' was 'typical West Indian cricket', a 'typical swashbuckling display from the West Indians'.[84] One observer of cricket in Handsworth emphasised that 'our style of game is built around a pattern of natural ability, attack and defence only as a last resort', and concluded that it is 'only if you are of West Indian stock can anyone know the feeling for cricket that runs through our veins'.[85]

For cricket 'fanatics' such as Nation, Gidden, Brown and the many others to have played for one of the Handsworth clubs, then, cricket provided a counterweight to the widespread rejection many Caribbean immigrants felt upon their arrival into Britain. The clubs began as a way of offering a practical solution to the problem of being barred from many mainstream areas of leisure, but they quickly developed into institutions that maintained an overtly black, Caribbean identity. This was manifest through social activities at the club, tours first to rural England and then to the Caribbean, and finally through the particular style of cricket that players adopted in Handsworth. In different ways, each of these practices made reference to the Caribbean and thereby worked to emphasise the club as a particularly black, Caribbean space in Handsworth. For players such as Gidden, in a similar way to the play C. L. R. James had witnessed from Rohan Kanhai, liberation on the field was seemingly a necessary part of obtaining liberation off it. 'I only stopped playing when I could no longer run between the wickets', Gidden recalled, at which point he took over the running of the pavilion bar in Handsworth,

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[83] J. Brown, *Continental Cricket Club*, p. 7.
[84] *Handsworth Cricket Trinidad Tour*, p. 20.
[85] R. Healy, cited in *ibid*., p. 52.

before later becoming head groundsman.[86] Seemingly, for cricketers of Gidden's generation, it was almost impossible to stop – as James put it – 'living the life'.[87] 'I can't imagine what my life would have been like without cricket', Gidden remarked. 'If I couldn't help with the ground or whatever, I would just go and sit down and watch'.[88]

However, not everyone in connection with the cricket club shared the same cricketing passion. By the 1980s, the children of those of Gidden's generation were reaching their teens and early twenties, and as they did so, many of them were increasingly turning away from cricket. This is alluded to in the experiences of Francis Nation. Where once, Nation remembered, his daughters would accompany him to matches and tours and be enthusiastic 'scorers and lambasters', encouraging their father from the sidelines, as they grew older they 'got interested in boys' and began attending other social events.[89] Such a development is dramatised by Phillips in *Playing Away*. There is a telling moment when, as the team are about to leave Brixton for their game 'away', the captain has an argument with his daughter, who makes it clear that she does not wish to be there. As he tries to assemble his party for a team photograph, the captain tells them that they 'look like a chain gang. The least some of you could do is uncurl your top lip'.[90]

But younger generations did continue to play cricket in Handsworth. In 1999 Handsworth Rangers entered the Warwickshire Cricket League and by 2003, Continental and Rangers had merged to form Handsworth Cricket Club.[91] Although it remained a predominately black club, this was perhaps without the overt references to the Caribbean. In the 1980s, the remainder of this chapter will show, a younger generation – the majority

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[86] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.
[87] C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, p. 36.
[88] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.
[89] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009
[90] C. Phillips, *Playing Away*, p. 21.
[91] T. Martin, 'Handsworth C.C.', in *African Caribbean Enterprise*, Jan-March 2005, vol. 1, no. 5, p. 29.

of whom born in Britain – were seeking out, and finding through their participation at different cultural institutions, alternative solutions in their own search for identity in Handsworth. For this generation – who had experienced British discrimination and other areas of inequality from a young age – reference to the Caribbean did not carry the same resonance as it did for their parents. It was necessary for this younger generation to establish a more relevant black identity in Handsworth. To do this, it will be shown, this generation turned away from the Caribbean and towards the idea of Africa.

Theatre and Dance

Performance-based, black arts institutions such as Kokuma Dance Company were preceded in Handsworth by a white, left wing arts movement. Banner Theatre of Actuality is one of the longest running socialist theatre companies in Britain – the group were formed in Handsworth in 1974 and have continued to stage productions both locally and nationally for more than thirty years.[92] Although Banner aim to reflect working class concerns across Britain, the group have always been rooted in the Handsworth locale, and in the long 1980s in particular, were keen to give dramatic expression to the black experience in Handsworth. In 1979, Banner established Handsworth Community Theatre Project (HCTP) with the explicit aim of encouraging local black youth to represent their own experiences on stage. However, as this section demonstrates, just as the emphasis on the Caribbean at Handsworth Cricket Club did not carry the same symbolic resonance for younger generations as it did for older generations, the emphasis on a working class tradition in Banner interfered with a desire amongst younger generations to embrace black history and in particular, engage with the concept of Africa. Younger generations in Handsworth moved away from the Caribbean and working class traditions and 'invented'

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[92] See Banner Theatre's website: http://www.bannertheatre.co.uk/ (accessed 23 November 2011).

their own African tradition in Handsworth, something that increasingly took place in independent, overtly black organisations such as Kokuma.

Charles Parker, an ex-BBC features producer, was the central figure in the establishment of Banner. Along with his associate Ewan MacColl, Parker had produced a number of 'radio ballads' for the BBC in the late 1950s and 1960s – programmes that provided a platform for working men and women from different industries to tell their stories, and often also perform their music. Parker argued that the everyday speech of working people was innately valuable, believing that it had all the 'pith and immediacy of Chaucer and Shakespeare',[93] something referred to by Dave Rogers, one of Banner's co-founders, as 'oral power'.[94] Parker's refusal to add a 'standard English' voiceover narration to the 'ballads' made them extremely controversial, and Parker was eventually sacked from the BBC in 1972. It was following this sacking that Parker, Rogers and others co-founded Banner. The intention was to establish a form of 'People's Art' with 'roots in the common working experience', a 'socialist community and cultural group' that aimed to 'develop a radical propagandist theatre which not only voiced working class issues, but was prepared to support working class struggles'.[95]

Banner staged productions based on interviews with people from all over the country, as well as locally in Handsworth. It was primarily as a result of these local interviews that race became an important feature of Banner's work. However, from the beginning, the group – the founders of which were all white – struggled to incorporate race into their wider socialist agenda. One of Banner's earlier productions, for example, was entitled *The Great Divide*. The play was first performed in 1977 and attempted to document the experiences of black immigrants with racism in the workplace, recounting

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[93] C. Parker, cited in A. Filewood & D. Watt, *Workers' Playtime: theatre and the labour movement since 1970* (Strawberry Hills: Currency Press, 2001), p. 86.
[94] D. Rogers, personal interview, 26 May 2009; C. Rogers, personal interview, 3 October 2009.
[95] Cited in A. Filewood & D. Watt, *Workers' Playtime*, p. 86.

such experiences – in classic Banner style – through the words of ordinary people. At one point in the play, for example, a character describes the conditions in his factory as being 'like Smith in Rhodesia',[96] whilst another describes how if there was a 'dirty job in the factory, the people always say, "that's a blackun's job".[97]

However, *The Great Divide* did not only consist of the words of ordinary people. The script was also made up of scenes and characters that were written in by members of Banner, and it is here that the wider political emphasis of the group can be identified. As the title suggests, *The Great Divide* was an attempt at bridging the 'divide' in the workplace, and was aimed primarily at white audiences. The play attempted to communicate in simple terms what Banner saw as racism's true nature, as a 'tool of the ruling class'.[98] This was done primarily through the character of 'capital', represented as the voice of capitalism: 'when the working class are so far up the creek they don't know what or where they are', the character comments, 'we can really move in and fleece 'em...until then, we must keep 'em happy kicking the blacks'.[99] As the play progresses and capital is ultimately defeated, Banner hoped that *The Great Divide* would stress to white workers the need to see their black co-workers not as enemies but comrades in the common 'struggle for change'.[100] For Banner, racism was 'perhaps the most powerful tool possessed by the ruling class', and any show, such as *The Great Divide*, 'which seeks to expose racism will be doing an invaluable service not only to the blacks and Asians of this country but also to the labour movement as a whole'.[101]

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[96] *The Great Divide* actuality typescript, 1977, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/B/8.
[97] *Ibid.*
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] D. Rogers, 'Suggested Revisions to Race Show', personal correspondence, c. 1977, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/B/8/1.

The problem was that Banner's wider political agenda did not always fit in with that of its black participants. Initially this was apparent in the reactions to Banner productions from some of those whose words formed a central part of each play. The key criticism of *The Great Divide*, for example, was 'the absence of any black actors from the cast'.[102]

It was in light of such concerns that HCTP was established as a subsidiary of Banner, and was to be a 'multi-racial documentary theatre group, based in Handsworth'.[103] Its aim was to stimulate local talent in order to present 'another side of life in Handsworth – the wealth of energy of many of the young people, the richness of ethnic cultures, the eagerness to give expression to issues which involve local people'.[104] Banner worked 'with local residents in order to pass on the skills necessary to compile and perform a series of documentary shows about life in this part of Birmingham', and stayed true to the traditional Banner technique of recorded interviews with ordinary people 'in and around Handsworth'.[105]

Chris Rogers – who with her then husband Dave Rogers had also been a prominent figure in the founding of Banner – was HCTP's first co-ordinator. She remarked that 'areas like Handsworth had always received a bad press', and argued that HCTP was a way of 'celebrat[ing] what was actually there'.[106] The project itself consisted of 25 primarily black participants aged between thirteen and twenty, with rehearsals and performances taking place in local schools. The aim, Chris Rogers recalled, was to 'build up the skills of the group and give them a sense of identity'.[107] On

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[102] Review of *the Great Divide*, in *Banner Theatre of Actuality Report, 1976-78*, p. 11, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/A/4/2.
[103] Handsworth Community Theatre Project, introductory leaflet, c. 1979, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/C.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] *Ibid*.
[106] C. Rogers, personal interview, 3 October 2009.
[107] *Ibid*.

the one hand, HCTP productions encouraged both participants and audiences to explore the history of the local area. One production, for example, attempted to tell 'the story of Handsworth from the year of Domesday to the Industrial Revolution', and document the role of figures such as James Watt and Matthew Boulton in the industrialisation of the area.[108] On the other hand, the organisers were keen to reflect the experiences of participants in their contemporary lives in Handsworth. 'Actuality' was conducted by the participants themselves, and when it 'threw up certain issues we [the organisers] would turn them into a series of sketches'.[109] For instance, one HCTP play was entitled *Kids on the Dole* and featured a song called 'The Soho Road'. The song was loosely based on the actuality of black youth, and included the lyrics 'school on the Soho Road, school on the Soho Road / why take my GCEs if there's no job for me / school on the Soho Road'.[110] For Rogers, whatever the participants 'came up with – which was based on their knowledge and culture – we would therefore try and incorporate in the show. We didn't want anything which was going to appear as cultural imperialism or dominance – it had to come from the group'.[111]

However, a schism had developed between HCTP and Banner's wider political agenda, particularly after 1982 and the appointment of Milton Godfrey as the project's first black co-ordinator. The experiences of Godfrey, a local musician and playwright, show how in spite of Chris Rogers' comments, there was a mismatch between Banner's emphasis on a working class tradition and a desire amongst the black participants of HCTP to move in a different direction. The majority of people who attended HCTP were

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[108] 'The Story of Handsworth' typescript, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/C.
[109] C. Rogers, personal interview, 3 October 2009.
[110] 'Kids on the Dole' typescript, Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS 1611/C/1.
[111] C. Rogers, personal interview, 3 October 2009.

'unemployed kids, mostly Jamaican and West Indians',[112] Godfrey recalled, and many were interested in exploring black history. 'They were fascinated to talk about their own history and culture – nobody had ever taught them these things in school'.[113] Like Rogers, Godfrey saw HCTP as an 'educational project', but believed that responding to the interest of participants in black history was more important than exploring, for example, Handsworth's industrial past.[114] 'We'd have open discussions for anyone to say or ask what they wanted', Godfrey recalled. 'From there we'd develop what we wanted to develop in terms of theatre and art. We'd choose an issue that they thought was relevant, be it Marcus Garvey, or the police in Handsworth, and discuss it, then try to turn it into art'.[115]

However, the management of Banner was clearly uncomfortable with the direction that HCTP was taking, and reluctant to allow them the space to explore the issues that Godfrey saw as being of most importance. In a 1984 memo, for example, Banner's committee members recognised that their 'black comrades' were arguing that HCTP 'should be seen as being clearly a black project, and [that] autonomy...is a necessary prerequisite for such a development', but noted that 'the white people in Banner feel uneasy' about a 'predominately black project'.[116] Milton Godfrey argued that the educational value of HCTP was being undermined by the refusal of Banner to grant him full autonomy. 'If [the] people [who attended HCTP] were interested about issues like Mandela', he stated, 'I felt the theatre company had to address the issue of Mandela'.[117] But Godfrey often had to justify this to Banner committee members, some of whom wanted HCTP to remain part of the group's overall socialist agenda. At one particular

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[112] M. Godfrey, personal interview, 28 May 2009.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*.
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] Banner Theatre internal memo, 28 March 1984, in Banner Theatre of Actuality archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS1611/A/1/10.
[117] M. Godfrey, personal interview, 28 May 2009.

meeting with the Banner committee, Godfrey recalled, 'the first thing they said to me was…"we're here to re-socialise you". I remember saying, "I don't know about that"'.[118] Although Godfrey claimed he had no issue supporting Banner on certain issues, there were 'quite a few issues that I thought didn't relate to myself or the community'.[119] Godfrey thought there were 'more important' issues for the young, black participants of HCTP, such as 'equality and justice for everyone, regardless of colour. These issues were simply more important than, for example, going to Greenham Common to address the issues that women were addressing'.[120] Godfrey found some of Banner's politics to be 'totally irrelevant. They just didn't belong to us'.[121]

The sense of frustration that Godfrey expressed with regard to HCTP was not an issue in Kokuma, largely because it was from the beginning a black organisation established explicitly to meet the needs of black communities. Although similarly rooted in the Handsworth locale, Kokuma did not have Banner's overtly socialist emphasis. Kokuma was founded in 1978 by Bob Ramdhanie, a probation officer who had particular responsibility for young black offenders in the Handsworth area, and went on to form part of a 'critical mass' of black dance groups that operated in the Midlands during the long 1980s.[122] Ramdhanie has detailed his involvement with the group in his Ph.D thesis, 'African Dance in England – Spirituality and Continuity'.[123] Establishing Kokuma – initially under the name 'the Mystics and the Israelites' – was part of an attempt to find

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[118] *Ibid*.
[119] *Ibid*.
[120] *Ibid*.
[121] *Ibid*.
[122] Groups based in the Midlands included Lanzel (Wolverhampton), Dance le'Afrique (Birmingnam) and the Black Dance Development Trust, an umbrella organisation formed under the directorship of Bob Ramdhanie after he had estabished Kokuma. See H. Carty, 'Black Dance in England: the pathway here', in F. Adewole *et al* (eds.), *Voicing Black Dance: the British experience, 1930s-1990s* (London: The Association of Dance and the African Diaspora, 2007), pp. 18-19.
[123] B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England – Spirituality and Continuity', Ph.D thesis, University of Warwick, Centre for British and Comparative Cultural Studies, April 2005.

'alternative, dynamic and interactive ways of working with black youths'.[124] Ramdhanie quickly established that 'music and movement' was 'the way to communicate effectively' with his clients in Handsworth, and he soon 'decided to introduce an African and Caribbean dancing project' into his portfolio.[125] Ramdhanie began to hold informal drumming and dancing sessions initially at the Probation Service offices in Perry Barr. Those attending were usually young women aged between fifteen and eighteen, and three male Rastafarians in their early twenties.[126] 'No one had been involved in African music or dancing before', Ramdhanie remarked. 'But all were steeped in reggae music…had attended black churches…[and] were "street wise"'.[127]

The group met once a week and in the early 1980s began rehearsing in Handsworth Cultural Centre, which was also managed by Ramdhanie. Ramdahnie was keen to encourage members of the group to take on more responsibility for its general and administrative running and to mark this transition, the group renamed themselves Kokuma, a Nigerian word meaning 'this one will never die'.[128] Kokuma began to recruit new members, mostly 'without any skills whatsoever, except an affinity to Africa and a love for reggae music'.[129] With an expanding repertoire of stage productions, however, and the introduction of new training programmes run by external dance tutors, Kokuma was developing into an increasingly professional outfit. This transition was accelerated with the appointment of Jackie Guy, an experienced choreographer who previously worked with the Jamaican National Dance Theatre Company, as Artistic Director in 1988. Kokuma incorporated a number of smaller, Handsworth-based dance groups and went

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[124] *Ibid*., p. 215-216.
[125] *Ibid*.
[126] B. Ramdhanie, personal interview, 18 February 2009.
[127] B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 216.
[128] The group came across the word in the *Caribbean Times*. B. Rahmdani, personal interview, 29 July 2009.
[129] B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 222.

from putting on small-scale shows to full-length, theatre style productions.[130] In 1989 Kokuma moved to a permanent base in the Lozells Methodist Church on Gerrard Street, and, with the support of funding from both the Arts Council of England and West Midlands Arts, formally became a professional dance group.

Productions like the 1992 *The History of the Drum* were indicative of Kokuma's emphasis on using dance to explore, and communicate the significance of, black history to its young participants and audiences (*plate 2.2*). It was performed in Kokuma's specialist style, a fusion of African and Caribbean dancing set to African drumming, and attempted to tell the story of the African people through the image of the drum. In the opening scene, the drum is represented as a tool of communication, first spiritually as a way of talking to God, then as a way of expressing love between two individuals, and finally as form of language that a whole community can use. The drum becomes the 'tongue of…[the] people' and acts as a focal point of the community,[131] who through it appear at one with nature, God and each other. But this harmony is violently disrupted when an intruder appears on stage. The intruder, whose face is concealed by a mask, confiscates the community's drum, and in doing so, visibly weakens the spirit of the community. Having taken the drum, the intruder forcibly takes the people themselves, and they are removed from their homes and put into a new and unfamiliar environment.

The intruder is victorious, and decrees that all drum playing must stop. The following scene is thus in dramatic contrast to the first: whereas in the first, the community is represented as vibrant and joyous, dancing in unison to the drum's beat, in the second the atmosphere is quiet and oppressive. The community is being forced to work, and the slow, laborious dances clearly allude to a people worn out, exhausted,

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[130] These were groups by the names of Sankofa, Uhuru Dancers and Wanter Wanzuri Dance Group. See B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 219.
[131] Kokuma Performing Arts, *The History of the Drum* programme notes (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1992), p. 1, Kokuma Dance Theatre Archive, National Resource Centre for Dance, University of Surrey, (hereafter KDTA), KO/E/8/7.

overridden and exploited. Yet despite this, the image of the drum reappears. Initially, this is in the form of the rhythms made by the community's tools of work, but soon the drum itself re-emerges. The community becomes reenergised, and the drum is presented as a means of resistance against the community's exploitation at the hands of the intruder. The dances now represent a community in harmony again, and this time defiant. The intruder's impositions are rejected by the community, and together, marching like an army, they confront him. In unison, the community chase after the intruder, their single stride itself forming the beat of the drum, until the intruder is forced first to retreat and then to run away. The intruder is defeated, and the community dance in celebration.

The rest of the production goes on to document the continuing beat of the drum in different contexts: the audience is transported to twentieth century America, and the emergence of jazz; to the Caribbean, where the drum provides the beat for calypso and ska; and then, to a contemporary British context. Here the audience hears the drum alongside the heavy bassline of British and imported reggae. The audience see a dancehall and a DJ playing requests and 'toasting' the dancing crowd in front of him. Then, the lights in this dancehall dim and gradually everybody leaves until there is only one man left on stage. He stands and simply beats his drum, slowly and methodically, until three other men, each in African dress, each beating a drum and each singing in harmony, join him.   Finally, as the singing stops, so does the drumming, and the men take their drums and raise them above their heads towards the sky.

In 1994, Jackie Guy commented that although 'learning about black culture is a gift to everyone', for 'black people knowing their history is a necessity'.[132] Like Godfrey, Guy believed there to be an educational void in many black people's lives in Britain. 'In this country, "1066 and all that" is on the curriculum…[but] usually black history is

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[132] J. Guy, 'Developing Audiences for African and Caribbean Dance', in *Dance Dates*, BNDA Newsletter, Summer 1994, p. 7.

not'.[133] Dance has long been a means of articulating black identities in the Caribbean,[134] and Kokuma's 'mission' was not only to 'entertain people at large, but to heighten the awareness of African-Caribbean history and culture, through dance and music'.[135] On his arrival at Kokuma, Guy observed how 'a lot of guys were searching for an identity in Handsworth'. This was 'about a search for cultural identity because a lot of them didn't feel that they were British'. Part of Kokuma's success, Guy concluded, was that it represented 'somewhere where these people could get together and feel proud of their heritage'.[136]

Both the HCTP and Kokuma, therefore, were responding to a desire to explore black history amongst a younger generation in Handsworth. It was Kokuma, however, which was able to facilitate this exploration in a much less inhibited way. Kokuma ran introductory workshops for young people on Nigerian, Ghanaian and Azanian dance forms,[137] for example, 'structured to facilitate the process of development, study and general understanding of the history of African and Caribbean people, their culture, religion, languages, dance and music'.[138] Each of Kokuma's productions would also emphasise an aspect of African-Caribbean culture or history. *Nine Nights*, for example, which was performed by the group in 1987, explored the traditional Caribbean practice of holding wakes for nine days and nights. In *The History of the Drum*, the aim was to show how 'the drum through the ages has been the extended story of the African people. Through hollowed logs and pampered skins the history, survival and journey of the people has been shaped, narrated and told'.

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[133] *Ibid.*

[134] See N. Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: the arts of ethnic minorities in Britain – a report to the Arts Council of Great Britain* (May, 1976), pp. 90-107.

[135] J. Guy, 'Developing Audiences for African and Caribbean Dance', p. 7.

[136] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7 May 2009.

[137] The notion of 'African dance' is self-evidently a vague concept, however, as Carty argues, 'there is a clear genre of movements that are common across African dance forms and lead us to the basics of African dance technique'. See H. Carty, 'Black Dance in England', p. 17.

[138] 'Kokuma Performing Arts', introductory pamphlet, 1988, p. 1, KDTA, KO/H/5.

The drum [has] become the vital organ in the survival system. The vital organ (or soul) helped people survive…the painful experiences of slavery. Through this hectic journey the drum has been re-shaped, adapted and used in many forms in numerous different societies.

It was hoped that an awareness of this history through the story of the drum would 'assist in the retention of the culture and identity of the Africans'.[139]

For the participants at Kokuma, the exploration of black history also acted as a way of coming to terms with their contemporary lives in Handsworth.[140] One Kokuma dancer, who had joined the group when it was still attached to the probation service, commented in 1982 that 'through dance, you can get rid of a lot of frustration. Instead of being picked up by the police, or going around smashing windows – I'm not saying that if you don't dance you do these sorts of things – but there's nothing else to do'.[141] Ursella Walker, for example, joined Kokuma as a teenager 1985 after her uncle, Milton Godfrey, had taken her to one of their beginner's workshops. 'That was the first time I was exposed to Afro-Caribbean dance', she said in 1992. 'I wanted to be a dancer but I didn't have any formal education.[142] In 2009 Walker reflected on how important it was for her that Kokuma offered a positive definition of black identity through its dancing and performances.

As I was growing up, there just wasn't anything positive about black people or black culture at all. So I could really identify with what Kokuma were doing. It gave me a sense of pride really…the black identity thing was really important to me. It gave me a sense of grounding, and something to aspire to as well.[143]

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[139] *The History of the Drum* programme, 1992, KDTA, KO/E/7.
[140] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7 May 2009.
[141] Cited in Y. Walia, *African Oasis*, (1982).
[142] U. Lawrence (Walker), cited in T. Grimley, 'Beating the Drum for Brum', in *Birmingham Post*, 24 September 1992, p. 18.
[143] U. Walker, personal interview, 8 July 2009.

For Bob Ramdhanie, Kokuma appealed to young people in Handsworth precisely because they were 'marginalised from the dominant culture'.[144] As Ursella Walker remembered, 'in my school, there weren't many black teachers, and I suffered from insecurity as a result. Kokuma helped to fill that gap'.[145]

Many of these themes were explicitly elaborated by Kokuma in a 1994 production entitled *The Awakening*, written by Kwesi Owusu and choreographed by Guy. The production represented the contradictions of contemporary urban living, and showed how an embrace of history could help to resolve this situation. A young couple in urban Britain appear at odds with each other and the world around them – they are shown repeatedly arguing with each other, and struggling to negotiate the demands of their everyday lives. The lyrics of the reggae soundtrack reflect the dominant preoccupation: 'everybody's got to work harder'. But the couple are soon visited by a 'griot' – an African storyteller or poet – who introduces them to their African roots and culture through dance. The couple are invited to join in, and quickly learn to understand the meaning of their heritage. More secure in their cultural identity, by the end of the production, the couple appear at ease in themselves, with each other, and with the contemporary lives they both lead.

Guy described arriving in Handsworth and finding 'this richness, this energy. It was like a kettle waiting to burst. You could feel this tension there. There was enormous talent that was not really being encouraged or nurtured'.[146] Throughout the 1980s, the group continued to be based in the Handsworth area.[147] To Guy, Kokuma played a crucial role within the Handsworth community because 'we encouraged people to not

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[144] B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 253.
[145] U. Walker, personal interview, 8 July 2009.
[146] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7 May 2009.
[147] In 1995, Jackie Guy's contract was not renewed, and Patrick Acogny, a relatively unknown French choreographer was appointed in his place. Acogny brought many professional dancers with him from France, and Kokuma struggled to retain their connection to Handsworth, eventually relocating to the Custard Factory in Digbeth area of the city. See B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 247.

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only retain some of their African sensibility, but also [to celebrate] their own survival as people whose families migrated to Britain. I believe Kokuma was a catalyst for showing the talent of people in Handsworth, and bringing a kind of respect to the area. People were very proud because we came out of the community – we were an organic thing that evolved out of the community'.[148] The bond between Kokuma and Handsworth was reciprocal. Guy remembers that every time the group put up posters in Handsworth advertising their latest production, they would be taken as mementos by people who recognised someone they knew.[149] As one former dancer in Kokuma put it, 'we were pretty well known. And we always felt a sense of pride towards Handsworth, despite of the way the news and the media portrayed it. We always looked at the positive things'.[150] Guy told the *Birmingham Post* in 1992 that 'we don't want to move out of Handsworth. The area does have its problems but the people are very proud [and] there's something of an artistic entity based here. They keep asking what we're doing'.[151]

For Pat Donaldson, one of the original dancers in Kokuma, 'being noticed as one of the dancers in the African group always made me feel very good…it didn't matter that we were doing it in the Probation Service or whatever, what was important to all of us was that we had an opportunity to do it'.[152] Just as at Handsworth Cricket Club, it was important that Kokuma was a black space in Handsworth. As Milton Godfrey put it,

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[148] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7 May 2009.
[149] 'People used to actually steal the posters we put up advertising our productions – we couldn't find them. The posters used to show the group dancing, and people used to say, "my god, that's my sister, that's my cousin, that's my friend, I know him, I know her", and they'd take the posters as a memento'. J. Guy, personal interview, 7 May 2009.

[150] U. Walker, personal interview, 8 July 2009.
[151] J. Guy, cited in T. Grimley, 'Beating the Drum for Brum', in *Birmingham Post*, 24 September 1992, p. 18.
[152] Cited in B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 218.

reflecting on what he saw as the need for HCTP to operate as a similarly black space, away from Banner Theatre's control, 'we had our own axe to grind'.[153]

Kokuma's embrace of black history had provided for its participants an African identity that helped them come to terms with their present. The concept of Africa clearly resonated amongst a young black generation in way that the Caribbean tradition articulated by the members of Handsworth Cricket Club or the working class tradition emphasised by Banner Theatre did not. However, Kokuma did not itself stimulate the 'invention' of an African tradition; rather, it was responding to a wider need amongst black youth in Handsworth. As Bob Ramdhanie recognised,

> black youth in the 1970s were aware of racial tension in their neighbourhoods and especially, in some schools. A significant proportion…were followers of Rastafarianism and almost all were inspired by reggae music and the philosophies of Marcus Garvey…. black youths were looking to Africa for their inspiration and their spiritual guidance.[154]

Kokuma, Ramdhanie admitted, 'evolved out of this situation'.[155] There were no more than twenty dancers and drummers participating at Kokuma at any one time, and even allowing for the group's popularity in Handsworth, their impact locally was relatively limited. Of more significance in terms of participation in Handsworth, was music. As Ramdhanie's comments suggest, it was 'a love for reggae music' that brought this younger generation into contact with Rastafarian ideas, and helped develop the widespread 'affinity to Africa'.[156] Above all else, it will be shown, it was reggae and Rastafarianism that facilitated an African identity amongst this younger generation in Handsworth. How and why this occurred in Handsworth – first, through the popularity of

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[153] M. Godfrey, personal interview, 28 May 2009.
[154] B. Ramdhanie, 'African Dance in England', Vol. 2, p. 215.
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*, p. 222.

various reggae bands, and then 'sound systems' – forms the subject for the remainder of this chapter.

Music

In 1978, the Handsworth-based reggae band Steel Pulse released their debut album, *Handsworth Revolution*. The band was heavily influenced by Rastafarianism, and *Handsworth Revolution*'s artwork was indicative of the growing importance of Africa to a young black generation in Britain. The cover of the album, which was designed by Steel Pulse's two founding members, David Hinds and Basil Gabbidon, depicts a scene from urban Britain – presumably Handsworth – as being fused with, even taken over by African imagery (*plate 2.3*). High rise flats and slabs of grey concrete make way for green shrubbery and exotic plants. In the background are mountains, onto which is etched the band's logo; in the foreground, highlighted by a beam of light, a group of children stand in African-style robes, with one beating a drum next to an abandoned car.

It was reggae music – both the British reggae of bands such as Steel Pulse, and that which was imported predominately from Jamaica in the 1970s – that popularised Rastafarianism in Britain;[157] and it was Rastafarianism, Stuart Hall argues, that 'saved the second generation of young black people in [British] society'.[158] Hall sees the Rastafarian embrace of Africa as resulting in a new form of language through which history could be 'retold' and the 'aspirations of liberation and freedom can for the first time be expressed' by a younger generation.[159] For Hall, this was nothing short of a 'cultural revolution'.[160] However, as Hall emphasised, the turn to Africa amongst younger generations in places

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[157] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 169.
[158] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', p. 14.
[159] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

like Handsworth was not to Africa in any literal sense. This is demonstrated by the fact that by engaging with Rastafarianism younger generations were in fact following a movement that was Caribbean in origin, having first emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s and been revived in part by the music of Bob Marley and other Jamaican artists in the 1970s.[161] In many ways, therefore, Africa was being viewed from Handsworth in the 1980s through the prism of what it looked like from Jamaica. This was Africa as a concept or an idea that had little connection to the physical nature to the continent itself, and was used by a young black generation in order to construct a new identity specifically in the British context.

In its original form, Rastafarianism emerged in Jamaica following the accession of Ras Tafari – who became known as Haile Selassie – to the Ethiopian throne in 1930. Rastafarians believed this represented the fulfilment of biblical prophecies regarding the deliverance of the black race. For Rastafarians, Tafari – or 'Jah' – was 'the Lion – the One True God of the prophecy, not merely God's vicar, like the Pope, or even an immaculate son – but the Living God'.[162] Rastafarians identified the contemporary and historical sufferings of black people as the 'reincarnation' of the plight of the ancient tribes of Israel, whose people had been enslaved by the kingdom of Babylon.[163] The biblical notions of Judgement Day, Zion and the Promised Land for Rastafarians provided answers to the suffering of black people living in contemporary 'Babylon'. Rastafarians were also influenced by the Pan-African philosophies of Marcus Garvey, and believed that salvation for black people would be found in their 'return' to their true home of Ethiopia and Africa, where all black people would one day live as 'free and dignified

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[161] H. Campbell, 'Rastafari: culture of resistance' in *Race & Class*, 22: 1, 1980, p. 13.
[162] J. Plummer, *Movement of Jah People: the growth of the Rastafarians* (Handsworth: Press Gang, 1978), p. 12.
[163] D. Hiro, *Black British, White British*, p. 72.

human beings'.[164] As Garvey himself put it in 1930, all 'black people…are part of the great African race that is to rise from its handicaps, environments and difficulties to repossess the Imperial authority that is promised by God himself'.[165]

Rastafarianism was widely vilified in Jamaican society, and older generations were sceptical about the embrace of Rastafarianism amongst their children in Britain. Rose Clarke, for example, who was born in St Kitts in 1941, Rastas were 'disgusting', and 'want[ed] their hair washed'.[166] However, on one level, the exporting of the music of Jamaican acts such as Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer helped facilitate a relationship between young black generations in Britain and Caribbean culture. This was in the context of what was often – as the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation highlighted in the previous chapter, and Milton Godfrey and Jackie Guy both recognised – a culturally insensitive education system. Brian Bennett, for example, was born in Birmingham in 1962 and has been active in its reggae scene for more than three decades. 'My parents are Jamaican and my older brothers were also born in Jamaica',[167] Bennett remarked,

> but I was born in England, and I grew up in a white world, I didn't know anything
> else. Their Jamaican culture always intrigued me. I'd listen to a tune when I was a
> kid and go, "why are they talking different?" There was a part of me I felt was
> missing when I looked at my skin colour – there was a part of me I needed to
> know about. I wanted to know historically, where do they come from, how do I fit
> into the scheme of things?[168]

For Bennett, reggae helped to answer these questions. 'The music was the news for me in the 1970s',[169] he recalled. 'It was my education. When I got to secondary school I didn't want to know about books. Reggae music has taken me through my life; it's given me

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[164] D. Hiro, *Black British, White British*, p. 72.
[165] Cited in H. Campbell, 'Rastafari: culture of resistance', p. 5.
[166] R. Clarke, personal interview, 30 September 2006.
[167] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[168] *Ibid.*
[169] *Ibid.*

awareness, information, politics and philosophy. It's been like a knowledge provider for my culture and my history'.[170]

On another level, however, in terms of the construction of a new black identity, it was the concept of Africa that was of most importance. For Dick Hebdige, 'somewhere between Trenchtown and Ladbroke Grove, the cult of Rastafari had become a "style"'.[171] It was this, Hebdige argues, that enabled a young black generation to positively assert their 'blackness' by visually expressing an association with Africa. Rastas in England began to wear the national colours of Ethiopia (red, gold and green) and grow their hair into 'locks' in order to 'cultivate a more obviously African "natural" style'.[172] Many dressed in surplus army uniforms (onto which were often sewn the Ethiopian colours), a 'sinister guerrilla chic' designed to show commitment to the onward march 'back to Africa'.[173] As Dilip Hiro put it, the object was to look as 'African and as fearsome as possible'.[174]

At the same time as this visual affirmation, Hebdige argued that young Rastas in England also expressed their association with Africa at a non-visual level in the form of slang or 'argot'. Rastafarianism literally provided the younger generation with a language, a 'subterranean semantics' that had at its origins in the days of slavery.[175] Just as in slavery a creole language had initiated the emergence of a subversive culture, in the British context the Jamaican patois that many younger generations deployed 'militated against outside interference' and 'guaranteed autonomy'.[176] As one girl from Handsworth

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[170] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[171] D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (London/New York: Methuen, 1979), p. 36.
[172] *Ibid*., p. 43.
[173] *Ibid*.
[174] D. Hiro, *Black British, White British*, p. 72.
[175] D. Hebdige, 'Reggae, Rastas and Rudies: style and the subversion of form', Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Stencilled occasional papers, 24 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1974), p. 9.
[176] *Ibid*., pp. 37-8.

simply put it, 'I speak patois when I'm with white people and I'm talking about them, and I don't want them to know what I'm saying'.[177]

In 1930s Jamaica, it is thought that Rastafarians began growing dreadlocks in order to emulate the 'long, plaited hairstyles of the East African Somali, Masai and Galla tribesmen who were appearing regularly in magazine photographs at the time'.[178] In places like Handsworth in the 1980s, however, the Rastafarian style was, as Hebdige puts it, 'borrowed from the sleeves of imported reggae albums'.[179] For many, reggae provided their only point of contact with pan-Africanist ideas. 'I'm not into Marcus Garvey's concepts as much as I'd like to be', one black teenager from Handsworth mused in the 1980s. 'But Bob Marley had nice concepts. That's what I'm for…his music was an inspiration'.[180] As another fan of Marley reflected, his music 'was giving us a different spin on our cultural identity to what we saw on TV – things like Tarzan. Bob Marley was representing us in a positive way'.[181] Marley's *Catch a Fire* album was released in 1973, and both Marley and the music were marketed with overtly Rastafarian imagery specifically in order to appeal to overseas audiences.[182] The front cover of the album, for example, showed a close up Marley – his trademark dreadlocks in full view – smoking a spliff. 'I heard *Catch a Fire* when I was about fourteen', remembers Basil Gabbidon, a founding member of Steel Pulse. 'I just played it to death. I must have gone through about three copies of that album. It was at that point that I decided I had to form my own band'.[183]

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[177] Willory (surname not provided), Trinity Arts History Project, 1984.
[178] D. Hebdige, 'Reggae, Rastas and Rudies', p. 14.
[179] D. Hebdige, *Subculture*, p. 43.
[180] C. Sealy, Trinity Arts History Project, 1984.
[181] M. Brown, personal interview, 22 February 2010.
[182] The aim was to make the album as accessible as possible to particularly the British market, a point reinforced by the decision to print the lyrics from the album on the record sleeve. See D. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: culture, identity and Caribbean music* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 79.
[183] B. Gabbidon, personal interview, 15 July 2009.

By the mid-1970s, just as Bob Marley was urging his listeners to 'never forget who you are, and where you stand in the struggle',[184] bands such as Aswad and Matumbi in London, and Beshara and Steel Pulse in Birmingham, were applying aspects of Rastafarianism explicitly to the lives and experiences of those who were brought up in Handsworth and places like it. Steel Pulse were formed in 1975 by Gabbidon and David Hinds, who went to school together at Handsworth Wood Boys School. From the beginning, the band adopted a Rastafarian aesthetic, placing African symbolism at the heart of their performances. Hinds, for example, who was the band's lead singer, wore particularly large dreadlocks that he further emphasised by often tying them up vertically above his head (*plate 2.3*). The band regularly appeared on stage in dressed in uniforms, including the prominent display of the Ethiopian national colours, red, gold and green (*plate 2.3*). The idea, according to Michael Riley, a backing vocalist with the band, was to challenge the expectations of audiences, and make a 'mockery of the regimentation of this society'.[185] Band members also appeared on stage dressed as bankers or priests, with the latter forming a visualisation of Rastafarianism's re-appropriation of mainstream, 'white' Christianity.[186] A 'lot of what we sing about is corruption, the "civilised" world', Riley elaborated, 'so we dress up accordingly'.[187]

Just as dance had for the participants at Kokuma, reggae music's focus on Africa helped a young black generation form a re-appraisal of their position in contemporary society. This is something embedded in Rastafarianism, and it was elaborated by bands such as Steel Pulse in terms that were explicitly relevant to people in the British context. As Horace Campbell, Paul Gilroy and others have argued, although Rastafarianism focuses on Africa as the true home of all black people, somewhat paradoxically, it is also

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[184] Bob Marley & the Wailers, *Exodus,* (Island Records, 1977)
[185] Cited in P. Silverton, 'No Jah-Bubble in-a Birmingham', in *Sounds*, 22 April 1978, from internet source: http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=11490 (accessed 18 June 2010).
[186] D. Hebdige, 'Reggae, Rastas and Rudies'*,* p. 12.
[187] Cited in P. Silverton, 'No Jah-Bubble in-a Birmingham'.

a movement concerned with the inequalities of the immediate historical moment, 'a movement organised around a political and philosophical critique of oppressive social relations'.[188] Rastafarianism was characterised by 'a culture of resistance', in particular to 'white society, white racist values, white education'.[189] As William 'Lez' Henry elaborates, Rastafarianism's emphasis on Africa is 'not about escapism'.[190] Rather, it is about 'learning why as Afrikans we are in this situation, and using that knowledge to determine what can be done on our own terms to transcend a system that is, by its very nature, anti-Afrikan'.[191] Fundamentally, Rastafarianism is a 'distinct expression of the contradiction between black people and the power block';[192] rather than focus on abstracts, Gilroy argues, quoting Marx, Rastafarianism is very much concerned with the 'concrete': the 'criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics'.[193]

Such themes are well illustrated by the poetry of Benjamin Zephaniah, who was born in Handsworth in 1958. Although a widely published written poet, Zephaniah's work is also an example of performance. He began his career in Handsworth as a 'toaster' on various sound systems, and it was partly as a result of this experience that he established a particular brand of performance poetry, which – in a manner similar to the 'dub' poet Linton Kwesi Johnson[194] – was often set to a reggae beat. Zephaniah 'cannot

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[188] P. Gilroy, 'You Can't Fool the Youths…Race and Class Formation in 1980s Britain', in *Race & Class*, 22: 1, 1981, p. 216.
[189] H. Campbell, 'Rastafari: culture of resistance', p. 20
[190] W. Henry, *What the Deejay Said*: a critique from the street! (London: Nu-Beyond, 2006), p. 75.
[191] *Ibid*., p. 75.
[192] P. Gilroy, 'You Can't Fool the Youths…Race and Class Formation in 1980s Britain', p. 216.
[193] K. Marx, 'Introduction to Critique of Hegel's Critique of the Right', cited by P. Gilroy, 'You Can't Fool the Youths…Race and Class Formation in 1980s Britain', p. 217.
[194] See D. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix*, pp. 101-102.

remember a time when he was not creating poetry',[195] and most of his work is performed before it is preserved in written form. It was as a result of living in Handsworth as a teenager in the 1970s – which Zephaniah describes as the 'Rasta capital of Britain'[196] – that Rastafarianism became one of the central influences on Zephaniah's work.

Zephaniah's early poetry is indicative of the appeal of Rastafarianism for people of his generation. On the one hand, it illustrates the turn towards Africa for an articulation of cultural identity; on the other, it shows the way in Rastafarianism facilitated a politicised engagement with conditions in the present. *The Dread Affair* (1985) is Zephaniah's second collection of poetry, and it is based in large part on his experiences in Handsworth. Many of the poems were originally released in 'dub' form on Zephaniah's debut album, *Rasta*.[197] *The Dread Affair* is dedicated to 'all true Rastafarians who seek God and revolution within themselves' and describes how Rastafarianism 'did materialize…to give understanding unto the children of slaves'.[198] Zephaniah's poems express love for Africa, but at the same time, also a profound need for it.[199] 'I was a slave only fit for the grave' writes Zephaniah in 'I dwell here'. England 'did reject me / I must cling to my tree',

> Africa, Africa
> reaching out
> Africa
> very black
> very proud
> shouting loud

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[195] B. Zephaniah, 'A Poet Called Benjamin Zephaniah', Internet source, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/benjamin-zephaniah-im-just-a-normal-bloke-who-writes-poems-1708406.html, 21 August 2009.
[196] B. Zephaniah, personal interview, 20 May 2009.
[197] Benjamin Zephaniah, *Rasta* (Upright: 1982).
[198] B. Zephaniah, dedication in B. Zephaniah, *the Dread Affair*, pp. 7 & 79.
[199] 'Africa, Africa / I need you / Africa, Africa / I love you'. Cited in B. Zephaniah, 'I dwell here', in *the Dread Affair*, p. 47.

AFRICA.[200]

This was about Zephaniah getting 'me back me real true culture', and for him, was 'a matter of survival'.[201] Zephaniah urges his readers to 'listen to the drum' and to 'Africa calling…African history, African culture / trees known by their fruit / slave ship shackles in our memory / therefore standing firm / flames of victory and liberty / one day we shall earn'.[202]

Yet Zephaniah makes it clear that for him, an embrace of Africa on its own is not enough; what is also required is an awareness of and engagement with conditions in the present. 'One ting I know if you deal with de dead', Zephaniah writes, 'den you dead already like I said'.

> if you deal with de past said dat nar last
> so don't involve natty dread,
> why deal with dead and deaders
> come reason with living stuff.[203]

The Dread Affair thus also forms a gritty and often satirical engagement with 'living stuff' – his experiences living as a Rastafarian in Handsworth and later in Brixton, where he moved at the age of 22. His poems speak of the hardships involved in as a young black man living in urban Britain, made clear in one of his best known poems, 'Dis policeman keeps on kicking me to death'.

> Dis policeman keeps on hitting me and pulling out my locks
> he keeps on feeding me unlimited broc-lacs
> dis policeman is a coward he gets me from behind
> he can jail my body but he cannot jail my mind.[204]

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[200] B. Zephaniah, *The Dread Affair*, p. 47.
[201] B. Zephaniah, 'Propaganda' in *ibid*., p. 57.
[202] B. Zephaniah, 'African Culture', in *ibid*., p. 92.
[203] B. Zephaniah, 'Living and dread', in *ibid*., p. 40.
[204] The issue of police brutality would go on to be an even more pressing concern for Zephaniah when in September 2003 his cousin, Michael Powell, died whilst in police custody at Thornhill Road police station, Handsworth.

In another poem, 'Modern slavery', Zephaniah uses the example of slavery to outline what he sees as the modern-day hypocrisy of 'their civilisation [which] is high', where 'some house have fifty bedrooms / some house is like a pig sty'.[205] Zephaniah provides a commentary on the nature of the conditions around him, but places this in the context of a demand for change, always firmly grounded in the here and now. 'I turn around and took myself to see dis preacher guy', Zephaniah continues in 'Dis policeman keeps on kicking me to death', who told 'me 'bout some heaven / dat was in the bloody sky….I don't think I'm free / if I'm free den why does he / keep fucking kicking me'.[206]

The Rastafarian critique of the present was something shared by British reggae bands such as Steel Pulse. As Basil Gabbidon recalled, 'that's basically why we started – we thought we had something to say'.[207] Part of the engagement with the present included a growing awareness of events in Africa. 'When I got together with David, there was a lot of stuff going on TV about starvation in Africa, and that kind of woke us up to a consciousness. We thought the best way to spread the message of unity and awareness was through music'.[208] However, as the title of Steel Pulse's debut album makes clear, *Handsworth Revolution* was primarily concerned with themes in their own lives in Handsworth. As Gabbidon surmised, 'you get your creativity, your strength, from your environment, and we got ours from Handsworth'.[209] *Handsworth Revolution* was 'a commentary on things that were going on in the community'.[210] It was about 'the blues [dances], the police, the Rastas, everything. All that fed into the music'.[211] One song,

[205] B. Zephaniah, 'Modern Slavery', in *The Dread Affair*, p. 73.
[206] B. Zephaniah, 'Dis Policeman Keeps on Kicking me to Death', in *ibid*, p. 96.

[207] B. Gabbidon, cited in Robin Velk, 'Handsworth Evolution', radio documentary for Birmingham Music Heritage, from Internet source: http://radiotogo.blogspot.com/2010/10/handsworth-evolution-documentary.html (accessed 24 May 2011).
[208] B. Gabbidon, cited in *ibid*.
[209] B. Gabbidon, personal interview, 15 July 2009.
[210] *Ibid*.
[211] *Ibid*.

entitled 'Macka Splaff', talks about 'feeling high' in 'ganja smoke tonight',[212] while 'Sound Check' depicts a Handsworth 'blues dance'.[213]

Handsworth Revolution thereby highlighted themes that could be immediately be referenced by black youth in Handsworth and places like it across Britain. Like Zephaniah, this included being the victim of racist attacks. 'Ku Klux Klan', for example, 'tackled British racism indirectly' by referring to the American racist organisation,[214] but its first person perspective makes it clear that it is the situation in Britain that is being addressed. The band performed the song in Ku Klux Klan hoods 'should anyone fail to grasp the meaning of the lyrics'.[215] Yet the overriding tone of the album is fundamentally not one of victimhood. Steel Pulse predicted that 'Babylon is falling', but that 'Handsworth shall stand firm, like Jah rock, fighting back'.

> We once beggars are now choosers
> No intention to be losers
> Striving forward with ambition…
> We rebel in Handsworth revolution…[216]

'We called the album "Handsworth Revolution" because [if] I wasn't in the band and came from Handsworth, and a group called their album that, it would make me feel good and give me something to aim for', stated Michael Riley. 'We are trying to clean the name up'.[217]

Steel Pulse were the most successful of a number of groups from Handsworth who performed this particularly British brand of Rastafarian-inspired reggae in venues such as the Rialto in Handsworth or the Hummingbird in Birmingham city centre. Just as Bob

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[212] Steel Pulse, *Handsworth Revolution* (Island Records, 1978).

[213] *Ibid.*. This theme was explored further explored on the group's second album, *A Tribute to the Martyrs* (Mango Records, 1979) in a song called 'Sound System'. See chapter four for a full discussion of the significance of blues/sound systems in dread culture.

[214] D. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix*, p. 100.

[215] *Ibid*.

[216] Steel Pulse, *Handsworth Revolution.*

[217] Cited in P. Silverton, 'No Jah-Bubble in-a Birmingham', in *Sounds*, 22 April 1978.

Marley had been for Basil Gabbidon, Steel Pulse became an inspiration for reggae bands in Birmingham, precisely because of their dual emphasis on Rastafarianism and on events and themes in the local context. Amlak Tafari, for example, was born in Handsworth in 1965 and was the founding member of Amlak Band. 'I used to keep a scrapbook with pictures of Steel Pulse in there', he remembers.[218] 'Songs like "Handsworth Revolution" and "Ku Klux Klan" made it big in Handsworth because they were about the lives we were leading. I was going through exactly the same things they had been through. They glorified Handsworth, just as I myself was proud to come from Handsworth. As a young reggae musician, a young Rasta man, a young man from Handsworth, I looked up to them'.[219] Jacko Melody was the lead singer of Eclipse, a band from the nearby Winson Green area of Birmingham, and recalled that 'everyone was a Rasta [at that time]. Even if you didn't have the locks, you were still a Rasta. The back to Africa thing, Garvey, it was like a teaching. I didn't know anything about Rasta until I joined [the band], and they taught me who Emperor Selassie was, who Garvey was, all those things'.[220].

Perhaps because of the near-impossibility of emulating the success of Steel Pulse, who to date have released eleven studio albums and won a Grammy award, there were during the 1980s more active participants in 'sound systems'.[221] A sound system can be defined as a 'large mobile hi-fi or disco'.[222] Rather than writing music or playing musical instruments, the object in a sound system is to obtain an extensive collection of music and to play it with the highest possible quality at various social events. The concept has its origins in Jamaica, where sound systems appeared in order to cater for a growing demand to hear first American r&b and then ska and reggae played competently at large dance

[218] A. Tafari, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[219] *Ibid.*
[220] J. Melody, personal interview, 9 June 2011.
[221] D. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix*, p. 125.
[222] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 164.

halls or in slum yards.[223] The sound system was thus brought to Britain by the first generation of immigrants from the Caribbean, and was often played at 'blues dances' – organised parties generally held in people's homes at which an entrance fee would be charged.

This concept, however, was re-appropriated by a younger generation to suit its own specific needs and tastes. This generation moved away from the domesticated, house party style of their parents' generation – in part, to get away from their parents – and replaced it with a culture of dances held in youth clubs, church halls, garages or warehouses. Sounds 'represented' the particular area in which they were from, and fans that came from the same area would follow the sound wherever they went to play. A whole network of promoters sprung up to facilitate 'clashes', events that pitted one sound system and their followers against another, and posters advertising them were commonly 'plastered over the pillars under the Hockley flyover'.[224]   A flier dated the 28th of May 1979, for example, advertises one such clash, taking place on Whit Monday at Digbeth Civic Hall in Birmingham:

> This is the Real thing, the Biggest Show [between] Jah Tubby representing London Tape control, Jah Mafia, representing Birmingham [and] Jah Tippertone, a skilful move up to Division 1. Jah Tubby believes no one can play him on music, he says first to go down will be Jah Tippertone but first to fall Jah Mafia no bells to save you this time…Did you hear what happened to the mighty Coxon? So shall it be to you says Jah Mafia [sic]. [225]

The event was one of many marketed as 'the show everyone is waiting to see!' [226]

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[223] See A. Wood, '"A Design for Social living": Sound System Culture from JA to UK', in P. Macpherson *et al* (eds), *Sub/versions: Cultural Status, Genre and Critique* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), p. 165.

[224] D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Cape, 1984), p. 37.

[225] Promotional flier, Birmingham, 28 May 1979, Digbeth Civic Hall. James Brown's handwritten draft of his memoirs of Handsworth Cricket Club was on the back of a large number of these fliers, and was obtained indirectly from Trinity Arts Centre by the author from John Dalton.

[226] Promotional flier, Birmingham, 28 May 1979, Digbeth Civic Hall.

A critical difference between the sound systems of younger generations and that of their parents is that whereas older sounds would largely play Caribbean 'festival music' such as calypso and ska,[227] the focus of the great majority of younger generations' sound systems was specifically reggae. For Michael La Rose, sound systems 'helped to shape a new black identity' for younger generations in Britain.[228] As it was with the British reggae bands, Rastafarian and African imagery was central to this identity. Sound systems called themselves names such as 'Jah Shaka' that explicitly referenced Rastafarian ideas. Many dressed in the Ethiopian red, gold and green.[229]

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, 'Jungleman' were the biggest sound system in Handsworth and in Birmingham (*plate 1.4*). For Brian Bennett, who at the time ran 'Rootsman', a rival sound, Jungleman were 'revolutionary'.[230] This was in part because they were regarded as having the best quality sound in the area, both in terms of clarity and volume. The group's sound was like a 'killing machine', remembers Bennett.[231] Whereas most sounds were pre-occupied with finding the necessary funds to support themselves – often through gambling, or petty crime[232] – Jungleman built their sound largely with the help of public funds. The group were established in 1978 after a successful application to the Cadbury Trust, and were maintained up until 1986 with further grants from Cadbury as well as the Prince's Trust. It was this regular source of funding that enabled Jungleman to invest in better quality equipment than that of their rivals.

Bennett describes the experience of going to a Jungleman sound. 'All of a sudden, a needle would go on the record,' he said, 'and a piece of earthquake would hit the room'.

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[227] M. Brown, personal interview, 22 February 2010.
[228] M. La Rose, in R. Harris & S. White (eds.), *Changing Britannia*, p. 136.
[229] For a dramatization of sound system culture in the 1980s, see the 1980s film *Babylon*, directed by the Italian Franco Rosso.
[230] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[231] *Ibid*.
[232] M. La Rose, in R. Harris & S. White (eds), *Changing Britannia*, p. 126.

Boom! Even your eyeballs would start to shake with the bass. The whole place would shake. You know when thunder hits? It was like that, if the thunder was right outside your front door. It had a way of speaking to you and saying, 'man is nothing'. Jungleman were like that.[233]

It was as a result of this that at their height in the early 1980s it was claimed that Jungleman had a following of 'thousands' in Handsworth.[234] Ras Tread was Jungleman's photographer and engineer throughout the group's existence, and he summed up the group's sound. 'We were a very raw talent', he said.[235] 'Our Deejay, Speedy, was very up front, very to the point. If it wasn't going well, we would literally turn up on them; turn the volume up on them. We were one of the first sounds to have thousands of watts in our amp. The money helped in that respect, we invested it wisely in good equipment. We had one of the heaviest sounds going'.[236]

However, as Bennett makes clear, Jungleman's popularity was not only the result of their quality of sound. Jungleman also 'had this energy, like an aura',[237] he remembered, and this came from the group's overtly Rastafarian emphasis. As it was in Steel Pulse, Rastafarian imagery was a central part of Jungleman's act. The group transported their system around in a van painted red, gold and green. Each member adopted names such as Pharaoh, Ras and Boa that were meant to reference Rastafarianism and Africa, and many members also grew thick dreadlocks. 'We just tried to be as natural as possible', Tread commented.[238] Jungleman wore uniforms of khaki suits and tunics, and hats specifically designed to incorporate particularly large dreadlocks. 'We were trying to follow Haile Selassie and Garvey's teaching. When we saw images of them looking impeccable in suits, we thought well, why not us? At that time a lot of Rastas

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[233] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[234] R. Tread, personal interview, 12 June 2009.
[235] *Ibid.*
[236] *Ibid.*
[237] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[238] R. Tread, personal interview, 12 June 2009.

looked like real vagabonds, but we thought having smart tunics was important – it was a militant style that showed we were serious about what we were doing.'[239] For Tread, such uniforms occupied a central part of what Jungleman was about. 'It was about our image and how we were going to portray ourselves. We wanted to look immaculate'.[240] The uniforms were an attempt to 'say to Handsworth: "if we can make ourselves better, so can you"'.[241]

For Jungleman, Rastafarianism provided a way out of some of the problems in their everyday lives in Handsworth. Tread recalled how prior to their formation many in the group were 'what you call disenfranchised youth'.[242] Jungleman's members were in their 'teens or early twenties…we didn't have jobs, weren't qualified…we weren't happy with the way we were being treated by the police'.[243] Rastafarianism helped those in Jungleman to come to terms with this situation, particularly with its emphasis on self-help. 'A lot of sociologists came to Handsworth and wanted to know why we were turning to the Rasta "cult" as they called it', Tread reflected. 'Well the Rasta vibe was important because it let us take a different road. It was that Rasta ethos of self-help. We wanted to do something good with our lives – self-help, self-reliance'.[244] Perhaps ironically, it was this that encouraged Jungleman to seek out funds from the Prince's Trust, not only for the sound system but also for a number of related projects. Jungleman set up their own tailors that made the uniforms they wore on stage, and a photography venture, which sold photographs of reggae acts performing in Birmingham. The umbrella group for each of these projects was called 'Exodus' – named after the title of Bob

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[239] *Ibid.*
[240] *Ibid.*
[241] *Ibid.*
[242] *Ibid.*
[243] *Ibid.*
[244] *Ibid.*

Marley's seminal 1977 album. The idea, according to Tread, was simply to 'do what we can to help ourselves and the youth'.[245]

Jungleman, however, did not see its turn towards Africa as being for use solely in Handsworth. Africa was of more than a symbolic significance to the group. As Tread recalled, 'we had this militancy thing about a return to Africa – that was central to what Jungleman were about. We saw ourselves as righteous soldiers, soldiers from God'.[246] In 1982, Jungleman obtained more funds from the Cadbury Trust, this time to make a trip to Africa. The idea was to emigrate permanently, and 'set up a clothing industry with the tailors, set up a radio station, and continue with the sound. That was the intention'.[247] Before making the trip, Jungleman sent some of its members, including Tread, over to Africa to check whether permanent emigration would be feasible. Tread and two others made the trip from Handsworth to Ghana, Nigeria, Togo and the Ivory Coast, and according to Tread, the 'feedback was all really positive. We began to believe that this could actually happen'.[248]

Yet the planned migration to Africa was a failure. Whilst Tread was in Africa, other members of Jungleman in Handsworth were having second thoughts. 'There was all these stupid arguments about cars', Tread recalled. '"What are we going to do with the cars?" The most stupidest excuses I ever heard. The other members didn't have the courage to come, they said we were rushing ahead too quick. It's so saddening because we left a lot of equipment in Africa, really believing that we were going to go, and when we got back, there was just all this shock and fear. I was so pissed off'.[249] Unlike Benjamin Zephaniah, Steel Pulse and those active in Kokuma Dance Company, Jungleman had mixed the concept of Africa garnered from reggae music, dance or

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[245] *Ibid.*
[246] *Ibid.*
[247] *Ibid.*
[248] *Ibid.*
[249] *Ibid.*

Rastafarianism, with a desire to physically follow through with Garvey's 'back to Africa' mantra. Tread recalled that he felt 'let down. We had a set of bredrin, saying we're going to do this collectively, and then…it just made me question my faith in man'.[250]

Yet the point of the turn to Africa in Handsworth was that it enabled the articulation of a positive black identity, and a politicised engagement with the reality of everyday life, specifically in Handsworth. It was an 'invention' of a tradition for use in the present. Jungleman, however, mistook it for something more literal. In the event, the group were forced to return the grant they had received for the African trip to the Cadbury Trust and within two years, Jungleman had disbanded. For Tread, 'the dream had gone out the window'.[251]

Conclusion

By the beginning of the 1990s, many of the groups discussed in this chapter had disbanded. In 1992 Kokuma moved out of their base in Handsworth to a premises in central Birmingham, and two years later, following a series of arguments about the direction of the group, folded. Other groups changed almost beyond all recognition. Following the release of *Handsworth Revolution* and three, less successful follow-up albums,[252] in 1982 Basil Gabbidon left Steel Pulse, the group that he himself had co-founded. 'I couldn't handle it anymore', he remarked. 'I was tired and worn out, angry and depressed'.[253] The band's core market increasingly became the United States and following their Grammy for *Babylon the Bandit*,[254] Steel Pulse performed at President

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[250] *Ibid*.

[251] *Ibid*.

[252] The albums were *Tribute to the Martyrs* (Mango Records: 1979), *Caught You* (Mango Records: 1980) and *True Democracy* (Elektra: 1982).

[253] B. Gabbidon, cited in 'The Basil Gabbidon Story', Internet source: http://andybrouwer.co.uk/basil.html (accessed 26 May 2011).

[254] *Babylon the Bandit* (Mango Records: 1985).

Bill Clinton's 1993 inauguration party.[255] By this time, Steel Pulse had already moved to America, with only two remaining members from their original Handsworth line-up.

The 1990s also witnessed change in Handsworth's reggae scene. In 1990, Steven Kapur, a twenty-three year old resident of Handsworth of south-Asian descent, was embarking on his own musical career. Under his stage name Apache Indian, and sporting dreadlocks similar to those of David Hinds, Benjamin Zephaniah and many other figures discussed in this chapter, Kapur released his debut single, 'Movie Over India'. The single was a fusion of Kapur's two main influences – reggae, garnered from his time spent 'toasting' on various Handsworth sound systems, and bhangra, an influence from his upbringing in an Indian household. In 1992, following in the paths of Bob Marley and Steel Pulse, Kapur signed a record deal with Island Records, perhaps the most prominent record label ever to have come out of Jamaica. The following year, he released 'Boom-shack-a-lak', which became one of the biggest selling reggae singles in the UK. The single, with its party-like tone and irreverent lyrics, has featured on numerous advertisements and film soundtracks around the world. Alongside the changes to many of the groups discussed in this chapter during the 1990s, the release of 'Boom-shack-a-lak' could be regarded as marking the moment at which the significance of Africa in Handsworth had come to an end.

This chapter has illustrated the contrasting ways in which traditions functioned as a source of identity within the black structure of feeling in Handsworth. For younger generations, Africa was of particular significance in this respect. Of all the acts that have been discussed, it is perhaps Steel Pulse and *Handsworth Revolution* that best encapsulate the way in which, through various forms of performance, Africa provided for a young black generation a source of identity in the particular context of Britain in the 1980s. As

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[255] See Steel Pulse Official Website: http://steelpulse.com/biohistory.php (accessed 26 May 2011).

was alluded to in Kokuma's production 'the Awakening', Benjamin Zephaniah's poem 'Dis policeman keeps on kicking me to death', and *Handsworth Revolution* itself, Africa helped this generation come to terms with a feeling of alienation in their contemporary lives in Handsworth. 'As soon as you leave school', David Hinds reflected in the early 1980s, 'you find that all the things you were promised – a job, a future and so on – it's all different. When you realise that, all you've got to turn to is your own culture and yourself. There's nowhere else to look'.[256] As reggae fanatics such as Brian Bennett or Amlak Tafari made clear, Steel Pulse were popular in Handsworth not only because of the quality of their music, but also, through their focus on Rastafarianism, because they emphasised an African identity that was specifically for use in Handsworth, something made apparent by the front cover of *Handsworth Revolution*. The same was true of those who attended Kokuma. African dance had 'given me a black identity…a sense of grounding', a performer in Kokuma reflected. It 'filled the gap'.[257]

Conversely, as the section on cricket showed, for older generations in Handsworth, it was the Caribbean that provided the clearest source of a black identity. In the context of their own sense of rejection from British society at an earlier period, cricket and its associated practices provided for Handsworth's players a link to previous lives in the Caribbean. For those for whom returning there to live remained a distant ambition, annual tours away, a game of dominoes and cricket itself had an important symbolic resonance, something well-illustrated by Francis Nation. Having captained Continental for many years, and helped to establish the clubhouse in Handsworth Park, Nation turned his hand to writing. He produced a series of self-published short stories, each set in Jamaica, with the aim of communicating to younger generations the nature of what he

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[256] Cited in J. Plummer, with D. Bishton & B. Homer, *Movement of Jah People*, p. 48.
[257] U. Walker, personal interview, 8 July 2009.

termed 'Jamaicanness'– 'the way we used to do things back home'.[258]   Yet as is made clear in numerous interviews with younger generations, it was difficult for 'Jamaicanness' or any other such concept to make an impact. Many black youths saw their parents as being, as one teenager put it, 'more Victorian than the oldest, most reactionary British themselves'.[259] There was, as another youth put it in the mid-1980s a desire to 'rebel', because parents 'never told us about the racism'.[260] The turn to Africa evolved out of this situation. As one person put it, Africa was 'something unique to us West Indian kids'; it provided 'something to hang on to'.[261]

Following the 1980s, cricket in Handsworth had also changed. After the merging of Rangers and Continental, as the players from the 1980s got older it became necessary to recruit younger players, and for many of these the Caribbean was of less symbolic significance. Handsworth remains a predominately black club, however. Gidden, Nation and others retain honorary managerial positions, and dominoes is still played by older people in the clubhouse during the cricketing off season. It was such everyday, even banal, activities that during the 1980s enabled this generation to articulate a certain black identity, to make reference to a Caribbean 'tradition'. The significance of other day-to-day practices in Handsworth – in the everyday institutions pubs and clubs, the church and the home – will be explored in detail in the following chapter. What has been shown here is that it was necessary for younger generations in Handsworth to 'invent' a tradition of their own. The turn to Africa in Handsworth did not mean Africa in any literal sense. It was, as Stuart Hall put it, Africa as an 'imagined community'.[262]   Whereas Benjamin Zephaniah, Steel Pulse and the dancers at Kokuma were content to 'return' to Africa

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[258] F. Nation, personal interview, 12 December 2009.
[259] Cited in A. John, *Race in the Inner City*, p. 31.
[260] C. Sealy, Trinity Arts History Project, 1984.
[261] E. Cameron, personal interview, 28 September 2006.

[262] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', p. 4.

metaphorically, Jungleman attempted to physically migrate there. For Ras Tread, Jungleman was 'not just a dream of going to Africa and waiting for something mysterious to take us away. We felt we had realistic dreams'.[263] With the arguments over cars and the eventual returning of the Prince's Trust money for the plane tickets, for Tread the dream had 'crashed'.[264]

It is important to recognise that for many Rastafarians such as Tread, the 'return' to Africa was both realistic and the ultimate objective. However as this chapter has attempted to show, like the Caribbean tradition embraced by those at Handsworth Cricket Club, the African tradition may have been 'invented', but it was nevertheless an important part of the black structure of feeling in Handsworth. As Stuart Hall has argued,

> the point was not that some people, a few, could only live with themselves and discover their identities by literally going back to Africa – though some did, not often with great success – but that…people re-engaged with an experience which enabled them to find a language in which they could re-tell and appropriate their own histories.[265]

The long 1980s was the moment in which the search for that 'kind of ground for our identities', that 'something stabilized', was found by younger generations in the shape of Africa, and for the majority, this was for use not in Africa but in Handsworth. As Steel Pulse simply put it, this was a 'Handsworth revolution'.

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[263] R. Tread, personal interview, 12 June 2009.
[264] *Ibid*.
[265] S. Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', p. 13.

Plate 2.1: Cricket

Francis Nation (right) with co-founder of Handsworth Continental Gilbert Blackwood. From *Handsworth Cricket, Trinidad Tour*, official tour brochure, 1986, p. 51.

Unnamed match, c. mid-1980s. From *Handsworth Cricket, Trinidad Tour*, official tour brochure, 1986, p. 57.

THE PACE-MAN "ONE TO WATCH":

Unnamed player, c. mid-1980s. From *Handsworth Cricket, Trinidad Tour*, official tour brochure, 1986, p. 60.

Unnamed player, c. mid-1980s. From *Handsworth Cricket, Trinidad Tour*, official tour brochure, 1986, p. 60.

A CLASSIC DEMONSTRATION OF COVER DRIVING:

Plate 2.2. Kokuma Dance Company

Photograph from Kokuma Dance Theatre Archive, National Resource Centre for Dance, University of Surrey, KO/F/1/56.

Photograph from Kokuma Dance Theatre Archive, National Resource Centre for Dance, University of Surrey, KO/F/1/48.

Plate 2.3: Steel Pulse
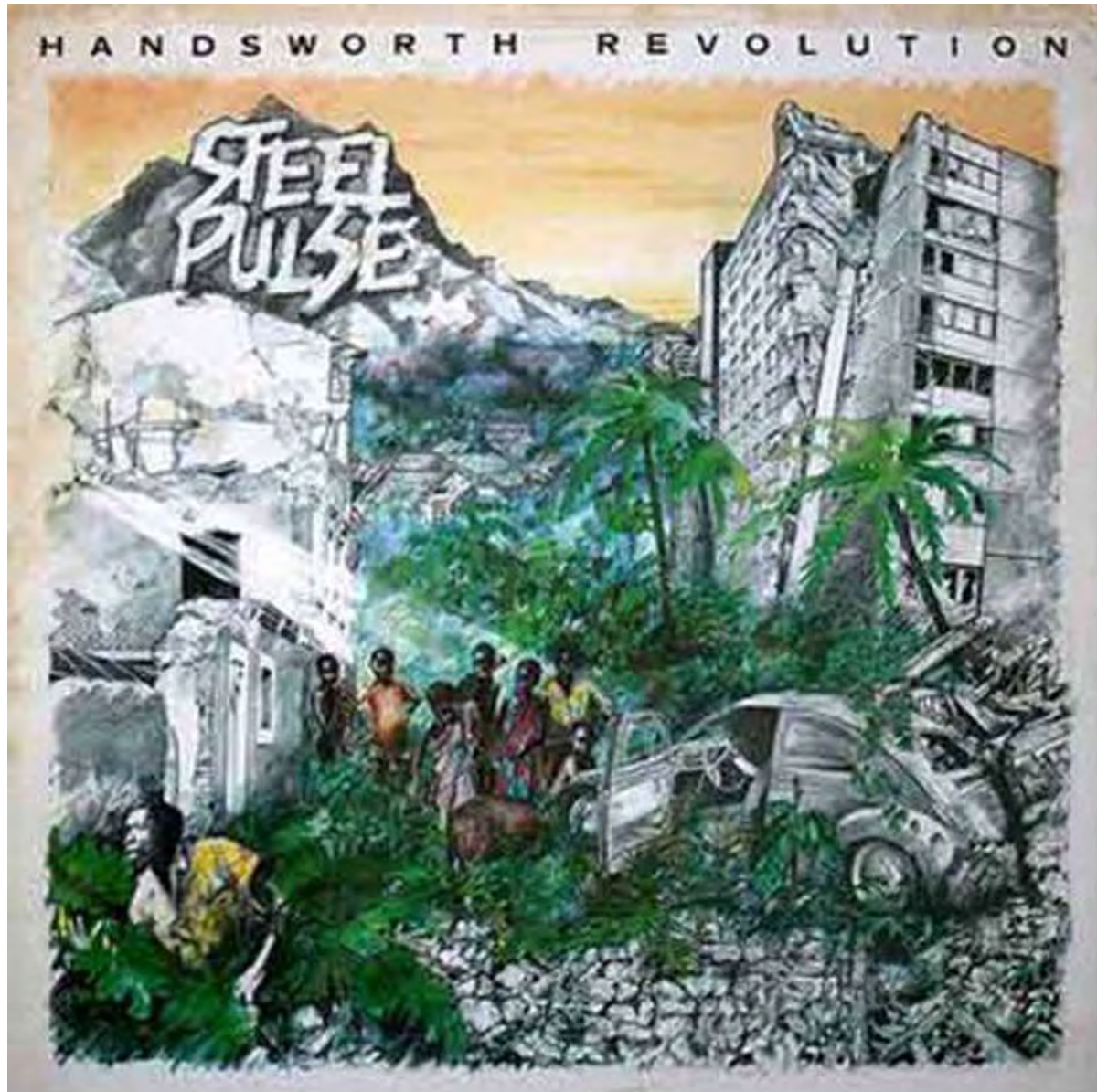
Image from Internet source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/shows/documentaries/island-artwork/index.shtml?gp=16 (accessed 7 November 2011).

Steel Pulse, 1978, from Internet source: http://andybrouwer.co.uk/photos.html (accassed 7 November 2011).

Image of Selwyn Jones, Steel Pulse, 1986, from Internet source: http://andybrouwer.co.uk/photos.html (accessed 7 November 2011).

Chapter Four: Towards the Black Everyday

Introduction

In an interview with the black filmmaker Isaac Julien, featured in his 1993 collection of essays *Small Acts*, Paul Gilroy comments on what he sees as the continuing problematic of black people in Britain 'being seen as transgressor[s] all the time'.[1] For Julien, in a manner similar to mainstream representations of gay communities, it had become a cliché for black subjects to be portrayed in this way, something that he had consciously tried to avoid in his own cinematic work.[2] As Gilroy has done at points throughout his career, he uses *Small Acts* on the one hand to attempt to undermine such stereotypical views of black people, and on the other hand, to point towards the significance of everyday black cultures. There is an analysis of figures such as Salman Rushdie and Frank Bruno, the work of David A. Bailey and Spike Lee, even the role of mundane items such as record sleeves within the black diaspora. Perhaps the central question, Gilroy remarks in his interview with Julien, is: 'what about the right of blacks…not to be exciting?'[3]

In one sense, the previous two chapters of this thesis could be regarded as having focused predominately on the 'exciting' in Handsworth. Although Chapter Two examined political organisations that were responding to the everyday needs of the local community, and Chapter Three looked at relatively mundane institutions such as cricket clubs and sound systems, in each instance there was a wider meaning that was about articulating a politics of 'black' in resistance to various forms of domination. Even in an overtly cultural organisation such as Kokuma Dance Company, race was seemingly manifest at the political level, as a way of asserting a black identity in relation to a hostile dominant culture.

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[1] P. Gilroy, 'Climbing the Racial Mountain: a conversation with Isaac Julien', in P. Gilroy, *Small Acts: thoughts on the politics of black cultures* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 169.
[2] I. Julien, cited in *ibid*.
[3] P. Gilroy, cited in *ibid*.

This chapter aims to move beyond the 'exciting' – and the somewhat simplistic binary between oppression and forms of 'transgression' – and instead foreground the ordinary and the mundane in Handsworth. Race, it will be shown, was not only present in political terms, in acts of transgression. It was also manifest in an array of ordinary activities and practices that took place on a day-to-day basis. This will be demonstrated using three case studies from everyday life: pubs and clubs, the church and the home. The practices that took place in these areas were not necessarily about forms of resistance. However, they were, it will be argued, as much a part of a distinctly black experience in Handsworth as various political groups, reggae bands and sound systems.

Gilroy's comments in *Small Acts* could be regarded as an implicit critique of his own earlier work, especially *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, which began as his Ph.D thesis at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS).[4] The CCCS project – established by Richard Hoggart in 1964 – was explicitly to move away from the hierarchical conception of culture that distinguished between 'high' culture, which was deemed worthy of academic study, and 'low' culture, which was largely ignored.[5] The CCCS aimed, in Hoggart's words, to take seriously the 'mass or popular arts' – from magazines, forms of advertising and television shows to pop music – and seek to understand how these functioned in people's ordinary lives.[6] Gilroy's analysis in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* of the music, 'social functions' and other everyday activities of black communities was, therefore, very much a part of the CCCS tradition, albeit one that had changed in theoretical emphasis since the 1960s.

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[4] See P. Gilroy, 'Racism, Class and the Contemporary Cultural Politics of "Race" and Nation', Ph.D thesis (Birmingham: CCCS/University of Birmingham, 1986).
[5] This approach is perhaps best epitomised in the work of F.R. Leavis. See, for example, F. R. Leavis & D. Thompson, *Culture and Environment: the training of critical awareness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933).
[6] Richard Hoggart, 1963, cited in A. Gray, 'Formations of Cultural Studies', in A. Gray *et al* (eds.), *CCCS Selected Working Papers* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 5.

The issue is that *There Ain't No Black* – like many of the key texts produced at the CCCS – in fact often did not document the everyday at all, but rather focused on the exceptional. As in the work of scholars such as Paul Willis, Dick Hebdige and even Stuart Hall, the focus was not on the everyday activities and 'rituals' of mainstream cultures, but on those of *sub*cultures,[7] the minority of people who were seen to carry out forms of symbolic resistance in their daily lives to the uneven structures of wider society. For Gilroy, in black cultures this was manifest in many of the themes discussed in the previous chapter – in sound systems, reggae music and the adoption of particular 'styles…dress, dance, fashion and languages', all of which had at their heart the 'oppositional sentiments' of Rastafarianism.[8]

Yet *Small Acts*, which was published six years after *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, expands on its narrative only slightly. In an essay called 'Wearing Your Art on Your Sleeve', for instance, Gilroy attempts to argue for the significance in black Britain of record sleeves, items that, he points out, are commonly seen as 'trivial' or 'inconsequential'.[9] Gilroy thus shifts the focus onto the importance of commodities in black cultures, and highlights an item that – as the previous chapter alluded to – was undoubtedly a pervasive part of everyday life in areas such as black Handsworth. But Gilroy then reverts to an argument that emphasises forms of black resistance. He describes the record sleeve as part of a 'black cultural and political sensibility',[10] a 'means of communicating pan-African ideas' and a way of allowing its black consumers to access the 'styles and symbols that constitute blackness'.[11] In spite of the apparent ordinariness

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[7] See, for example, S. Hall, 'The Hippies: an American "moment"', CCCS Stencilled occasional paper, Sub and popular culture series, no.16, 1968; P. Willis, *Learning to Labour: how working class kids get working class jobs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) and D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

[8] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 155 & 192.

[9] P. Gilroy, 'Wearing Your Art on Your Sleeve: notes towards a diaspora history of black ephemera', in P. Gilroy, *Small Acts*, p. 238.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 245.

of the subject, therefore, in a manner similar to *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, it is an 'oppositional politics' that most often emerges.

To take the example of music, one way of interrogating this narrative and forming an account of the black everyday in Handsworth would be to revert back to the initial act of consumption. As was shown with the example of *Handsworth Revolution*, many record sleeves did indeed carry political messages, but this did not mean that this was the prime reason for people consuming them. People also bought records for their 'use-value' – simply because they enjoyed listening to them. [12] As one person from Handsworth put it, people went 'back to school on a Monday and [said], "did you go to that dance, did you hear the track?"' Then 'we would go to the record shops to…find it'. [13] At its most ordinary, the politics of transgression that was inherent in Rastafarianism or the music of Steel Pulse simply became an act of consumption. People went to record shops such as, for example, Don Christie's in Birmingham city centre, to 'listen to records or maybe buy one', [14] find some 'hard to find Reggae twelve inches' and 'spend all day in there'. [15]

The transition from an 'authentic', often oppositional culture to one based around the consumption of commodities is largely a familiar narrative. [16] It is partly for this reason that this chapter focuses on the examples of the pub, the church and the home, institutions that are not usually considered to be oppositional. These case studies also

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[12] A. Warde, 'Consumption and Theories of Practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5:2, 2005, p. 147.
[13] R. Turner, cited in R. Valk, *Handsworth Evolution* radio documentary (2010), from internet source: http://radiotogo.blogspot.com/2010/10/handsworth-evolution-documentary.html (accessed 27 June 2011).
[14] B. Gabbidon, cited in *ibid*.
[15] 'Review of Don Christie's Records', cited from Internet source, http://birmingham.myvillage.com/place/don-christie-records-birmingham/reviews (accessed 10 August 2011).
[16] One of the earliest forms of this can be found in the work of Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and other members of the Frankfurt School on the 'culture industry'. For a good overview of this work, see T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991). For a more recent example on the role of consumerism in 1960s 'counterculture', see T. Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: business culture, counterculture and the rise of hip consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

help overcome a more pervasive problem in the study of the everyday. That is, the issue of what should be considered part of it. It has been noted that the 'defining quality' of everyday life is seemingly its 'lack of qualities': those acts that are 'unnoticed…inconspicuous… [and] unobtrusive'.[17] Conversely, the case studies of the pub, church and home each provide tangible spaces in which everyday practice can be grounded and therefore clearly illustrated. Rather than being 'inconspicuous', it is hoped that each example will provide a set of practices that are discernable, whilst at the same time being sufficiently disparate in form to be representative of the complexities of the black everyday.

The chapter, then, seeks to foreground the ordinary in everyday life in black Handsworth, beyond the binary between oppression and black transgression. To do this, the chapter offers a conceptual understanding of the black everyday that expands on Raymond Williams' notion of the 'structure of feeling' by applying some of the key concepts established by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Like Hoggart and E.P. Thompson, Williams was a key influence on the CCCS,[18] and there is a sense that, in spite of his declaration that 'culture is ordinary',[19] Williams also had a tendency to focus on those working class cultures that he regarded as possessing a wider politics of opposition.[20] Bourdieu did not have Williams' political ambition to 'make a good common culture'.[21] His primary ambition was rather to try to explain the uniformity in culture, and in people's everyday 'practices' – their actions, tastes or 'commonsense behaviours'.[22] For Bourdieu, the key task is not to seek out acts of resistance in people's

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[17] B. Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 1.
[18] A. Gray, 'Formations of Cultural Studies', p. 2.
[19] R. Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', 1958, in B. Highmore (ed.), *The Everyday Life Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 92.
[20] See M. Hilton, 'Politics is Ordinary: Non-governmental Organizations and Political Participation in Contemporary Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22: 2, 2011, pp. 230–268.
[21] R. Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary', p. 97.
[22] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge : Polity, 1990), p. 110.

everyday behaviours, but rather to try to understand why it is that there is such uniformity. To answer this, Bourdieu introduces the notion of the 'habitus'.

The habitus is the particular conventions, values and routines that work to limit people's everyday behaviour so actions appear as 'second nature'.[23] It 'encapsulates how the active residue of a person's past that is grounded in their group's collective history functions within their present'.[24] The habitus – in which the themes of class, gender and race all operate – sets the parameters of practice. It defines what is considered by a group to be acceptable, '"reasonable"', even fashionable, and at the same time, excludes other practices as '"not being for the likes of us"'.[25] It generates the 'durable dispositions' that provides people with 'common schemes of perception'.[26] Thus it helps explain, for instance, the general preference of the working class for realist art and the middle class for modernist art, or why those from public school backgrounds are able to move with a particular 'confidence and style' in highly formalised areas of employment.[27] In contrast, for example, with the work of Antonio Gramsci, whose concepts of 'hegemony' and 'counter hegemony' greatly influenced Gilroy and other scholars at the CCCS,[28] 'practice' and the 'habitus' help avoid seeing race only in relation to domination and resistance. Although Bourdieu does leave some room for the possibility of resistance – particularly with his concept of a 'feel for the game' – a search for acts of opposition is far from the defining characteristic.[29] As a result, the notion of the habitus offers a social framework

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[23] A. Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 215.
[24] J. Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: migration, ethnicity and gender in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 5.
[25] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 110.
[26] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 114-116.
[27] A. Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, pp. 214-215.
[28] See P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 29.
[29] P, Bourdieu, *In Other Words: essays towards a reflexive sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 9.

with which to examine those activities and practices that might otherwise have been dismissed as trivial or even 'banal'.[30]

The contention is that for the residents of black Handsworth, race was an integral feature of the habitus, and it was this that 'set the parameters' of people's behaviour. Race was routine in Handsworth, and it was an important part of the everyday practices that took place in the pub, the church and the home. In pubs and clubs, this was manifest in the particular style of dominoes that was commonly played. This was a different form of the game to that played in white working class pubs, but also corresponded with a markedly different culture of leisure. As the previous chapter touched upon with the example of the cricket club, this culture came from a shared history of playing dominoes in the Caribbean, something recognised by its participants and formalised in 1989 with the establishment of the Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League. Similarly, although there may be similarities with the practices in predominately white churches, as black churches became established in the area from the 1950s onwards, people engaged in a whole culture of worship – both inside and outside the church – that was distinctively black. Importantly, this was true for both older and younger generations. Finally, in the home and particularly in the front room, race was manifest through taste. People bought a particular set of items for the front room, decorated it in a particular style and used it in a particular way because of a shared 'scheme of perception'. This was partly influenced by class and a desire to be seen to be 'getting on', and there were indeed parallels with the domestic interiors of working class and other migrant communities. However, in its specific form, it will be argued, front rooms were part of a black aesthetic as distinctive as the Rastafarian style discussed in the previous chapter.

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[30] See M. Hilton, 'The Banality of Consumption', in F. Trentmann & K. Soper (eds.), *Citizenship and Consumption* (London: Palgarve, 2008), pp. 87-103.

There are other areas of everyday life that might also have made useful case studies in this chapter. For example, there is scope to explore the role of an expanded notion of consumption in black cultures, away from the record shop or the front room. Alongside the sports of cricket and dominoes, more research is needed on the role of football in black communities in the long 1980s. In 1970s, for instance, a local community magazine ran a feature on the 'Handsworth Ankletappers', a predominately black under-16s team that played tournaments each Friday on disused land behind the Crompton Arms pub in Handsworth.[31] As well as an understanding of how football was played, more needs to be learned about how it was watched, the impact of local clubs such as West Bromwich Albion recruiting prominent black players, and how – if at all – football formed a part of pub culture in areas like black Handsworth.[32]

For the historian, it is the truly ordinary that is perhaps most difficult to access. The ordinary is a 'familiar', 'recognisable' and a pervasive part of everyday life; but it is precisely these qualities that also regularly allow it to 'go by unnoticed', thus leaving little archival trace behind.[33] In a sense, what is required is an anthropological record of people's everyday behaviour in Handsworth similar to that compiled by the Mass-Observation group in the 1930s and 1940s. In the absence of this, however, the chapter relies particularly on representational sources: novels and short stories by local authors, photographs by practitioners such as Vanley Burke, *Empire Road* (a BBC television drama set in Handsworth), exhibitions, and various oral history projects. Each source attempts to reflect some aspect of everyday life in black Handsworth. Using this material alongside Bourdieu's notion of practice, the chapter aims to cut through the conventional

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[31] Anonymous author, 'Hidden Soccer Talent in Handsworth', *Grapevine Magazine*, October 1972, no. 32, p. 6, Derek Bishton Archive, *Grapevine* Magazine, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2478/B/1/2

[32] In the 1978/79 season, West Bromwich Albion – who play their home games at The Hawthorns, just over a mile from Soho Road in Handsworth – became the first club to field three black players: Cyrille Regis, Laurie Cunningham and Brendan Batson.

[33] B. Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory,* p. 23.

emphasis placed on the 'transgressive' in black cultures. Race was something one *did* in Handsworth, it is argued. But this was banal as well as 'exciting'.

Pubs and Clubs

Drawing on fieldwork undertaken in the early 1980s in Selton Town and Vermount, districts of Kingston in Jamaica, the American anthropologist Diane Austin describes what she sees as the typical dynamics of the game of dominoes in Jamaican bars. The best players were often 'quiet and sometimes older men' who 'revere their concentration', she observes.[34] Games were generally watched by 'noisy crowds' and having won a game, even the older player would 'slam his dominoes down on the table, cry out, and tease the opposing pair to illustrate that he is, after all, the master'.[35] For Austin, dominoes was 'by far the most important' game played in Jamaican 'bar culture'.[36] As Bert Williams – who grew up in Jamaica and moved to Birmingham in the early 1960s – remarked, dominoes is a 'national sport [in Jamaica]. Everyone plays it'.[37] The enthusiasm for the game was brought to places like Handsworth by Williams' generation. Williams – who formed his own dominoes team in Aston, a district adjoining Handsworth – commented that the game 'helped us settle in the UK' and allowed 'you [to] meet other people from the same background'.[38] For Anita Witter, who began playing dominoes in the mid-1980s and is now the chairperson of the Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League, 'when the Caribbean people came to this country, all they had was christenings, weddings and dominoes. Dominoes was just something that was always played'.[39]

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[34] D. J. Austin, 'Culture and Ideology in the English-Speaking Caribbean: a view from Jamaica', in *American Ethnologist*, 10: 2, 1983, p. 231.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] *Ibid*.
[37] B. Williams, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.

The game of dominoes is believed to have originated in China and spread across Europe during the Napoleonic Wars,[40] and was widely played particularly in working-class areas of Britain before the arrival of the first generation of immigrants from the Caribbean in the 1950s. In *The Pub and the People* (1943), for example, the classic Mass-Observation study of everyday life in Bolton or 'Worktown', it was observed that the game was played in 'about two-thirds of the local pubs'.[41] The dominoes were described as comprising of 'oblong bone, wooden, or composition pieces, about half an inch across and two inches long', the faces of which were 'divided into half' with a different number of dots on each side, usually ranging from one to six.[42] Players received nine dominoes each, and the aim was to 'construct a chain by matching a number on the free end of the chain…until no one is able to match the numbers'. When this point is reached, 'the numbers left in each player's hand are added up', with the player 'with the lowest number being the winner'.[43] Mass-Observation described dominoes as 'the most popular pub game' in Bolton and as Arthur Taylor points out in his history of pub games in Britain, the 'Fives and Threes' form of the game – in which players aim to ensure that outer pieces in the chain are either fives or threes, or multiples of fives or threes – continues to be played across Britain, with an annual national championship having taken place in Bridlington between 1985 and 2007.[44]

However, the game that black migrants played in Handsworth was manifestly different from this, both in form and in the manner in which it was played – the 'practices' that it involved. For those that played the game, whether on a casual basis in pubs or competitively in a league, this was a black form of dominoes.

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[40] See A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub: the pub games of Britain* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2009), p. 144.
[41] Mass-Observation, *The Pub and the People: a Worktown study* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943), p. 302.
[42] *Ibid*., pp. 301-302. It was noted that 'Worktown' was one of the few places in the country dominoes often consisted of pieces with dots that went up to nine.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 301.
[44] A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub*, p. 147.

In the first instance, the aim of the game played by black players is to get to seven or multiples of seven as opposed to 'Fives and Threes'.[45] The game consists of two pairs facing each other across a square table, with, as Taylor notes, each pair appearing to 'spend as much effort on joking and riling their opponents as they do on the inherent mental gymnastics of the battle'.[46] The showmanship highlighted by both Taylor and Austin – in particular, the practice of slamming a winning domino down on the table – is identified by players as being an integral part of the game. 'We always slam the domino down', one player remarked. 'It's to make it exciting, it's a craze. You say, "take that"'.[47] The game is 'all about the banter', another player surmised. 'If I know you haven't got any threes, I bang my threes down on the table'.[48] Amongst 'the West Indians', Len Gidden – who alongside captaining Handsworth Rangers was also a keen dominoes player – slamming the domino down is 'part and parcel of the game'.[49]

Alongside this, many black dominoes clubs also play the 'code' form of dominoes which, as the previous chapter showed, was banned from being played competitively at Handsworth Cricket Club. The aim in the code game is to 'communicate to your partner what you have got in your hands' through certain physical signs, 'without letting your opponent know what you are doing'.[50] Particular dominoes clubs have a general 'club code that everyone who joins will know', and alongside this groups of players who work well together develop their own 'private code'.[51] Roy Richards manages the Faith and Confidence Finance (FCF) social club on Soho Hill in Handsworth, which was co-founded by his father in 1971. Dominoes is regularly played at the club – 'if you come

[45] D. Williams, personal interview, 12 October 2011.
[46] A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub*, p. 148.
[47] D. Williams, personal interview, 12 October 2011.
[48] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.
[49] L. Gidden, personal interview, 18 January 2010.
[50] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.
[51] A. Crawford, personal interview, 13 June 2011.

down here any night there will be people playing'.[52] Richards remembered that as he was growing up, he was intrigued when he saw those of his parents' generation playing the code game. He 'used to laugh' when he saw people communicating through signals such as the tapping of the nose or wrist.[53] 'As a kid looking in that's what you see', Richards commented. 'I used to look through the window and see these signs and think to myself, "what's going on here?"'[54]

It was these distinct practices that many saw as making this form of dominoes specifically a black game. Just as those at Handsworth Cricket Club argued they played in a distinctively West Indian style, dominoes players emphasised that the game they play is explicitly Caribbean. 'It's an Afro-Caribbean sport that we play' concluded Johnson Gowane,[55] who captains the Bromfield Stallions, the team formed by Bert Williams in Aston, whilst another player described it as 'a Caribbean style of dominoes'.[56] For Gowane, who was a 'new arrival' in Britain, having migrated to Birmingham from Jamaica in the early 1990s, 'no one plays [dominoes] like we play it. It's unique to us – the Chinese wouldn't understand how we play'.[57] In the British context, the game's 'blackness' was defined partly against the way in which the 'the English' were perceived to play dominoes. The slamming of dominoes onto the table, for example, was seen as something particularly 'un-English'. One player observed how 'English people, they just put [the domino] down',[58] whilst Gowane argues that 'English people see [the slamming of dominoes] as something aggressive'. However, Gowane argued, the slamming of

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[52] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.
[53] *Ibid*.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[56] D. Williams, personal interview, 12 October 2011.
[57] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[58] D. Williams, personal interview, 12 October 2011.

dominoes is 'just a way of demonstrating our control'. It was seen as a way of showing that 'you are masterful'.[59]

For Pierre Bourdieu, the nature of a particular group's everyday practice is structured in part by the manifestation of a shared history in the present. The habitus represents 'a product of history' and 'produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history'.[60] It was a shared Caribbean history that many black dominoes players also referred to whilst describing the essence of their brand of the game. One player from Jamaica described how 'when we were boys' dominoes was a 'tomboy game…very robust, quite intimidating…rough and tough'.[61] Dominoes was described as a game that 'goes well with the barbeque' in the Caribbean, and was played in 'bars, shops, houses…everywhere'.[62] As the previous chapter showed, there was a close connection between dominoes and cricket in the Caribbean. 'Anywhere cricket is, there is a few tables around playing dominoes' Witter remarked,[63] and Gowane recalled that in 'Jamaica, when the cricket is on, you have a good game of dominoes – when there's a wicket, you stop'.[64] However, 'being as cricket is only played in certain seasons [and] the rest of the year was vacant…dominoes came to the fore'.[65]

On its arrival into Britain, black dominoes was often played at the pub. In Handsworth, for example, Vanley Burke has photographed a group of middle-aged black men playing dominoes at the Bull's Head on Villa Road in the early 1980s (*plate 3.1*), a pub which has since closed down. Four men sit opposite each other around a square table as one of them shuffles the dominoes in preparation for the next game. A small group of

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[59] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[60] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 109.
[61] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.
[62] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[63] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.
[64] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[65] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.

spectators – many of them wearing 'pork-pie' hats – look on from an adjacent seat, while a white barmaid brings over a tray of beverages. Usually, the particular pub that black dominoes was played at depended, as Bert Williams observed, on whether the 'gaffer [of the pub] is a black man', and he would himself commonly be a player.[66] Other pubs in Birmingham in the 1970s and 1980s at which black dominoes would be played included the Coach and Horses and the Brighton, both in the Balsall Heath area of Birmingham, and the Villa Cross, on the corner of Lozells Road and Heathfield Road in Handsworth – which, as the previous chapter showed, was closed by the police following the 1985 riots.[67]

But the game also developed away from Birmingham's established pubs. This was in part due to the hostility of many white-run establishments, both to black people in general and the black style of dominoes in particular. 'When we first came here', Don Williams recalled, 'there was segregation. People looked on you as a black bugger. You couldn't go into a white pub and play dominoes. People wouldn't play a game with you'.[68] Another player argued that 'there was very little out there for the working guys. They didn't want to go into the pubs and have arguments and things like that'.[69] Alongside the hostility of some pubs, there was also a desire amongst black players to be able to play dominoes beyond last orders. For Althea Crawford, a player at the BCA Slammers dominoes club in the Small Heath area of Birmingham, 'rather than going to the pubs and clubs, [people] liked their own place where they can play late into the night or early morning'.[70] Initially, this was often in people's homes. The Birmingham novelist Maeve Clarke has represented this fictionally in 'Letters A Yard', an epistolary story about the processes involved when the first generation attempted to obtain suitable

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[66] B. Williams, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[67] *Ibid*. Both the Brighton and the Coach and Horses are now under different management.
[68] D. Williams, personal interview, 12 October 2011.
[69] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.
[70] A. Crawford, personal interview, 13 June 2011.

accommodation in England. Having finally found a house, the story's protagonist, Munchie, writes to tell her mother in Jamaica that each week, 'the men go in the front room with them rum and play dominoes'. [71] As Anita Witter recalled, 'people would go into people's homes and just play dominoes. That was what kept them busy'. [72] In 'Letters A Yard', this makes Munchie feel like she is 'back home [in Jamaica]'. [73]

But dominoes was also increasingly played at the black social clubs that were beginning to be established in the 1960s and 1970s. The FCF club in Handsworth, for example, was formed out of a desire to have a regular meeting place for social events in the black community. Roy Richards recalled that as a child he accompanied his father to school halls or churches such as St Michael's Church in Handsworth 'to have meetings. Any time there was a function or a dominoes match, it would have to be in a [school or a church] hall'. [74] His father was part of a group that bought the premises on Soho Hill in order for the black community to 'have their own place'. [75] The 'finance' in the FCF name stems from an investment scheme that the group set up, a variation of the 'Pardner' system used by Caribbean migrants as a way of 'amassing capital for immediate needs'. [76] Each member of the group put a certain amount of money into a shared fund each month, until they could afford to buy the premises on Soho Hill. 'We've continued in the community ever since', Richards stated. 'If anyone wants to have a birthday party, or a funeral or whatever, we are there for that. Every weekend we put on dances and other events'. [77] At FCF, games of dominoes were social events that formed part of this routine.

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[71] M. Clarke, 'Letters A Yard', in L. Ross & Y Brissett (eds.), *Whispers in the Walls: new black and Asian voices from Birmingham* (Birmingham: Tindal St Press, 2001) p. 21.
[72] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.
[73] M. Clarke, 'Letters A Yard', p. 21.
[74] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.
[75] *Ibid*.
[76] M. & T. Phillips, *Windrush*, p. 99.
[77] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.

Many of the practices associated with dominoes were formalised in 1989 with the formation of the Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League (ACDL). There had been numerous attempts at establishing a competitive league throughout the 1970s and 1980s,[78] but the ACDL has been by far the most successful. Teams such as the Bromfield Stallions, the BCA Slammers and the Hampton Hawks in Birmingham compete against other clubs from across the country in matches that take place annually between April and October, culminating in a 'grand final', where teams play off for final league position. Each club competes in their own team colours and there is a £10 fine for anyone not wearing the team uniform,[79] as well as a £50 fine for swearing.[80] The league has received sponsorship from multi-national firms such as Grace Foods, Guinness and Western Union, 'companies with a large Caribbean following',[81] and by the early 2000s, the ACDL had 3,000 members, with big matches often drawing up to 2,000 spectators (*plate 3.1*).[82]

Each ACDL match is officiated by a referee drawn from a neutral club in order to ensure fair play. However, as Crawford remarked, 'there are a few teams out there that are very conniving' and are 'known for cheating'.[83] 'Coding', for example, was legalised in the ACDL partly because of the impossibility of detecting the codes. The more experienced teams were perceived as often attempting to 'take advantage' of younger teams by 'banging the table and telling their opponents to hurry up'.[84] There is a juxtaposition in black dominoes, between the overt showmanship of players, and the intellectual side of the game, the necessity for players to keep count and attempt to 'read' the play of opponents. Thus in a promotional leaflet for the ACDL, funded by Guinness,

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[78] One of the original attempts was called the 'Big Twelve' league. A. Crawford, personal interview, 13 June 2011.

[79] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.

[80] D. Davies, 'Pub games: dominoes', in *Time Out* London, from Internet source: http://www.timeout.com/london/features/307/Pub_games-dominoes.html (accessed 29 October 2011).

[81] A. Witter, personal interview, 17 June 2006.

[82] A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub*, p. 149; D. Davies, 'Pub games: dominoes', in *Time Out* London.

[83] A. Crawford, personal interview, 13 June 2011.

[84] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.

a key requirement of dominoes is summarised as being an 'understanding of the power of words and sounds'.[85] Players are described as 'employing sound to intimidate opponents. The bang of the table is often used to humiliate a defeated player. Incessant conversation, jokes, red herrings and wordplay are used to antagonise opponents into submission'.[86] Yet amongst the players themselves, those who are respected most are often the players that do not take part in such intimidation, or resort to the use of codes. As one player put it, 'the real dominoes players can work the game out without signs – the best players don't need it'.[87] This is called the 'mental' variation of the game, or, as one player put it, the 'purer game'. [88]

In spite of the professional aspirations of the ACDL, it retains a social function that in many ways forms the essence of black dominoes. Matches in the ACDL start at four in the afternoon, but break at seven for food and after the game is over, 'people go on to enjoy themselves by having a recreational dance lasting to the early hours of the morning'.[89] It is the responsibility of the home team 'to provide the entertainment after the game. We put on food like rice and peas, and play music until three or four in the morning. Win or lose, after the game it's fun'.[90] At its most basic level, whether it is played at pubs such as the Bull's Head, social clubs such as FCF or in the ACDL, dominoes is simply a way of passing the time. As one regular player put it, dominoes is to 'fill the needs of people when they have a free weekend – you meet a lot of friends and meet a lot of people'.[91] Although matches in the ACDL largely take place in community halls or even in hotels in order to accommodate the large numbers of spectators, the game

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[85] Guinness Foreign Extra Stout/ACDL, 'The Domino Effect' promotional leaflet, c. early 2000s, pp. 1 &17.
[86] *Ibid*.,p. 17.
[87] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] A. Crawford, personal interview, 13 June 2011.
[90] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[91] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.

remains in essence a pub game. As Gowane puts it, 'drinking is a big part of dominoes culture. You drink during the game and after it. And you keep on playing dominoes until the music stops'.[92]

There is an essential ordinariness to black dominoes, something well illustrated in *Private Space*, a series of paintings by the Handsworth artist Barbara Walker. Walker was born in Birmingham and grew up in Handsworth in the 1970s, and uses her work to attempt to communicate the significance of scenes away from what might be termed the 'exciting' in Handsworth. Walker wants to move beyond the prevalence of images of Rastafarianism or reggae music to define black communities in Britain, something that she regards as having become a 'stereotype'.[93] There 'was more to the community', she argued, 'more to us than the Lion of Judah or Bob Marley'.[94] To attempt to communicate this, Walker turns to dominoes. In one painting in *Private Face*, of a group of people playing in a community centre, the energy and showmanship that many players saw as being inherent to the game is absent. The players appear calm: this is perhaps a 'mental' game of dominoes, and the participants are elderly – one player is sitting in a wheelchair whilst another has a pair of crutches. One of the players in the painting is wearing a hat with the West Indian cricket team's logo.

Race was embedded in dominoes, in its associated practices such as the slamming of dominoes on table or the use of 'codes', but also in the game itself. It was race that meant that these practices were understood amongst the black community as being, to use Bourdieu's terms, 'for the likes of us'. This may have been particularly clear with the generation of player that Walker's painting depicted. As Roy Richards put it, 'remember that Bill Shankly phrase about football being more important than life or death? It's like

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[92] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[93] B. Walker, personal interview, 17 June 2011.
[94] *Ibid*.

that for people of my parents' generation and dominoes'.[95] But as Walker's artwork suggests, dominoes was also a practice with which many of the younger generations who were born in Britain also associated themselves. In the ACDL, 'some youngsters who were silent witnesses to their parents, uncles, older siblings and extended families playing dominoes into the night, have now become players'.[96] As the following sections on the church and the home will demonstrate, the permeation of race in everyday, 'unexciting' ways in Handsworth meant a series of common practices that, whilst they may have been approached from different vantage points, were understood as 'black' by both old and young. As Andrea Williams – Bert Williams' daughter – put it with regard to dominoes, 'dominoes is a heritage thing. I always remember my dad had a table in the house and the hustle and bustle of it. I wanted to learn about it, and I want my son to learn about it'.[97]

The church

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Vanley Burke worked to establish a photographic record of the role of the church in Handsworth. His focus in particular was on the activities of the Austin Road United Church of God, a Pentecostal church founded in Handsworth in 1975.[98] 'My approach to religion', Burke commented, came out of a wider emphasis on 'documenting black people as they strive to establish themselves in England'.[99] Burke chose to focus on the practices of one particular congregation in order to develop a close relationship with them, and he gained access through his mother and grandmother, both of whom were church members.[100] His photographs capture the rituals

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[95] R. Richards, personal interview, 18 June 2010.

[96] Guinness Foreign Extra Stout/ACDL, 'The Domino Effect' promotional leaflet, c. early 2000s, p. 27.

[97] A. Williams, personal interview, 16 September 2010.

[98] See internet source: http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Lib-Central-Archives-and-Heritage%2FPageLayout&cid=1223092755358&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper (accessed 7 July 2011).

[99] V. Burke, cited from internet source: http://www.digitalhandsworth.org.uk (accessed 7 July 2011).

[100] V. Burke, cited from *ibid*.

that took place both inside and outside the church. Inside it, for example, Burke documented formal church rituals – a gospel choir singing, for example, or a man being baptised by immersion, as one member put it, 'giving his heart to the Lord' (*plate 3.2*).[101] Outside it, Burke photographed a group of younger women on a 'campaign for lost souls', an annual event with the slogan 'win the lost at any cost'.[102] In another photograph, taken in the aftermath of a funeral in Handsworth, a group of men are singing in the house of the deceased and are using the Bible as the hymn book. The practice, known in the Caribbean as 'ni'night', involves chanting from the bible 'in a long drawn out' and intentionally 'incoherent way. If someone sounds too clear, they will stop and someone else will take over' (*plate 3.2*).[103]

The conceptualisation of religion within popular narratives of black settlement has been dominated by stories of early experiences with racism in Britain. In the Birmingham Black Oral History Project, for example, one respondent recounted attending her local Anglican church in the 1950s and being told by the vicar to '"find another church because I don't want to lose my parishioners"'.[104] As late as 1988, the Diocese of Birmingham recognised that 'the alienation felt by black people from many of the indigenous denominations was strong', and argued that 'local Christian Churches often failed to address the issue seriously'.[105] Black church attendance in Britain is often defined in relation to these experiences, as a form of resistance to them. As the black theologian Joe Aldred has argued, one reaction to racism in the church was to say, '"well this is our church, we are not going anywhere"'.[106] Those who chose to stay in the Methodist,

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[101] L. Smith, cited from *ibid*.
[102] V. Burke, cited from *ibid*.
[103] *Ibid*.
[104] E. Lancaster, cited in Birmingham Black Oral History Project, Cassette 2 Side B, 1992, available from Internet source: http://www.bbohp.org.uk/node/2 (accessed 2 August 2011).
[105] R. O'Brien/Church of England, *Faith in the City of Birmingham: an examination of problems and opportunities facing a city* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1988), p. 26.
[106] J. Aldred, personal interview, 22 June 2011.

Anglican or United Reform traditions would therefore often witness at first hand the process of 'white flight' from places such as Handsworth, as the white members of the congregation either died or moved away from the area. Those who 'were once overlooked and often despised' became 'the fulcrum and bedrock of these churches'.[107]

Another reaction amongst black churchgoers was for people to establish new churches in Handsworth. This was also influenced by the relative lack of Pentecostal denominations in Britain. In the Caribbean, twenty-five per cent of churches were Pentecostal – defined as a combination of the Baptist 'fundamentalist gospel' and the 'African belief in the supernatural' – and although a few Pentecostal churches did exist in Britain in the 1950s,[108] these were based on a different doctrinal interpretation to that generally found in the Caribbean.[109] Many black people who felt rejected from their own denominations in Britain often joined the new black Pentecostal churches that were emerging.[110] The Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ was one such church in Handsworth. The climate in Birmingham, recalled Gerald Edmund, who helped form the church, was 'very racist'.[111] People were 'not welcome in a lot of the main churches' and, before moving to a permanent premises in Gibson Road in 1955, people 'congregated together' in 'somebody's bedroom'.[112] By the 1980s, alongside Bethel there were numerous other majority-black churches across Handsworth. These included the Pentecostal Austin Road Church of United God and the New Testament Church of God, established in 1962 on George Street, as well as the Cannon Street Memorial Baptist

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[107] A. Reddie, 'Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders', in M. Jagessar & A. Reddie (eds), *Black Theology in Britain: a reader* (London: Equinox, 2007), p. 195.
[108] D. Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 27.
[109] Black Pentecostalism regards there to be 'three stages in the process of salvation' – faith, sanctification and baptism. The majority of white Pentecostal churches in Britain adhered to a 'two stage' interpretation in which 'sanctification and justification happen at the same time'. See R. Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal: a political theology for the black church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000), p. 3. See also I. Macrobert, 'Black Pentecostalism: its origins, functions and theology', unpublished Ph.D thesis (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1989).
[110] J. Aldred, personal interview, 22 June 2011.
[111] B. Edmund, personal interview, 9 February 2011.
[112] *Ibid*.

Church, established in 1931, and the Villa Road Methodist Church, formed in the early 1900s.

Race was manifest in a number of different religious practices in 1980s black Handsworth. As with the practices involved in the game of dominoes, many religious practices were often informed by a shared Caribbean history. In a piece of research undertaken in 2004, for example, Jennifer Hunter Smith, a trained pastoral theologian, spent twelve months researching the forms of religious worship at Villa Road Methodist Church in an attempt to 'redeem the ordinary' of their religious practice.[113] She argues that whether members were 'telling', 'showing' or 'doing' holiness, they were often engaged in practices that implicitly referenced a style of worshipping that they had known in the Caribbean.[114] For one member, for example, holiness was 'showed' by placing fresh flowers on the altar each Sunday. When she was asked why this was important to her, 'she talked about the fragrance of flowers blowing through open windows when she was a girl in Jamaica'.[115]

Smith also highlighted a desire for a 'sense of occasion and special gathering in worship' amongst the congregation at Villa Road.[116] Members wanted sermons delivered in a 'blunt' fashion and to represent occasions that were 'worth getting dressed up for'.[117] Although the notion of 'Sunday best' is a pervasive feature of church going in any context, a particular emphasis was placed on it in black churches. Esmee Mignott, for example, migrated to Birmingham from Jamaica in 1954 and joined Cannon Street in 1969, and makes the emphasis placed on dressing up particularly clear. 'Dressing up is important to me', she remarked, 'because whatever you have, God has given it to you'.[118]

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[113] J. H. Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew', p. 34.
[114] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] *Ibid*., p. 97.
[117] *Ibid*.
[118] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.

Mignott remembered that her Pentecostal grandmother made her get her church clothes ready on a Saturday, and if 'they weren't ready on Saturday, don't get them ready on Sunday morning because you won't be going to church'.[119] Dressing up for church was the perpetuation of this history in the present.[120] 'I like to dress up, I like to wear a hat…the men as well, they are properly dressed in their suits. You always put your Sunday best on. We are worshipping God…give him the best'.[121]

Another aspect of religious practice for many church members often involved taking part in the community activities that various churches undertook in the 1980s. In the mid-1980s, for example, Cannon Street established the Olive Branch Community Centre, a service that provided a free daily luncheon, an advice surgery and an annual 'Caribbean night' in which the church 'provide[s] Caribbean foods' and puts on a 'mini concert'.[122] In 1984, Esme Lancaster – who was born in Jamaica in 1918 and migrated to Birmingham in 1950 – helped set up a senior citizens club at the New Testament Church of God as well as, three years later, a day care centre for local under-fives.[123] For Lancaster, who also volunteered at the Harambee hostel for young people discussed in Chapter Two, such community work was a critical part of her religious commitment, and in 2000 she received an MBE for her work.[124] Lancaster might, therefore, be seen as being an exceptional example, and her missionary zeal – articulated throughout her 2006 autobiography *My Journeys Through Life* – could be regarded as being a particularly strong feature of the habitus for a generation who grew up in a Caribbean society in which seventy per cent of people regularly attended church.[125] 'God is counting on me',

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[119] *Ibid*.
[120] See P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 109.
[121] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.
[122] *Ibid*.
[123] See E. Lancaster, *My Journeys Through Life* (Willenhall: Birches, 2006), pp. 123-132.
[124] See R. Oruye, 'Final Tributes for Handsworth Community Leader Esme Lancaster', *Birmingham Mail*, Feb 2 2009, cited from internet source: http://www.birminghammail.net/news/top-stories/2009/02/09/final-tributes-to-handsworth-community-leader-esme-lancaster-97319-22883025/ (accessed 4 August 2011).
[125] C. S. Hill, *West Indian Migrants and the London Churches* (London: OUP, 1965), p. 121.

Lancaster wrote. 'When I pledge, I must pay'.[126] However, although to varying degrees, there was also a religious commitment demonstrated by the young as well as the old in 1980s Handsworth. Whilst the majority of members at Villa Road, for example, were indeed first generation immigrants,[127] during the 1980s, at Cannon Street in particular, a significant number of younger people were active within the church, and many of these maintained a religious commitment even if their parents did not.

For some younger people, religious routine was a central feature of everyday life. Deleyen Smith, for example, was born in Handsworth in 1962 and has lived in the area 'all my life'.[128] Although his parents would go to church for weddings and funerals, they were 'not religious' and Smith was the first member of his family who 'came to know the Lord', having been baptised at Cannon Street in 1979.[129] The point of entry into the church for younger generations was commonly Sunday school or similar youth groups held at the church. Gordon attended both the Boys' Brigade and Sunday school, and described how every fourth Sunday the Brigade would 'march down to Soho road' with each member 'dressed up in uniform'.[130] Icilda Smith, who was born in Birmingham in 1963, attended the Girls' Brigade each Tuesday and recalled that people would 'come and sit and chat and play pool and table tennis'.[131] For Deleyen Smith, joining the church was a 'sort of calling', and following his baptism, he became active in various aspects of church life, including the Olive Branch Community Centre.[132] One of Smith's peers at Cannon Street was Keith Gordon, who was born in Sparkhill in 1963 but grew up in Handsworth. Similar to Deleyan Smith, Gordon's parents – who migrated to England

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[126] E. Lancaster, *My Journeys Through Life*, p. 74.
[127] J. H. Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew', p. 4.
[128] Interview with D. Smith, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-004, 2006.
[129] *Ibid*.
[130] Interview with K. Gordon, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-032, 2006.
[131] Interview with Icilda Smith, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-025, 2006.
[132] Interview with D. Smith, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-004, 2006.

from Jamaica in 1960 – 'were not involved with the church in any great respect', and it was following his own baptism in 1979 that Gordon began to get involved in the everyday practices of the church.[133] Both he and Smith played in the church band each Sunday, for example, with Gordon a singer and Smith a guitarist. Gordon articulated a commitment to the church that is reminiscent of Lancaster. He recalled that he began to do 'a lot of evangelising' following his baptism, for example. 'I was so enthused, I wanted to talk about what I believed in'.[134]

For people with less of a commitment to the church, religion was a routine that had to be fitted in around various others in everyday life, including reggae culture. This is fictionally represented in 'Matthew 7, Verse 1', a short story by the Birmingham author Beverly Wood. The story centres on Lauren and her best friend Joy who, after an absence from church for a period, decide to attend a service at 'a tiny church off Soho Road' in Handsworth, having been at a blues dance the night before. On entering the church, Lauren registers the 'ritualistic grooming and dressing up' of the congregation, most of whom she thinks otherwise 'looked very plain' in daily life.[135] Although both women are careful to put on makeup to cover up the previous night's excesses, they do not have difficulty moving from the practices involved in reggae culture to those that take place in the church. The friends begin to sing along 'with the old gospel choruses', which they regard as being 'almost pepped up to dancehall standards'.[136] As the service progresses, Lauren observes that her friend is 'already lost in the rhythm, clapping her hands, eyes closed. Her face held the same serene expression as last night, only then she'd been

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[133] Interview with K. Gordon, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-032, 2006.
[134] Interview with K. Gordon, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-032, 2006.
[135] B. Wood, 'Matthew 7, Verse 1', in L. Ross & Y. Brissett (eds.), *Whispers in the Walls*, p. 32.
[136] *Ibid*., p. 37.

dancing slowly, puffing a joint, joined at the groin with the best looking man at the party'.[137]

There were often direct interactions between the religious practices and those that take place in other areas of everyday life. In the ACDL, for example, it is common for each dominoes team to 'say the Lord's Prayer' before each match.[138] Jacko Melody was born and brought up in Winson Green, a district neighbouring Handsworth. He remembers that 'you had to go to church, there was no way that you could get away from it, unless you were sick and dying in your bed. Sunday school, Sunday best, all of it, you had to go'.[139] But it was going to church that meant Melody 'found out that I had a voice'.[140] Whilst Keith Gordon and Deleyan Smith restricted their playing to the Cannon Street church band, moving the church, in Smith's words, 'in a *Top of the Pops* direction',[141] Melody and others began toasting in sound systems and singing in reggae bands in their leisure time – Melody himself became the lead singer in Eclipse, a reggae band formed in the Winson Green area of Birmingham.

Some people attended church on a similarly casual basis to that depicted in 'Matthew 7, Verse 1', perhaps only for special occasions such as funerals or weddings. As one member of Cannon Street remarked, reflecting on her youth in the 1980s prior to joining the church, 'I did the things that young people do. I went out with friends…I had a weekend job…I never really gave church a second thought really, I mean except for weddings or official gatherings'.[142] Vanley Burke's desire to compile a record of the black community has led him to deposit in Birmingham Central Library a vast collection of memorial cards and wedding invitations from similarly 'official' gatherings at various

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[137] *Ibid*., pp. 36-37.
[138] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.
[139] J. Melody, personal interview, 9 June 2011.
[140] *Ibid*.
[141] Interview with D. Smith, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-004, 2006.
[142] Anonymous interviewee, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-022, 2006.

churches in Handsworth throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[143] Alongside the dozens of eulogies paying tribute to the lives of people who were 'sadly missed by all who knew them', this archive also provides a record of the banalities of these occasions, such as, for instance, the particular menu provided at a wedding reception that was held at the New Inns Pub on Holyhead Road in 1987.[144]

Even where this is not immediately evident, race was lived out by the residents of black Handsworth through these religious routines. Away from the church itself, many such routines took place in the home. In the 1950s churches such as the Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ started in people's homes. By the 1970s and 1980s, religion was manifest in the home in different ways. Bible reading groups, for example, became a central feature of everyday life in many black households. One person described reading the Psalms as 'my everyday breakfast', part of a 'daily list': 'every morning I get up to do it, that's my comfort and I don't do without it'.[145] Another person reflected how 'in the morning, sometimes I pray before I read *Word of Today* and sometimes I read before I pray', and in the evenings, 'I read my Bible and if I don't feel like it I watch my telly'.[146] Such practices might be regarded as universal for those with a particular religious commitment. However, even the most banal of religious practices were black. These religious practices often took place in the front room which, as the following section will demonstrate, in its specific form and style, was a black space. The front room became a 'prayer room' in many black houses, and was 'used for sundry or subsidiary meetings' of the church'.[147] As one woman said, the front room would be 'open for *Prayer Meetings*

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[143] See Vanley Burke Archive, Faith and Religious Expression, Birmingham Central Library, MS2192/C/A/3.

[144] Wedding invitation from Mr and Mrs Haughton to the marriage of Carol Brown and Silbert McQueen, 20 June 1987, Vanley Burke Archive, Birmingham Central Library, MS2192/C/A/3.

[145] 'VC', cited in J. H. Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew', p. 55.

[146] Interview with Mrs Miller, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-001, 2006.

[147] Pastor D. Burnett, cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009)., p. 61.

every Friday night'. But afterwards, her mother would 'say goodbye to everyone' and 'lock Jesus in the front room behind her'.[148] In black households, the following section will show, the front room was, as Stuart Hall put it, a particularly 'sacred space'.[149]

The Front Room

The 'sacred' nature of the black front room was often communicated by the overt presence of religious iconography, something captured in two photographs featured in John Reardon and Derek Bishton's Handsworth photo-journal, *Home Front*. In one image, two women pose for the camera on a chair, behind which, hung on the floral wallpaper in the centre of the room, is a painting of the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus (*plate 3.3*). In another photograph, two young men stand in suits in the front room during a wake. The walls of the room are bare, aside from the wallpaper and the painting of a blue-eyed Jesus. Alongside paintings of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, the black front room would often feature 'embroidered religious texts' with messages such as '"Christ is the head of this home, the unseen guest at the table"'.[150] However, although prayer groups, wakes and other religious events would take place in this space, the front room was also 'sacred' in the more general sense of the word. It was, for instance, commonly locked up in order to emphasise that it was a place apart from the rest of the house. James Pogson – a writer who grew up in the Small Heath area of Birmingham – remembered that as a child 'you didn't play in the front room', and described the front room as like a 'showroom'.[151] The front room was the place in which expensive or treasured objects were kept, and where important visitors to the house were entertained. As Esme Mignott remarked, 'you've got to secure a room that when you have visitors, you put them in

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[148] A. Le Mar, cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 78.

[149] S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 23.

[150] D. Murphy, *Tales From Two Cities*, (London : Murray, 1987) p. 163; D. Burnett, cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 61.

[151] J. Pogson, personal interview, 21 November 2011.

there.   The minister might come and visit you. You can sit in there in comfort and you are not disturbed by anybody'.[152]

In Maeve Clarke's short story 'Letters A Yard', the home forms a recurring backdrop to the changing fortunes of Munchie and her husband Nico. The change in the nature of the couple's home corresponds to the changes in their lives in Birmingham. In the first letter home to her mother, Munchie states that they have found a house but that they 'have to share with some Indian people'.[153] Following the birth of another child some years later, the couple are seeking to buy a larger house but struggle to find a willing seller. 'Every time is the same', Nico tells his wife. 'When dem see me dem seh da house just sell. If I did only come yesterday, or de day before. Bet you next week dem still have "For Sale" sign in the window. It mek me so tired'.[154] Yet when the couple eventually find a property, in their letters home they do not allude to their struggles in any detail. As Clarke remarked, 'you couldn't be seen to be failing'.[155] Rather, Munchie writes to tell her mother that her husband has bought her 'a wooden cabinet as a present. It so pretty, Mamma, I can't wait till I have some nice plates and glasses to put in there'.[156]

Recollections of the traumas associated with early attempts to find suitable accommodation – and the ubiquitous '"No Colour"' sign placed in the windows of ostensibly available accommodation – occupy a central position within popular narratives of black settlement in Britain.[157] In spite of such difficulties, however, as 'Letters A Yard' suggests, people were eventually able to obtain suitable properties. By 1985,

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[152] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.
[153] M. Clarke, 'Letters A Yard', p. 13.
[154] *Ibid*., p. 18.
[155] M. Clarke, personal interview, 26 June 2011.
[156] M. Clarke, 'Letters A Yard', p. 18.
[157] See various testimony in T. Phillips & M. Phillips, *Windrush: the irresistible rise of multi-racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 89.

almost half of all households in Handsworth were owner-occupied.[158]   Yet the significance of the everyday practices that took place inside the home – the 'wooden cabinets', religious paintings and other objects people put in them, the style in which people dressed them, even the rooms that particular activities took place in – has only recently begun to be considered. The emphasis has largely been on the initial search for the home rather than the more mundane story of what happened inside it.

By the 1980s, the front room was a significant site of consumption.   The importance of objects in the front room was captured in *Auntie Linda's Front Room* (1987), the photographs of the domestic sphere in Handsworth taken by Maxine Walker (*plate 3.3*).[159] Walker photographs middle-aged black women posing in the domestic surroundings of their front rooms. The women are in the foreground of each image, but the eye is drawn to the domestic backdrop behind them, and in particular, the items that are on display (*plate 3.3*). In one photograph, for example, this includes a sofa, a wall decoration, and a wooden cabinet containing ornaments of different shapes and sizes. In another photograph in the same series, a woman sits next to a television, on top of which are various ornaments and behind it is a bookshelf containing china and yet more ornaments.

Although with differing reference points, the front room can be seen to form a part of the Victorian 'parlour' tradition in which the consumption of various luxury items for the home was seen as a 'potent means of self-expression', a way of making a 'decorative statement' regarding the position of the well-to-do in contemporary Victorian society.[160] The Victorian parlour also influenced working class domestic cultures, but as Esme

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[158]Birmingham Area Studies Group, *Handsworth/Soho/Lozells: Inner Area Study 1985/6* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 1986), p. 11.
[159] For a discussion of Maxine Walker's work, see G. Tawadros, 'Redrawing the Boundaries', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine: the critical decade*, vol. 2 no. 3, Spring 1992, p. 90.
[160] D. Cohen, *Household Gods: the British and their possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 121 & 125.

Mignott makes clear, the front room in the form captured by Walker was regarded as 'a tradition people brought from home [in the Caribbean]. You have your settees, and you may have a little cabinet where you put your special cups and saucers that only your special guests use. We are like that, we like to keep one place clean'.[161] James Pogson commented that 'in my parents' front room, there's this cabinet in there with all the cutlery that was given to my parents as wedding presents. It comes out very, very, very rarely. I don't remember the last time we used it. When we used to get any trophies, we used to put them in there. My district sports medals, my degree, they are all in the front room'.[162]

The nature of the front room space was further elaborated by Michael McMillan's 2005 exhibition on the 'West Indian' front room, which also corresponded with a BBC television documentary and publication, *The Front Room*.[163] Prominent features of the front room were described as including patterned wallpaper that 'sort of but never perfectly' matched the patterned carpet,[164] ornaments and china on display in glass cabinets, paraffin heaters and religious iconography and texts framed on the walls (*plate 3.3*).

McMillan recalled that the exhibition provoked 'emotional responses' from visitors.[165] In the comments books that the Geffrye Museum kept open for its duration, younger generations remarked that the exhibition brought back memories of their own childhood. Visitors wrote that the exhibition 'brought a shiver to my spine and a tear to my eye',[166] and remarked that 'we had a paraffin heater just like that…I burnt myself on

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[161] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.

[162] J. Pogson, personal interview, 21 November 2011.

[163] *Tales from the Front Room* (Z. Percival, 2007); M. McMillan, *The Front Room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009).

[164] S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 20.

[165] M. McMillan, 'Migrant Aesthetics in the Front Room', cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 10.

[166] Anonymous commenter, in *The West Indian Front Room* comments book, Geffrye Museum of the Home exhibition archives, London.

it'.[167] One visitor wondered why 'people's front rooms are the same, no matter which West Indian island they come from'.[168] Another commented that 'if my aunty was here she would say, "have you been to my house while I was out and taken all my furniture?"[169] There were similar themes in a discussion of the exhibition on Blacknet, an African-Caribbean social networking website. Users reminisced about 'those small whiskey glasses neatly stored in the posh black cabinet in the posh front room', and 'the plastic floor covering which was obligatory'.[170] One user commented that these were items that 'all black folks had back in the day',[171] whilst a visitor to the exhibition wrote that that walking around it was 'like going to my Aunt's, cousin's or any other West Indian house in the 1980s'.[172] There were similar responses from various interviewees for this thesis upon being shown a copy of *The Front Room*. As one interviewee put it, 'it was like that, that was exactly how it was'.[173] The exhibition was 'like taking a trip down memory lane', one visitor wrote;[174] it made one person 'want to take my shoes off and sit down'.[175]

Whereas the object for the Victorian middle classes was often to obtain furnishings that were ever more extravagant in nature, from stuffed crocodile card holders to waste-paper baskets 'fashioned from an elephant's foot',[176] the objects that furnished the black front room on the surface appear less ambitious. In *The Front Room*, for example, there is a list of the 'top ten' items in the front room. Alongside the china

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[167] *Ibid*.

[168] Mr Browm, in *The West Indian Front Room* comments book, Geffrye Museum of the Home exhibition archives, London.

[169] Leticia, in *The West Indian Front Room* comments book, Geffrye Museum of the Home exhibition archives, London.

[170] 'Kunjufu' user on User on Blacknet forum, from internet source: http://www.bnvillage.co.uk/village-square/79543-west-indian-front-room.html (accessed 28 July 2011).

[171] *Ibid*.

[172] Anonymous commenter, in *The West Indian Front Room* comments book, Geffrye Museum of the Home exhibition archives, London.

[173] J. Aldred, personal interview, 22 June 2011.

[174] Anonymous commenter, in *The West Indian Front Room* comments book, Geffrye Museum of the Home exhibition archives, London.

[175] *Ibid*.

[176] D. Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. xv.

cabinet and floral-patterned wallpaper,[177] this included the paraffin heater, drinks trolley and the 'Blue Spot' Radiogram.[178] These items clearly had practical functions, but they were also purchased for reasons other than their 'use-value'.[179] Many were prized by their owners in much the same way as stuffed crocodile card holders were by the Victorian middle classes. If the Victorian middle classes had an appreciation of items that were excessively lavish, the residents of black Handsworth on the surface appeared to have more reserved tastes. However, in the particular context of black Britain in the 1980s items such as radiograms and coffee tables were regarded as being in their own way lavish. Having a front room was 'a bit posh', one respondent remarked in *The Front Room*. 'The first thing I put in it was a three-piece settee and a coffee table. It was gorgeous…my three piece suite was more important than my bed'.[180]

For Stuart Hall, the aesthetics of the front room were in part influenced by the 'class shift' that occurred as people migrated from lower-middle-class professions in the Caribbean into working class occupations in England.[181] The front room for many people functioned as a physical link to the respectability they had enjoyed in the Caribbean. The items in the front room enabled people to 'raise themselves', Hall argues,[182] or as one interviewee put it, 'present as someone who is not poor'.[183] Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital' is a way of explaining the specific tastes that are adopted by distinct groups in society. For Bourdieu, the status of capital is always the product of an internal dialogue.[184] Although people have realistic expectations based on how much capital they are likely to be able to obtain – influenced by the 'durable dispositions' of the habitus – it

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[177] M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 58.
[178] 'Blue Spot' is the name given in England to the German electronics manufacture, *Blaupunkt.*
[179] A. Warde, 'Consumption and Theories of Practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5:2, 2005, p. 147.
[180] L. Small, cited in *The Front Room*, p. 47.
[181] S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 19.
[182] *Ibid*.
[183] J. Aldred, personal interview, 22 June 2011.
[184] See P. Bourdieu, 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', in R. Brown (ed.), *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change: Papers in the Sociology of Education* (London: Tavistock, 1973), for a full account of the concept of cultural capital.

is nevertheless possible for people to 'gamble' in the hope of achieving greater capital.[185]

Thus just as for the Victorian middle classes virtually 'no scheme was off limits' in an endeavour to increase capital within the home,[186] in the context of black Britain 'people visited one another and monitored what the next-door neighbour had'.[187] As the writer and broadcaster Trevor Phillips put it in *The Front Room*, whether it was a three-piece settee or a cabinet with which to display 'some nice plates and glasses',[188] if 'you didn't have one in your front room you weren't anybody'.[189]

In the late-1970s, the subject of black domestic life was beginning to be included in the output produced at BBC Pebble Mill in Birmingham, where the drama department had the aim of reflecting the changing demographics of the wider city.[190] *Black Christmas* (1977), for example, was a one-off play written by the Guyanese writer Michael Abbensetts, and depicted Christmas Day in the life of one particular black family. As Paul Long points out, 'while Handsworth is the ostensible setting, the drama is very much about interiority – of domestic space, relationships and emotional life'.[191] *Black Christmas* acted as a 'template' that allowed Pebble Mill to develop dramas that could represent the 'textures of black life and culture amidst a recognisable Birmingham'.[192] It was followed by *Empire Road*, which ran for two series on BBC Two between 1978 and 1979. The series was also written by Abbensetts – who spent six months in Handsworth undertaking research for it – and the length of *Empire Road*

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[185] P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford, California : Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 217.
[186] D. Cohen, *Household Gods*, pp. 125-126.
[187] S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 20.
[188] M. Clarke, 'Letters A Yard', p. 18.
[189] Cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 36.
[190] See P. Long, 'Representing Race, and Place: Black Midlanders on Television in the 1960s and 1970s', *Midland History* Vol. 36 No. 2, 2011, p. 272.
[191] *Ibid.*, p. 273.
[192] *Ibid.*

enabled Abbensetts to explore themes in black community life in much greater detail.[193] An emphasis on black domesticity was one recurring aspect of this.

One of the pivotal relationships of the series is that between Everton (Norman Beaton) and Hortense Bennett (Corrine Skinner-Carter), an aspirational couple who own numerous properties in the local area, and Miss May (Rosa Roberts), a single mother who runs the local fish and chip shop. In the book that accompanies the first series, also written by Abbensetts, Hortense is shocked to find out that her brother has started a relationship with Miss May, whose job Hortense regards as a clear sign of 'common[ness]'.[194] The set of *Empire Road*, in particular the Bennetts' domestic space, with its loud wallpaper, china cabinet and drinks trolley, has obvious parallels with McMillan's exhibition more than twenty five years later, and Hortense's anxieties about May are often played out in the home. At one point, Hortense 'looked around her living-room. She had chosen all the furniture in this room. The thought of someone like May…*dirtying* her chairs made her shudder… "I'd have to cover our nice, nice chairs wit' newspaper"', she remarks.[195]

In one particularly revealing scene, May visits the Bennetts' home for the first time and it becomes clear that both Hortense and her husband are in fact relishing the chance to show off their interior – and therefore their superior cultural capital. As Everton shows May into his house, he catches her stealing 'a glance at the Bennett's expensive stereo, the drinks cabinet and the colour television set'.[196] With particular relish, Hortense asks her guest if she will have something from the drinks trolley. 'A little sherry…some white wine? *Chilled* white wine? Some rum, brandy, you like brandy, or

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[193] M. Abbensetts, personal interview, 1 July 2009.
[194] M. Abbensetts, *Empire Road*, p. 93.
[195] *Ibid*.
[196] *Ibid*., p. 106.

dere's gin, vodka, Martini, Rosso. Take your pick'.[197] As Denise Noble argues, in the Caribbean, women who drank alcohol except on special occasions were commonly perceived as 'flighty'.[198] Thus in *Empire Road*, immediately after Hortense offers Miss May a beverage from the drinks trolley, she makes it clear that that she herself does not drink alcohol. Abstinence was another way of Hortense demonstrating her superior cultural capital. Having offered May her choice in refreshment, Hortense 'threw in the clincher. "Of course, *I* don't drink"'.[199]

For James Pogson, 'a lot of black British kids [of my generation] can identify with the front room'.[200] But children growing up in black households approached it from a fundamentally different perspective to their parents. In the first instance, younger generations were allowed in the front room only on particular occasions. Pogson, for example, remembered that when his mother 'got involved in Tupperware, she'd have Tupperware parties in the front room. Me and my brothers would be in the living room, all the women would be in the front room, and we would try and go in there and get a glimpse – we were like, "wow, people are actually sitting down"'.[201] On occasion, children might be assigned a particular task in the front room, but they would always be under close supervision. Pogson recalled that if visitors 'like my Godfather came around, I was allowed to mix the drinks from the drinks trolley', although 'I was never allowed to taste them'.[202] Similarly, Jacko Melody remembered that 'my Dad would tell me to go in there and play some records on the radiogram', but that 'you had to play what they were into', usually Calypso, Ska or the religious folk music of Jim Reeves.[203] Pogson 'grew up

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[197] *Ibid.*
[198] D. Noble, 'Dressed By Women, Used By Men', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 89.
[199] M. Abbensetts, *Empire Road*, p. 106.
[200] J. Pogson, personal interview, 21 November 2011.
[201] *Ibid.*
[202] *Ibid.*
[203] J. Melody, personal interview, 9 June 2011; J. Aldred, personal interview, 22 June 2011. As is made clear in *the Front Room*, Jim Reeves was a particular favourite within the front room, 'the icon of the day' through his brand of '"good" church music'. D. Butcher, cited in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 39.

on Jim Reeves', and remembered that he 'used to hate him'.[204] For Pogson, the front room is a 'generational thing. It's what my parents brought over from the Caribbean, and it's very much a part of their identity. For us it's like, "hold on a minute, how can you have a room in the house which is not used for anything when there's not much space anyway? What's that about?"'[205]

Men and women undertook generally defined, usually distinct roles in the front room. As Noble argues, men in particular would use the front room to 'retreat away from women and children…to play cards, have a lively game of dominoes or drink rum'.[206] But as Stuart Hall puts it, although 'men may occupy the front room, it is women who are the guardians of that sacred space'.[207] The 'basic division of responsibilities' in both middle- and working-class Victorian and Edwardian homes, in which 'women were seen as managers and men as "providers"', has been well documented.[208] As economic migrants, paid labour was of far more importance to black women in the British context, but women nevertheless exerted a particular control over the domestic sphere. This is something discernible in the work of Vanley Burke, who has photographed his own mother in the context of the domestic space in which he grew up. In this sense, these domestic photographs are somewhere between the professional photographers' art and the kinds of amateur 'snaps' that end up in family photo albums. One of Burke's photographs, for example, featured in *The Front Room*, captures his mother sitting on the settee whilst watching television in her front room in Handsworth (*plate 3.3*). Although the image presents Burke's mother in a relaxed position, lounging on the sofa, the objects in the room which form a frame around her − ornaments on shelves, religious

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[204] J. Pogson, personal interview, 21 November 2011.
[205] *Ibid*.
[206] D. Noble, 'Dressed By Women, Used By Men', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 89.
[207] S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 23.
[208] E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place: an oral history of working-class women 1890-1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 117.

iconography and texts on the walls, a patterned carpet – visually allude to both to her ownership of each object and her overall authority within this space.

Similar themes are evident in Maxine Walker's photography. Unlike in Burke's, in these images the woman in each frame is self-consciously asserting her control over the front room. The furnishings of the room make up a large proportion of each image, but it is the women who are in the foreground, most clearly in focus and looking straight into the camera. They are dressed formally in frocks and jewellery, and pose with their hands clasped firmly together. In a sense, in their self-consciousness and formality, Walker's photographs echo the Dyche portraits of the 1950s and 1960s, discussed in Chapter One. However, whereas sitters in the Dyche portraits often had to borrow items in order to project an image of cultural capital – suits, watches, pens – by the 1980s superior taste was manifest in the front room, through the ownership of items such as radiograms. As Merrise Crooks – who, as Chapter One showed, had her own photograph taken in a high-street studio in Handsworth – put it, 'the front room was special'. It was 'where you meet your special friends who have nice clothes' and 'where you show off the things that you've gathered around you since you've arrived'. [209]

Conclusion

In 1981, Gary Clarke wrote a paper that attacked the work on popular culture that was being produced by figures such as Dick Hebdige at the CCCS, where Clarke himself was a postgraduate student. Clarke argued that too much emphasis was being placed on uncovering the actions of those in 'authentic' subcultures, which were 'counterposed against what is presumed to be an undifferentiated "normalcy" or "straightness" among

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[209] M. Crooks, personal interview, 25 August 2012.

the vast majority'.[210] Almost writing from a materialist perspective, Clarke also highlighted the limitations of the Gramscian and semiotic approaches, in which a continual 'search for resistance' meant that 'counter hegemony' or 'signs' could be found in almost any everyday activity. Clarke drew attention to the trend in early 1980s Birmingham, following the council's decision to offer young people vastly reduced bus tickets, for teenagers to 'ride around on buses' all day, many of them wearing ski-jumpers.[211] This might have been construed as a symbolic form of resistance, but for Clarke, the ski-jumpers were 'semiotically innocent' and 'a particular example of a much wider argument': that is, the need, in Clarke's view, for an analysis that not only searched for forms of resistance in popular culture, but one that also looked at what people 'actually *do*'.[212]

Although Clarke's analysis is focused primarily on youth subcultures, it is equally applicable to the way in which black British cultures in general are often represented in publications such as *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. This chapter has attempted to provide an account of what people who might be considered – to use Clarke's terms – 'straight' actually *did* in everyday life in black Handsworth. Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'practice' enable an articulation of race that is not reducible to the simplistic dichotomy of 'hegemony' and 'counter hegemony', or oppression and various forms of 'transgression'. The idea that the habitus 'sets the parameters' of practice, and defines what is and is not considered 'for the likes of us',[213] encapsulates the way in which race was experienced in ordinary ways in Handsworth. Alongside forms of cultural resistance, people's everyday, banal practices were also a part of the black structure of feeling.

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[210] G. Clarke, 'Defending Ski-Jumpers: a critique of theories of youth sub-cultures', in A. Gray *et al* (eds), *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 231.
[211] *Ibid*., p. 251.
[212] *Ibid*., p. 249
[213] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 110.

In the pub, this was manifest in the type of dominoes that was played, and the associated leisure practices that came with it. This was a black form of dominoes, and race was lived out through ordinary practices such as slamming a winning domino down, the use of various 'codes' or by playing the 'mental' variation of the game. Alongside this, dominoes performed a social function that was seen by players as a way of 'filling the needs of people when they have a free weekend'.[214] This was a lot more 'straight' than the practices of younger generations in a Rastafarian sound system or an African dance group, but it was equally black. Players defined this 'blackness' partly in relation to the way in which the 'English' play the game, and partly in relation to a shared Caribbean heritage.

The manifestation of a shared history in the present was also discernable in the practices involved in the church. Here, a shared Caribbean history helped to structure the style of worship in black churches, and the practices involved became routine in much the same way as the game of dominoes. Religion was routine in Handsworth: it was a recurring feature of people's daily lives, whether this meant worship on a Sunday, taking part in a church's community activities, holding Bible-reading groups or simply reading the scripture before watching television. But religion was also 'routine' in the sense that for many, it was an unquestioned feature of everyday life. It was evident for those who regularly attended Sunday school or marched around Handsworth in the Boys' Brigade, as well as for people who did not have such an overt religious commitment but nevertheless attended church with parents or on special occasions such as funerals or weddings. This was true for both older and younger generations in Handsworth.

The final case study illustrated how race was manifest in taste in black Handsworth, played out in the case study of the front room. On the one hand, the front

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[214] Anonymous interviewee, 12 October 2011.

room was a 'sacred space'. It was the place in which paintings of Jesus Christ would be hung or bible reading groups would be held. However, as Maxine Walker's photographs show, on the other hand, the front room was also a space in which material objects were valued. Betterware parties were held in the front room, alongside bible groups. People bought items such as Blue Spot radiograms or drinks trolleys for their front room as much for the statement they were perceived to make as for their practical use-value. This was not a process of commodification. No 'authentic' or oppositional politics was lost in the black front room as families purchased particular items. In fact, this form of conspicuous consumption was a part of the banality of everyday life in Handsworth. The processes involved in the front room in many ways epitomise the way in which race can be seen to function as a feature of the habitus, structuring practices and tastes as being 'for the likes of us'. Although certain features of the black front room were shared with the Victorian parlour, as well as with other working class or immigrant traditions,[215] the specific combination of aesthetics, practices and routines were quite particular to the black experience of the 1980s, something well-illustrated by the reactions of visitors to Michael McMillan's recent exhibition in London.

There is a need for a broader conception of the black everyday, away from the pub, the church and the front room. Employment, for example, and the cultures of work (or unemployment) amongst the black community provides one obvious example for further research. Others are alluded to by the work of Barbara Walker. Alongside representations of games of dominoes, Walker portrays, variously, scenes from inside barbershops and outside market stalls. These are very different sites of consumption from the black front room but, as Walker surmises, there are a similarly particular set of

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[215] There were some similarities with a Jewish domestic aesthetic in Britain, for example. See S. Hall, 'The "West Indian" Front Room', in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 22

'conversations, gestures…clothing' and, indeed, practices at play in each place.[216] How –

if at all – race functions in these everyday sites requires further elaboration. This chapter

has shown that in the everyday areas of the pub, the church and the front room, at least,

everyday black practice was not necessarily 'transgressive' or even 'exciting'. The reality

was a lot more ordinary than that.

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[216] B. Walker, personal interview, 17 June 2011.

Plate 3.1: Dominoes
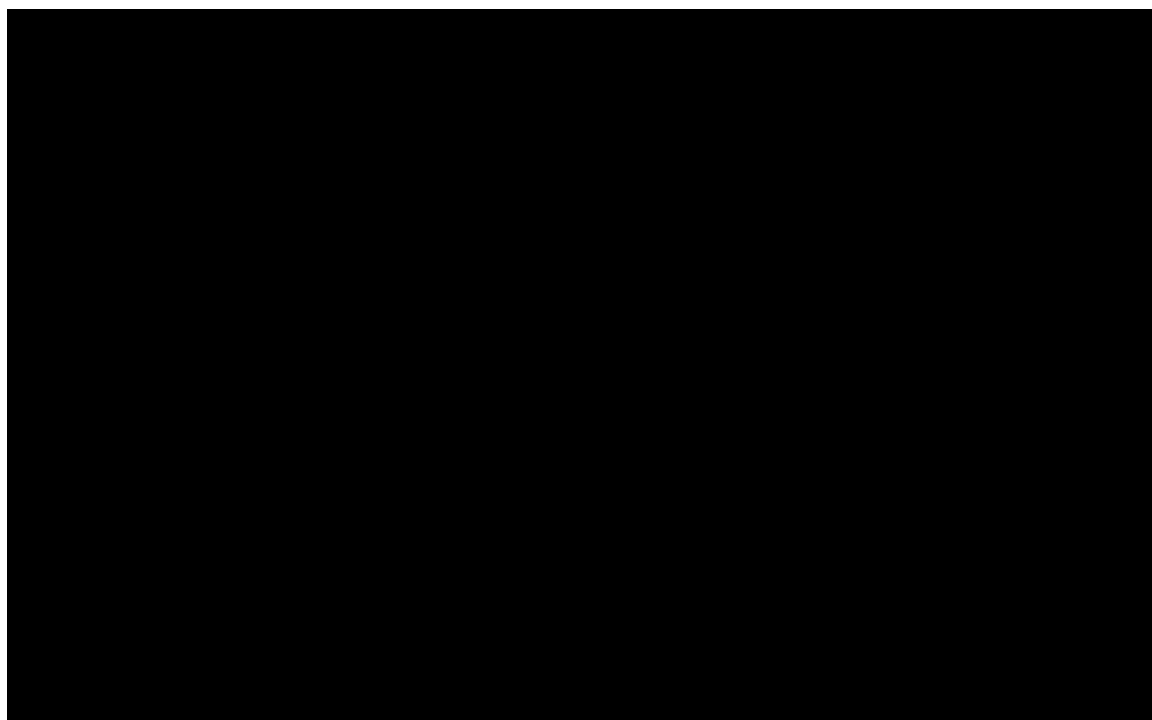
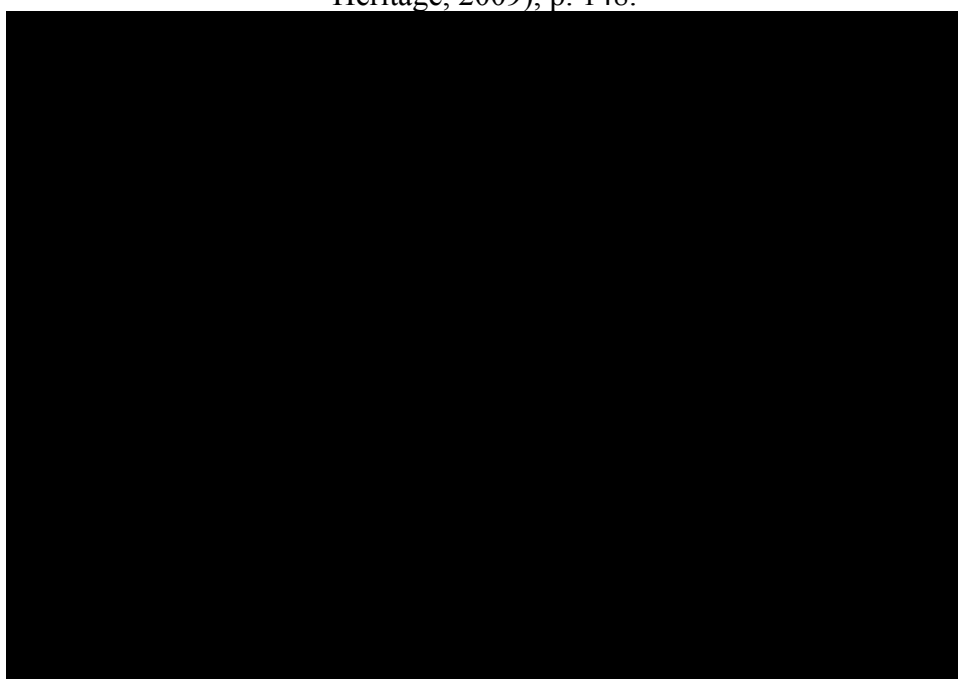Game of dominoes, Bull's Head Pub, Handsworth c. early 1980s. Photograph by Vanley Burke, in A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub: the pub games of Britain* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2009), p. 148.

Scenes from the African-Caribbean Dominoes League, c. early 2000s. From from A. Taylor, *Played at the Pub*, p. 149.

Plate 3.2: Religion
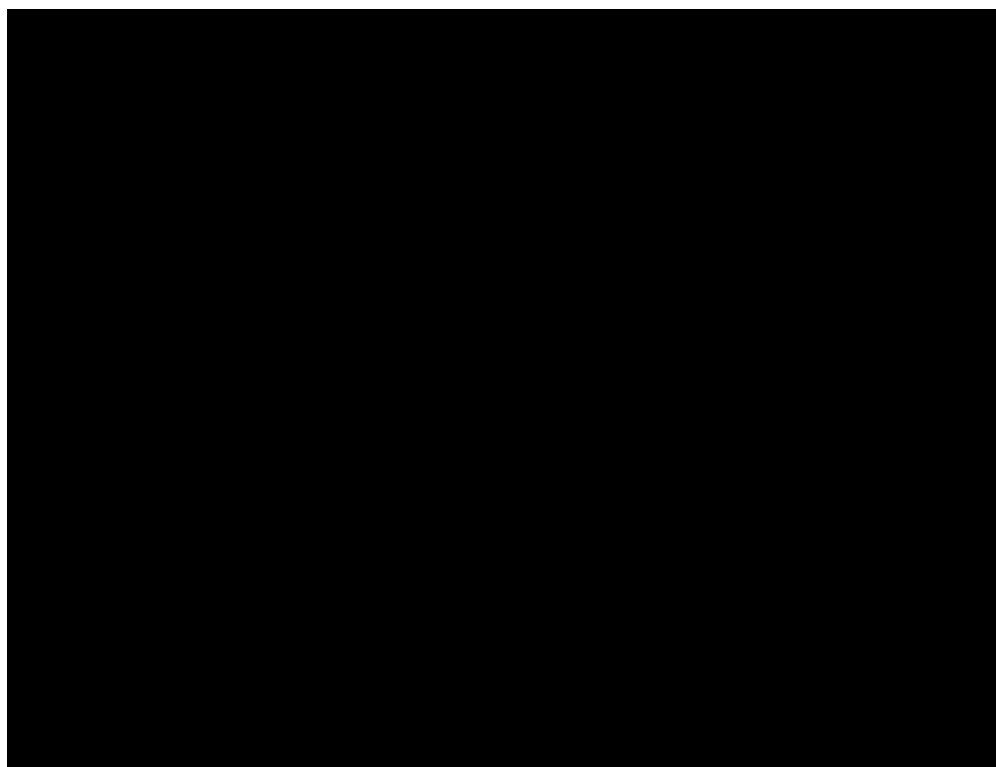
Baptism at Austin Road United Church of God, Handsworth, c. 1970s. Vanley Burke, from Digital Handsworth Website: www.digitalhandsworth.org,uk (accessed 7 November 2011).
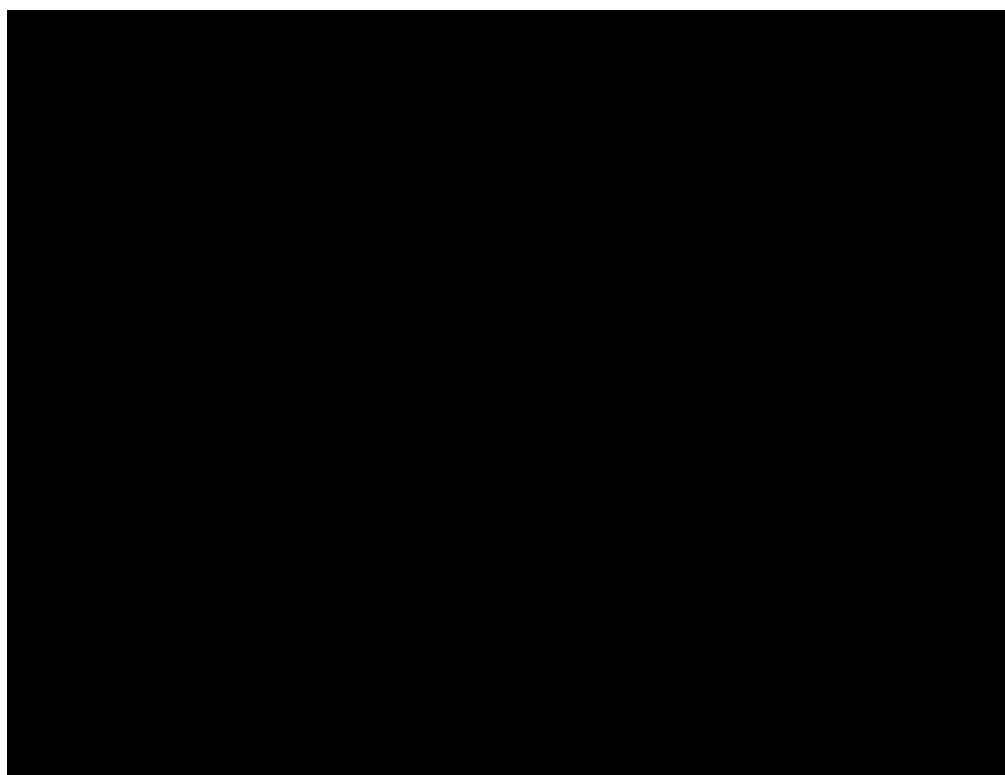
'Ni'night', Handsworth, c. 1970s. Vanley Burke, from Digital Handsworth Website: www.digitalhandsworth.org,uk (accessed 7 November 2011).

Plate 3.3: the front room
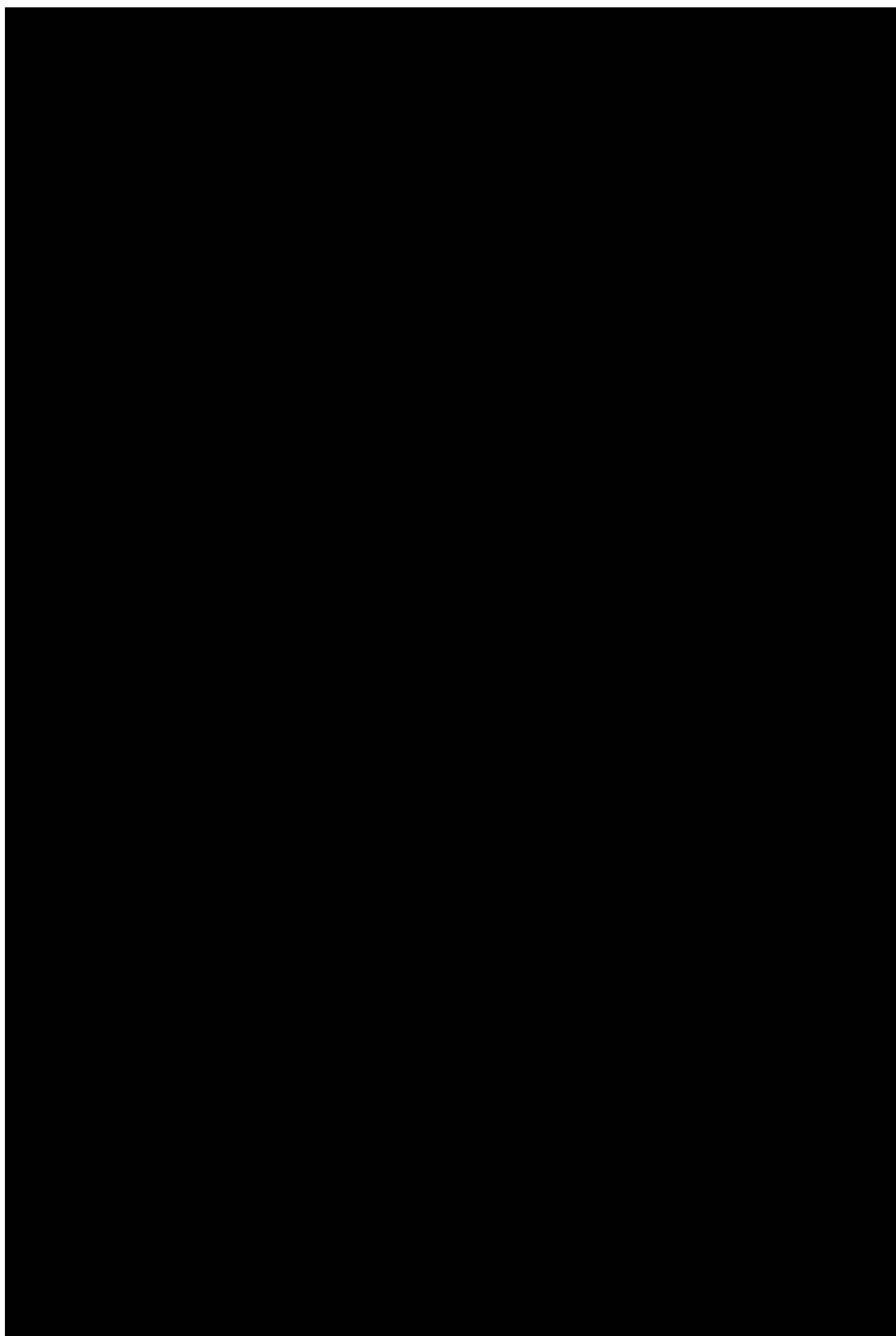
Photograph by John Reardon, featured in M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 95.
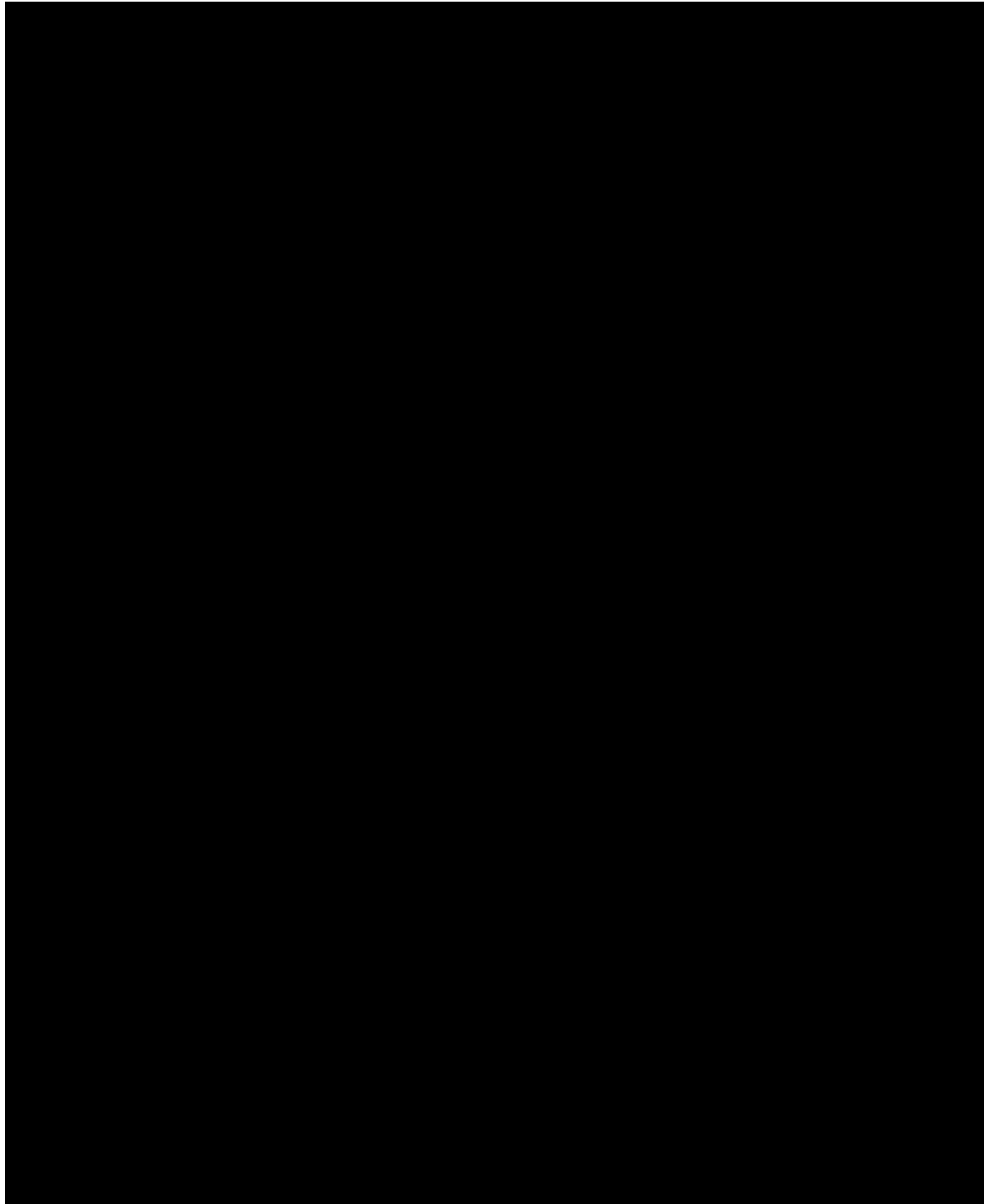
Maxine Walker, *Aunty Linda's Front Room*, 1987. From M. McMillan, *The Front Room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2009), p. 84.
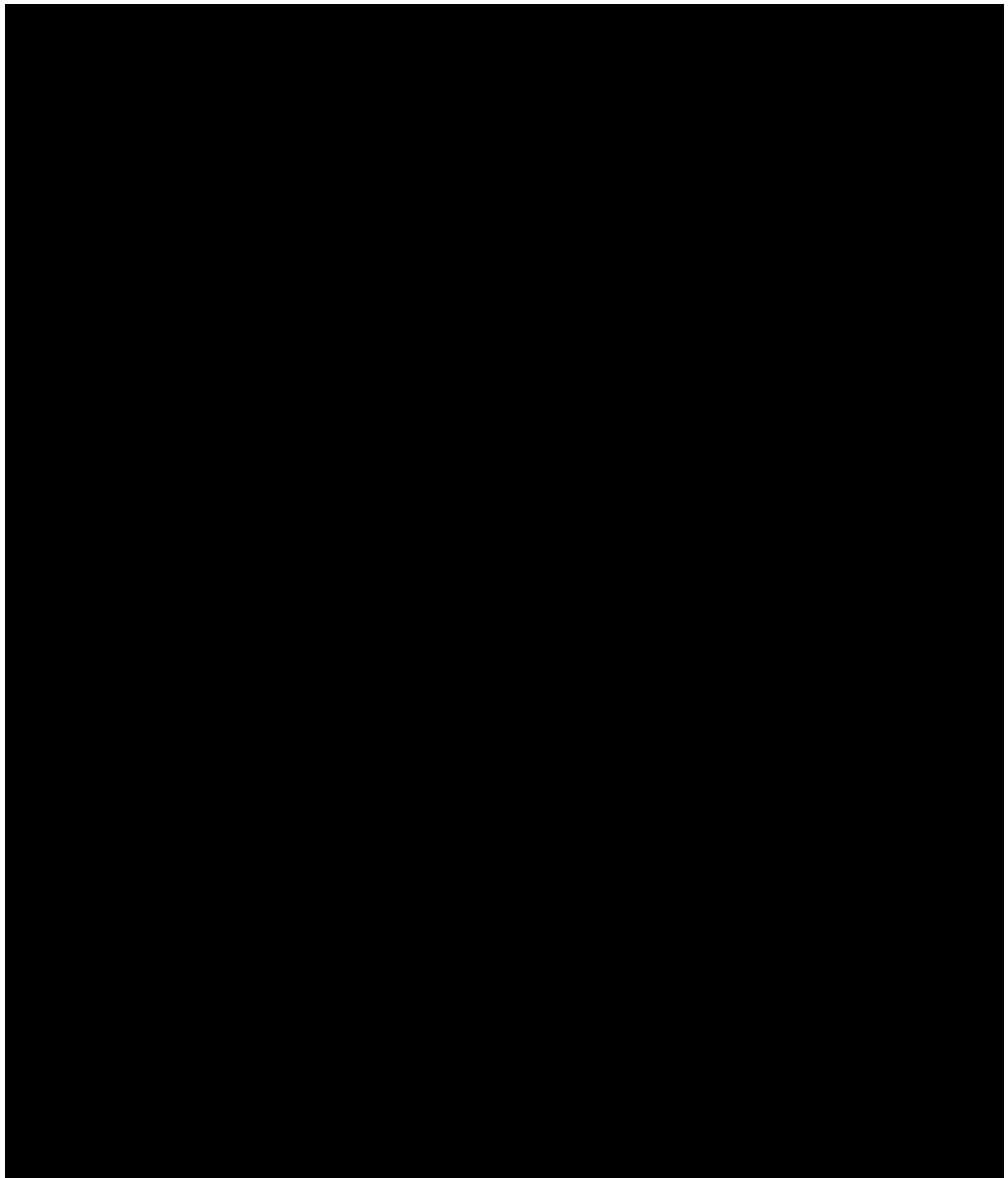
Maxine Walker, *Aunty Linda's Front Room*, 1987. From M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 93.
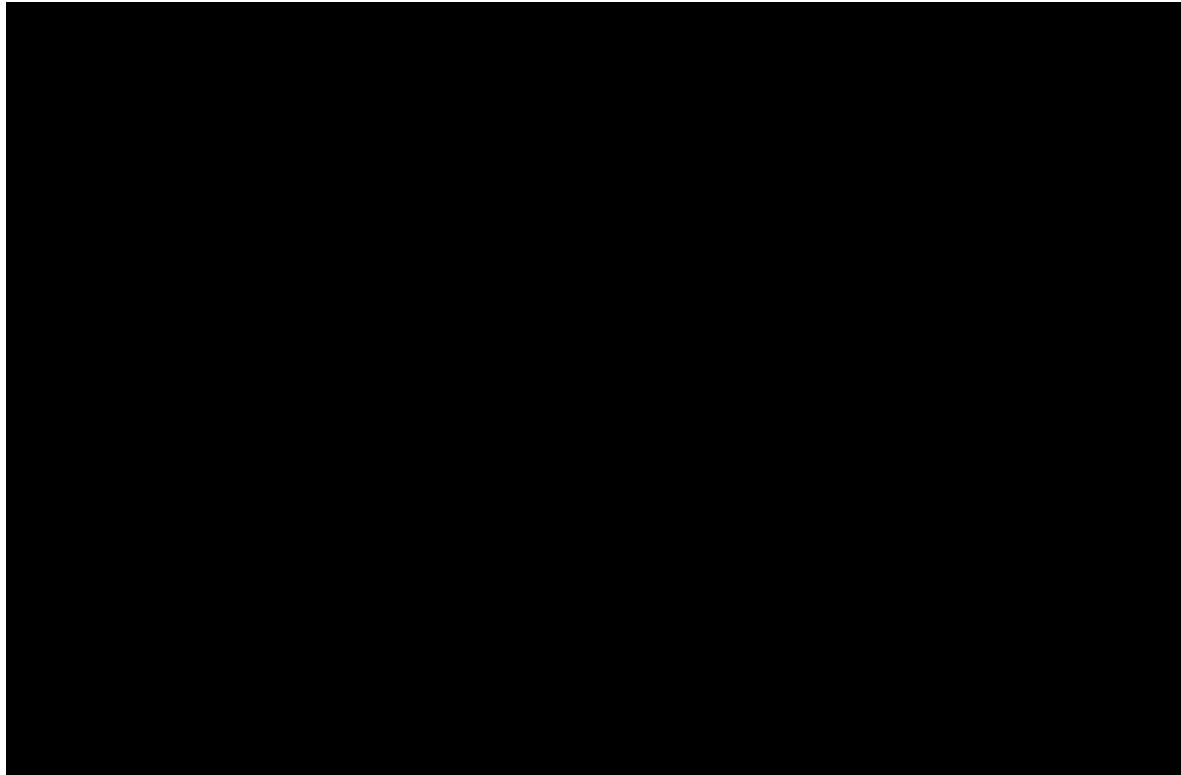
Installation from *The West Indian Front Room*, Geffrye Museum of the Home, 2005. From M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 17.
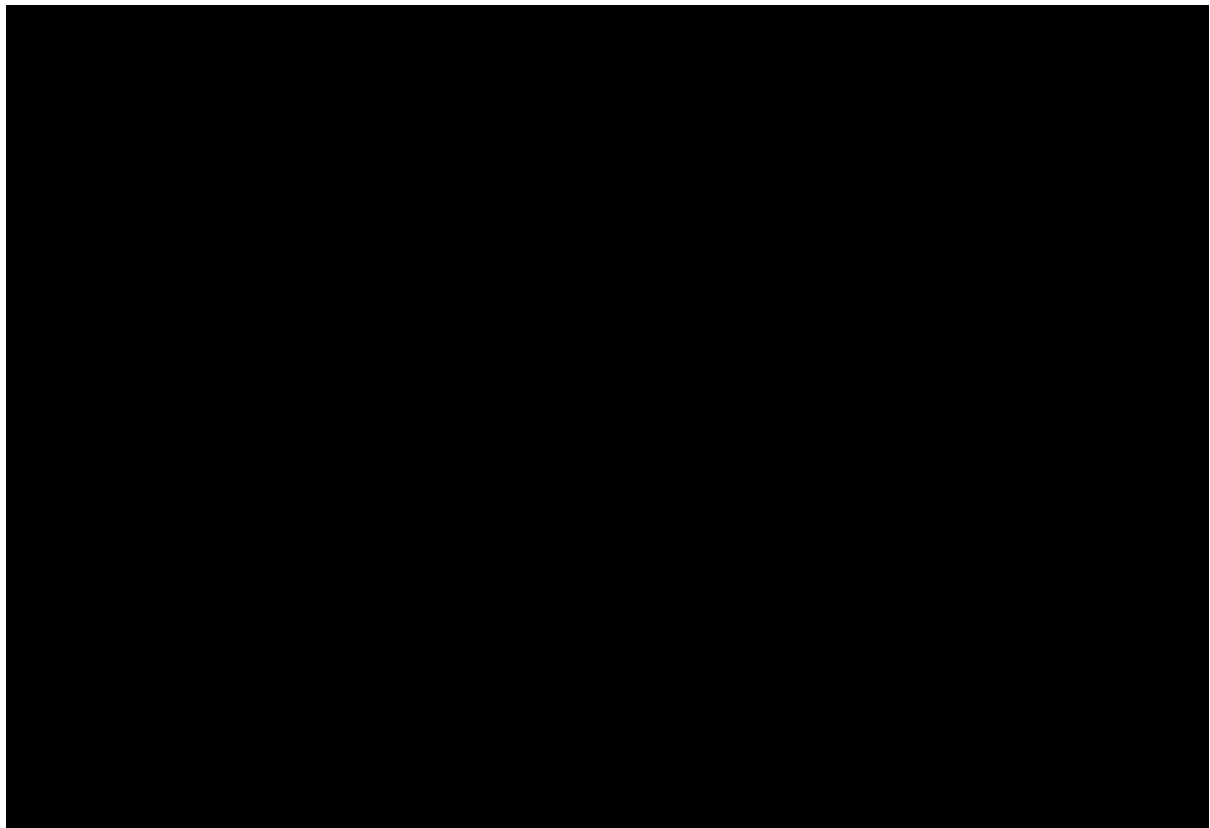
Vanley Burke's mother in her front room. Vanley Burke, from M. McMillan, *The Front Room*, p. 87.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to document a black way of life in Handsworth in the 1980s, and form an account of race in Britain as a 'structure of feeling'. Later in his career, Raymond Williams summarised his definition of a structure of feeling as 'the area of interaction between the official consciousness of an epoch – codified in doctrines and legislation – and the whole process of actually living its consequences'.[1] This thesis has shown that in Handsworth, the black structure of feeling was undoubtedly shaped by the 'official consciousness' on race in the long 1980s. Literally, this meant having to deal with the anxieties regarding the black inner city that were widely articulated in popular discourse in the period. More generally, it also meant living with other external factors – structural inequality in housing and employment, for example, or the effects of a culturally insensitive education system. However, alongside this, the aim has been to demonstrate that race was also shaped by the residents of Handsworth. Race was articulated as a positive identity, and lived out in ordinary ways – through forms of politics, culture, leisure and everyday 'practice'. Taken together, this constituted what can meaningfully be described as a black experience in Handsworth, a 'whole way of living' that represents a significant part of the social history of contemporary Britain.[2]

Yet this project to uncover the black structure of feeling has had some significant limitations. In part, these relate to what Williams himself identified as the elusive nature of structures of feeling in general. Williams regarded the notion of a common 'feeling' – or, as he further elaborated it, 'a pattern of impulses, restraints [and] tones'[3] – as one of the 'least tangible parts of our activity'.[4] A structure of feeling is 'delicate', and any

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[1] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters: interviews with the New Left Review* (London: NLB, 1979), p. 159.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 64.

attempt by historians to document its key elements can only ever be an 'approximation'.[5] Allowing for this, however, there have also been some issues particular to the process of researching the black structure of feeling in Handsworth. The first is the difficulty of locating an 'authentic' black culture in Handsworth. The second is the presence of a black nostalgia in Britain. This conclusion will expand on these limitations and argue that, in spite of them, the black structure of feeling was nevertheless a defining feature of life in black Handsworth during the long 1980s.

The problem of locating an 'authentic' image of black Handsworth was most clearly illustrated in Chapter One. In spite of the arguments made by both Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, photography did not provide an 'alternative history of black people' in Handsworth.[6] The presence of external stereotypes regarding black Handsworth – visually alluded to in the pages of tabloid newspapers by images of urban deprivation, 'helmeted cops' and, most powerfully, the black bomber – was an important influence within the community. Various practitioners removed Handsworth from the picture altogether, or found themselves taking photographs that also captured scenes of poverty and conflict. These images were central to the dominant structure of feeling on race in 1980s Britain – 'the official consciousness of an epoch'. But they were clearly also part of the black structure of feeling. The dividing line between an 'inauthentic' view of Handsworth from without, and an 'authentic' view of Handsworth from within, the chapter showed, was never clear cut. Indeed, as the case of John Reardon demonstrated, sometimes it collapsed altogether.

The issue of authenticity was also a feature of other chapters. In Chapter Two, the claims made by writers such as Sivanandan and Malik for an authentic, oppositional and united 'Black' politics – prior to the intervention of the state and the allocation of funds

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[5] *Ibid.*
[6] S. Hall, 'Reconstruction Work', in *Ten.8 Photographic Magazine,* 2: 3, 1992; p.108.

along ethnic lines – were found to be highly problematic. 'Black' politics was shown to have been fragmenting at a grassroots level, in spite of the ideological commitment of some activists to the theories of Sivanandan and other black intellectuals in the period. There was also an issue of authenticity in Chapter Three. Using the case studies of various modes of performance, the chapter provided an account of the 'invention' of traditions in Handsworth. Although this invention had significant consequences in the Handsworth locale, the invention of an African tradition in particular was also somewhat fragile. This was made clear by the experiences of Jungleman sound system in their attempts to physically migrate to the continent. In one sense, the African identity adopted by many could only function when it was inauthentic in Handsworth, manifest symbolically by growing dreadlocks or wearing the red, gold and green.

Although outside of the period of study, a possible answer to this dilemma of authenticity is suggested by *The Journey*, a 1993 exhibition held at the Walsall Art Gallery and co-curated by Vanley Burke, a photographer whose work has provided a key focus for this thesis. The exhibition was split into a number of different rooms, with each room meant to represent a particular stage in the development of black Britain. The first room, for instance, signified a person's initial departure from the Caribbean: it featured a suitcase packed by Burke's mother, a 'recreation of the one packed for her by her mother' before she left Jamaica in 1953, as well as reflections of people's first impressions upon arriving in Britain.[7] Other rooms in the exhibition were dedicated to the themes of reggae culture, religion and rioting, with the latter alluded to by the outline of an unmoving body on the ground and a soundtrack of breaking glass and police sirens. The final room of the exhibition was the largest, and was clearly meant to represent the 'authentic' nature of contemporary Handsworth. It was the centrepiece of the exhibition, and featured

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[7] D. Robinson, *The Journey* exhibition catalogue (Walsall: Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, 1993), p. 2, Vanley Burke Archive, *The Journey*, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/A/M.

thousands of photographs taken by Burke, each hanging from a wire attached to the ceiling. In order to get from one end of the room to the other, visitors had to make their way through these images, literally coming face-to-race with the many lives that Burke had photographed in Handsworth over a period of three decades. The truly 'authentic' narrative of black Handsworth, the presence of so many photographs in this room seemed to suggest, was one of pluralism.

Yet a narrative of plurality – one that emphasises the essential diversity and individuality of people's experience – is also fundamentally problematic. There is the issue of whether it is actually possible to represent the potentially infinite number of experiences that could form a part of such a narrative. As Chapter One showed, in *Handsworth Songs* the Black Audio Film Collective had the explicit aim of representing the multiplicity of experiences in Handsworth, encapsulated in the film by the repeated mantra the 'ghosts of other stories'. However, as Salman Rushdie and Darcus Howe made clear, the film in fact ended up repeating many of the stereotypical images of Handsworth from without. Implicitly, what seemed to be behind Howe's and particularly Rushdie's critique of *Handsworth Songs* was a perception that there was an absence of politics in the film. Rushdie wanted something that could 'chase out' the stereotypes about areas of black settlement such as Handsworth.[8] It is perhaps inevitable that a narrative of pluralism can result in a loss of politics, precisely because an emphasis on individuality leaves little room for the possibility of collective action. More than this, however, a narrative of pluralism also discounts the possibility of common experiences existing more generally, away from overtly political acts. A focus on plurality can often lead to the loss of the subject. In spite of the message implicit in the final room of *The Journey*, it is these points of commonality in everyday life – in areas like religion or

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[8] S. Rusdhie, Introduction to D. Bishton & J. Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), p 7.

forms of leisure – that Burke's photography in fact captured in Handsworth, however fleetingly and problematically. Providing an account of these areas of commonality has been the central objective of this thesis.

Burke's exhibition, however, also alluded to the second, related limitation of the thesis: the difficulty in moving beyond the presence of a black nostalgia in Britain. Matthew Mead has highlighted one aspect of this by pointing to the nostalgia that has developed for the initial moment of black settlement in Britain, symbolically marked by the docking of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury in 1948. For Mead, the '*Windrush* myth' has become popularised in Britain, and has attained 'symbolic resonance and power not through historical accuracy, but through the repeated inscription of this "moment" on the national consciousness as a profound moment of cultural change that confirms, validates, and values the arrival and continuing presence of ethnically diverse communities'.[9] This perspective is encapsulated by the subtitle of Trevor and Mike Phillips' history of the '*Windrush* generation': *the irresistible rise of multi-racial Britain*. The Phillips's work – and the corresponding BBC documentary – was crucial in establishing in popular memory the symbolic moment of black arrival.

However, the black nostalgia that has developed is not only for the 'moment' of black settlement. The process of researching this thesis has suggested there is also a form of nostalgia for the experiences of black migrants with forms of racism and inequality – perhaps symbolically represented by the repeated evocation of the 'no blacks, no Irish and no dogs' sign. This is illustrated, for example, by the fact that this in large part forms the overarching narrative of the *Windrush* book.[10] Similarly, in *The Journey*, although the

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[9] M. Mead, '*Empire Windrush*: cultural memory and archival disturbance', *Moveable Type*, 2007, 3, p. 116. Accessible from internet source: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/graduate/issue/3/pdf/mead.pdf (accessed 2 November 2011).

[10] Chapters on, for example, the 'Profumo Affair' or 'Carnival' are generally told through the prism of discrimination, inequality and hardship. Even the final, celebratory chapter 'The Irresistible Rise'

final room of the exhibition emphasised the plurality of black experiences, the focus in the majority of other rooms was on discrimination, hardships or conflict: the 'extremely uncomfortable living conditions' endured by black settlers, for instance, the presence of the National Front and 'clashes on the streets'.[11] These themes have become the pervasive narrative in populist histories of black Britain, and they were undoubtedly important and very real parts of the black experience. But the focus on such hardships has largely been at the expense of all other experience – the everyday practices and relative banalities of black community life. This was not only in exhibitions such as *The Journey* or publications such as *Windrush*. The research for this thesis has suggested that nostalgic representations of black settlement in Britain have, to some extent, also become internalised by respondents who take part in oral history initiatives, including by some people who were interviewed for this thesis.

Reflecting on the testimony in *Hard Times* (1970), Studs Terkel's classic oral history of the Great Depression, Michael Frisch shows how, thirty years after the event, personal experiences and historical narratives were often combined. There was a relationship between an individual's memory of events and the 'historical generalization' of the period.[12] People were often self-consciously incorporating the established, collective history of the 1930s into their own 'biographical memory,'[13] something Ronald Grele summarises as the active presence of a respondent's own 'historical consciousness'.[14] Similar themes are discernable in the oral histories used for this thesis. There was a tendency for people to respond – perhaps unconsciously – in a manner that

emphasises the continuing marginalisation of the black labour force and the continuing victimisation of the black population by the police. See M. & T. Phillips, *Windrush*, pp. 392-394.

[11] Walsall Museum and Art gallery, *The Journey* Resource Pack, (Walsall: Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, 1993), pp. 8-11, obtained by the author from the papers of Michael Green via Professor Matthew Hilton.

[12] M. Frisch, 'Oral History and *Hard Times*: a review essay', in R. Perks & A. Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 33.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[14] R. J. Grele, 'Movement Without Aim: methodological and theoretical problems in oral history', in R. Perks & A. Thompson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, p. 45.

was highly reminiscent of the particular 'historical generalisation' encapsulated by what Mead terms the '*Windrush* myth'.

This often meant talking in terms similar to the narrative popularised in *Windrush* and other forms of popular black history. First generation migrants commonly emphasised their initial experiences with racism, or talked in somewhat cliched terms about their shock upon experiencing the British weather. In the Birmingham Black Oral History Project, for instance, which was undertaken in 1990, one respondent recalled seeing snow for the first time and thinking it 'looked just like a beautiful carpet', and remembered walking past 'shop windows and I'd see "Rooms for let – sorry no coloureds, no Irish, no dogs", this kind of thing'.[15] The Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church oral history project was undertaken in 2005 in order to chronicle the recent development of the church. However, in the great majority of transcripts, the emphasis was not on the ordinary forms of religious practice undertaken by members on a day-to-day basis. Rather, church members reflected how, for instance, in the 1950s white members of the congregation would 'take their time and pull away and sometimes the vicar of whichever church you go they would come and say "I'm sorry but my parishioners they don't like it so don't come back"'.[16] Respondents commonly highlighted their initial confusion on arrival into Britain. For example, a woman who had arrived in Birmingham in 1957, remembered seeing British houses and thinking, '"Oh my God, plenty money, plenty job"…I thought the houses then were factory'.[17] Such testimony clearly alludes to an important part of the black experience. But it has also become part of the 'historical generalisation' regarding the black presence in Britain to the exclusion of other themes.

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[15] C. Duncan, cited in Birmingham Black Oral History Project, Cassette 2 Side B, 1992, available from Internet source: http://www.bbohp.org.uk/node/2 (accessed 2 August 2011).
[16] Interview with M. Miller, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-001, 2006.
[17] Interview with E. Webster, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-016, 2006.

There was also a form of nostalgia discernible in the oral testimony of younger generations. In place of the memories of early experiences in Britain, younger generations often emphasised what they saw as their symbolic resistance to forms of racism and inequality in the long 1980s. There was a tendency for people to talk about their experiences in, for example, sound systems and reggae culture, in ways that echoed – albeit at a basic level – the arguments that were made by scholars such as Paul Gilroy, particularly in early works such as *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* and *Small Acts*. For example, just as Gilroy argued that the 'styles…dress, dance, fashion and languages' of reggae culture were combined with the 'oppositional sentiments' of Rastafarianism,[18] one person from Handsworth interviewed for this thesis remarked that 'I didn't know anything about Rasta until I joined the sound system and they taught me who Emperor Selassie was, who Garvey was'.[19] Just as Dick Hebdige regarded the 'Rasta' subculture as a way of 'refracting the system of black and white polarities [and] turning negritude into a positive sign',[20] interviewees described blues parties as significant because they were 'particularly black spaces.'[21] People were less likely to talk about reggae culture in terms of the everyday, routine practices it involved than they were to highlight it as something that 'shaped our views, and to some extent our ideology. It was the first time people were getting in touch with Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, James Baldwin. These were the intellectual things that were going on. It was like a rush of knowledge. It was like our Prague Spring'.[22] The emphasis on figures such as Garvey often corresponded with the use of language that was similar to that used in works produced at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. In a sense, the forms of black cultural resistance argued for by Gilroy, Hebdige and others, have to some extent come to

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[18] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp. 155 & 192.
[19] J. Melody, personal interview, 9 June 2011.
[20] D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 37.
[21] B. Bennett, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[22] P. Bassaragh, personal interview, 7 May 2011.

form part of a black nostalgia in much the same way as the docking of the *Empire Windrush*.

These limitations have been apparent at different stages in the researching of this thesis, and it is questionable the extent to which they could have been fully overcome. The issue of a black nostalgia, for instance, may not have been as relevant had a black researcher been undertaking a thesis of this nature. There was a sense that people's nostalgic responses were in part informed by a desire to explain in basic terms subjects which they were unsure a white researcher would understand. However, there may still have been issues relating to age or class. For example, Soryah Brown, a young black social worker, undertook the oral history project at Cannon Street Baptist Church,[23] yet many of the responses of interviewees retained a nostalgic emphasis. Similarly, as Chapter One showed, neither did being a resident of black Handsworth necessarily lead to the creation of a more 'authentic' representation of the area.

The process of highlighting structures of feeling is, therefore, undoubtedly problematic. However, as Williams argued, this does not make their presence any less real. For Williams, there is a 'contradictory' element to all structures of feeling.[24] They may be 'delicate', but they are at the same time also 'firm and definite'.[25] They may at times appear intangible, but they are also fundamentally 'practical' and 'material', and refer to something that is 'actually being lived'.[26] As Williams summarised, a structure of feeling is ultimately something that 'you could perceive…operating'.[27] In spite of the limitations involved in the researching of the thesis, it was nevertheless possible to perceive a black structure of feeling operating in Handsworth. It was manifest in a

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[23] See overview of the project on Digital Handsworth website: http://www.search.digitalhandsworth.org.uk (accessed 19 November 2011).
[24] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.
[25] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 64.
[26] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 131.
[27] R. Williams, *Politics and Letters*, p. 159.

number of distinct, if sometimes related areas – in political organisations, leisure institutions and everyday practices. It was within these institutions and through these practices that a set of overtly black identities, outlooks and 'feelings' were 'structured'.

First, the desire to present a different perspective of life in Handsworth was itself a prominent part of the black structure of feeling. Although this was something shared by visiting artists such as the Black Audio Film Collective, as well as white liberals such as the groups behind the Self-Portrait Project and Banner Theatre, it was most acutely present in the photographic practice of Vanley Burke. For him, living the consequences of the 'official consciousness' on race in the period – encapsulated by the photograph of the black bomber – meant turning his lens away from certain scenes and deciding not to take the photograph. Burke was not always successful in this ambition, and he was himself falsely accused of having sold the photograph of the black bomber to the press. But his desire to present a different image was emblematic of a more general desire in Handsworth, manifest in numerous other forms of practice. This was seen in Maxine Walker's images of everyday domesticity for example, in Kokuma's aim to 'bring a kind of respect to the area' through dance, [28] in Steel Pulse's ambition to 'clean the [Handsworth] name up' and even,[29] to an extent, in the photographs that were taken by ordinary residents in high-street photographic portrait studios.

Second, older generations in particular wanted to be seen to be 'getting on' in Handsworth. People like Merrise Crooks purchased clothes and in some cases, borrowed jewellery that could be worn in photography studios and act as visual communicators of success and prosperity. In one sense, the theme of conspicuous consumption might be regarded as a pervasive part of the experiences of economic migrants in general, a point illustrated by the fact that by the 1960s, the Dyche studio was attracting Asian as well as

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[28] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7th May 2009.
[29] Cited in P. Silverton, 'No Jah-Bubble in-a Birmingham', in *Sounds*, 22 April 1978.

black custom. However, this was also manifest in Handsworth in overtly black ways. As the example of the front room showed, purchasing items such as drinks trolleys and patterned wallpaper, together with the emphasis placed on having a room kept apart from the rest of the house, was seen as 'a tradition people brought with them from home [in the Caribbean]'.[30]   The consumption of these items was also about people demonstrating that they had 'arrived' in Britain. As Crooks put it, the front room was about 'showing off all the things that you've gathered'; it was 'where you meet your special friends who have nice clothes'.[31]

Third, the politics of 'self-help' was central to the black structure of feeling in the long 1980s. Again, as Chapter Two showed, this was something that was also a significant part of the south Asian experience, but it was felt in particular ways by black Handsworth. Harambee, for example, was formed in order to respond to the particular problem of homelessness amongst black youth, and argued that the state had a responsibility to provide funds to help them tackle the issue. The African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation, in contrast, refused to accept state funding, but also maintained an overtly black programme of self-help that focused in particular on the issue of education. Bini Brown maintained that the black community had been the victim of 'mis-education', and the ACSHO aimed to 'develop minds' and 're-educate'. [32] A similar emphasis was present in other local institutions – having become co-ordinator of the Handsworth Community Theatre Project, for example, Milton Godfrey spoke of the need for the group to focus on 'black history'.[33] At the ACSHO this meant African history, and the group subscribed to a wider pan-African political ideology that was articulated at their 'Tuesday

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[30] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.
[31] M. Crooks, personal interview, 25 August 2011.
[32] B. Brown, personal interview, 15 December 2009.
[33] M. Godfrey, personal interview, 28th May 2009.

seminars'. As was summarised in an introductory leaflet to the ACSHO, this was a 'political ideology that is wholly African'.[34]

Fourth, the black structure of feeling consisted of 'invented' traditions that were nevertheless lived and felt in real ways. As well as politically, the concept of Africa was also evoked culturally, through various institutions and practices. Somewhat paradoxically, the turn to Africa in Handsworth provided a younger generation with a positive black identity that was specifically for use in Handsworth. Kokuma, for example, used African dance as a way of enabling participants to overcome the alienation many felt in their everyday lives. African dance had facilitated the development of an 'African sensibility' that,[35] as one dancer put it, provided a 'sense of pride' and a 'black identity'.[36] Away from formal cultural institutions, a black identity was also facilitated more broadly by Rastafarianism and reggae music. The invention of an African tradition, whether through wearing the red, gold and green or the purchasing of Steel Pulse records, enabled a young black generation to form a re-appraisal of their position in contemporary Handsworth. The music by bands such as Steel Pulse resonated because, as one fan argued, it was 'about the lives that we were leading'.[37]

Alongside this, a black identity was also developed by the presence of the Caribbean in Handsworth. A Caribbean tradition was 'invented' largely by older generations in the institutions of the cricket club, the pub and the church. At Handsworth Cricket Club, players defined an ability to 'give the ball a good thump',[38] for instance, as 'typical West Indian cricket',[39] and further expressed an emphasis on the Caribbean through various corresponding leisure practices, including the game of dominoes.

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[34] ACSHO, 'Tuesday Meetings' leaflet, c. late-1970s, p, 2, Vanley Burke Archive, Community Groups, ACSHO Papers, Birmingham Central Library, MS 2192/C/D/1/1.
[35] Jackie Guy, personal interview, 7th May 2009.
[36] U. Walker, personal interview, 8 July 2009.
[37] A. Tafari, personal interview, 22 May 2009.
[38] *Handsworth Cricket Trinidad Tour*, p. 7.
[39] *Ibid*., p. 20.

Dominoes was often closely associated with cricket but as Chapter Four showed, it also developed away from it in pubs such as the Bull's Head in Handsworth and clubs such as Faith and Confidence Finance. The formation of the Anglo-Caribbean Dominoes League in 1989 formalised a game that was emphasised by its players as a particularly 'Caribbean style of dominoes', something 'unique to us'.[40] Finally, in the church, whether in the Baptist, Methodist or Pentecostal traditions, people worshipped in what was also defined as a specifically Caribbean style. As Jennifer Hunter Smith's research at the Villa Road Methodist Church showed, this could mean a general desire for sermons that were delivered in a blunt fashion in a manner typical to that found in the Caribbean, or more personal practices, such as the placing of flowers on the altar each Sunday in order to evoke memories of Jamaica.[41]

The notion of 'practice' alludes to the final aspect of the black structure of feeling that this thesis has attempted to foreground. The aim has been to use the work of Pierre Bourdieu to build on Williams' conception of the structure of feeling – as well as the cultural studies project that Williams himself partly helped to initiate. Race was a common experience in Handsworth, but this was manifest in ordinary and banal ways as well as in overtly political acts. Race was a habitus – it set the parameters for what was considered to be 'for the likes of us',[42] and was present in what people *did*. What people did in black Handsworth was sometimes political – people tried to present a more 'authentic' image of the area, for example, or embarked on a programme to 're-educate' black youth. But race was also manifest in more mundane practices: in the slamming of a winning domino down on the table, for instance, in coded signals such as the tapping of the nose or wrist in the ACDL, or in a 'mental' game of dominies played at the Bull's Head pub. Similarly, at Cannon Street Baptist Church, race was present in the annual

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[40] J. Gowane, personal interview, 16 September 2011.
[41] J. H. Smith, 'Mary in the Kitchen, Martha in the Pew', p. 67.
[42] P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 110.

Caribbean night, in Deleyan Smith joining the church band and moving it in a '*Top of the Pops* direction',[43] and even in the emphasis placed on 'dressing up, wearing a hat' and 'showing God the best'.[44] Finally, in the front room, race was manifest in the radiogram and pervasiveness of floral wallpaper, in the purchasing of the drinks trolley and in the 'little cabinet where you put your special cups and saucers that only your special guests use'.[45] These practices were not forms of black 'transgression', but they were, it is argued, no less black than the 'oppositional sentiments' that Paul Gilroy saw to be at the heart of Rastafarian reggae culture.[46]

The thesis undoubtedly represents an 'approximation' of the black structure of feeling. But the practices, institutions and outlooks described nevertheless represent – in spite of the limitations highlighted in this conclusion – a 'pattern' that is both 'firm' and 'definite'. Further research is required. There needs to be an exploration of how other leisure activities functioned within the black structure of feeling – how football, for example, operated alongside cricket and the pub in the long 1980s. Similarly, there is considerable scope to expand the theme of black consumption as a subject in its own right. Alongside the purchasing of items such as drinks trolleys and imported reggae albums, more needs to be learnt about West Indian Fig Tree Ltd, Gent's Continental Hairdressing and other black businesses that operated in the period. Following on from this, there is also scope for a development of understandings of how cultures of work functioned in the black structure of feeling – beyond somewhat nostalgic narratives regarding the continuing experiences with discrimination in the workplace.

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[43] Interview with D. Smith, Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church Oral History Project, MM-004, 2006.
[44] E. Mignott, personal interview, 8 June 2011.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, pp. 155 & 192.

For Williams, a structure of feeling is in essence a 'process'.[47] Younger generations often re-mould or even discontinue aspects of a particular structure of feeling, in order to respond 'to the unique world it is inheriting'.[48] More research is required on what happened to the black structure of feeling into the 1990s and beyond. Some institutions – the various black churches discussed, for example, and the ACDL – remain a significant presence in black community life. But other themes, such as any discernable reggae scene, have almost entirely disappeared.

By focusing on the everyday politics, institutions and practices in Handsworth in the long 1980s, this thesis has attempted to move towards a social history of race in Britain. This included the real and continuing effects of racism, poverty and structural inequality. But the aim has been to show that in the long 1980s, there was a black experience that was not reducible to these themes. In Handsworth, there was a black way of life that took place alongside poverty and discrimination. The everyday routines, beliefs and practices of the residents of black Handsworth – from styles of worship and music, forms of politics and culture to games of dominoes and cricket – were in themselves fundamental parts of a black British experience in Handsworth. This was, to use Raymond Williams' terms, a 'whole way of life'.[49]

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[47] R. Williams, *Marxism and Literture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 129.
[48] R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p. 65.
[49] R. Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 18.

Biographical information regarding key interviewees

Maurice Andrews

Co-founder of Harambee community group in 1972 and political activist in Handsworth throughout the 1980s. Now runs a solicitors company in Handsworth.

Brian Bennett

Ran Rootsman sound system in Birmingham throughout the 1980s. Now runs a music studio in Birmingham.

Derek Bishton

Along with Brian Homer and John Reardon, undertook the Handsworth Self-Portrait Project in 1979 and co-founded Sidelines publishing company in Handsworth. Also co-authored with Reardon Handsworth photo-journal _Home Front_ and co-founded _Ten.8 Photographic Magazine_. Currently works for the _Daily Telegraph_.

Bini Brown

Co-founded the African-Caribbean Self-Help Organisation in Handsworth in 1964 and remains its chairperson.

Merrise Crooks

Community education worker in Handsworth for thirty years, and had her photograph taken as a young woman in a high street portraiture studio in Handsworth. Remains active in community education.

Milton Godfrey

Musician and playwright who became director of Banner Theatre's Handsworth Community Theatre Project in 1982. Continues to write and perform in the Birmingham area.

Johnson Gowane

Captain of Bromfield Stallions dominoes team in Aston.

Surinder Guru

Member of Birmingham Black Sisters during the 1980s, now a lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

Jacko Melody

Lead singer of Eclipse reggae band in Birmingham throughout the 1980s. Now works in local radio.

Esme Mignott

Joined Cannon Street Memorial Baptist Church in Handsworth in 1969 and has been a member of the church for more than forty years.

Francis Nation

Co-founder of Handsworth Continental Cricket Club, and key player in the construction of a pavilion in Handsworth Park. Retains a ceremonial role in the club, and now writes stories and poems about 'Jamaicanness'.

James Pogson

Grew up in the Small Heath area of Birmingham and writes short stories and plays. Currently runs his own copywriting business.

Bob Ramdhanie

Founded Kokuma Dance Group and the Handsworth Cultural Centre and was the director of the Black Dance Development Trust. Set up Community Arts Village Entertainment in Moseley, and now manages the gospel group Black Voices.

Roy Richards

Richards' father co-founded the Faith and Confidence Finance social club in Handsworth, which he now manages.

Ranjit Sondhi

Co-founded the Asian Resource Centre in Handsworth in 1976. Went on to become Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, became a senior lecturer at the

University of Birmingham and was appointed to the BBC board of governors. Was awarded a CBE in 1999 for services to the community.

Ras Tread

Member of Jungleman sound system in the 1980s. Now a reggae DJ on New Style Radio in Birmingham.

Appendix 2:

Exhibition catalogue for *Photographing Handsworth: representing Handsworth 25 Years On*. The exhibition was curated by the author and examined the way in which Handsworth has been photographed by different practitioners from the 1985 riots to the present day. It featured press photography, the work of Vanley Burke, Pogus Caesar and Derek Bishton – alongside the photographs taken by a local school – and helped develop many of the themes discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. The catalogue is included as an attachment to this thesis.

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Derek Bishton archive:

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