Black Power and Socialism in the West Indies

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Abstract

This piece examines articulations of socialist politics and theory by West Indian Black Power groups and actors. It positions the emergence of Black Power in the West Indies in the late 1960s in the context of the global upsurge in revolutionary activity often associated with 1968 and thevarious socialist-inflected protest movements that emerged at that time. Itshows how Black Power groups and thinkers in the West Indies deployed a socialist analysis of the post-colonial nation-states of the region which gained independence in the 1960s and 1970s. Analyses of neo-colonialism in the Caribbean, and the Global South more broadly, developed by Black Power groups and thinkers and articulated through a Black Power politics, made a core contribution. West Indian Black Power's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics and thought saw that race and class oppression were inseparably intertwined in the region. From this theoretical position emerged an interest in and commitments to solidarity with socialist revolutions and struggles across the Global South in the 1960s and 1970s. This article examines West Indian Black Power's solidarity with anti-colonial struggles in Africa and its interactions with the Cuban Revolution.

Key words: Black Power, socialism, Caribbean, Walter Rodney

Introduction

Black Power, as expressed in the West Indies, first erupted into the region's popular consciousness in October 1968 following the 'Rodney Riots' in Kingston, Jamaica. The riots began as a protest march instigated by University of the West Indies (UWI) students following the banning of Guyanese intellectual, Black Power theorist and socialist historian Walter Rodney from the island. Violence broke out in the afternoon after marchers

were subjected to police attacks and the protestors' ranks swelled by demonstrators from Kingston's poorer neighbourhoods.[1] We can understand the Rodney Riots and the popular emergence of Black Power in the West Indies in the context of the 1968 moment. 1968 was an 'epochal year' for radical and left politics globally with the well-known events of that year (the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, French General Strike, Prague Spring etc.) seen to have constituted something of a high-water mark.[2] The 1960s saw a proliferation of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles globally from the solidification of the Cuban Revolution to the libera- tion wars against Portuguese imperialism in Africa and the Civil Rightsand Black Power movements of the US. These events had significant impact on the articulation of socialist politics through Black Power in the West Indies. Many involved in the movement had visited Cuba and/orhad contact with radical African American figures in the US. Similarly,a consistent focus on African liberation wars and the Marxist-Leninist groups waging them presaged a move towards that form of organisation in later years.

The Rodney Riots had roots in Walter Rodney's popular consciousness-raising efforts on topics of socialism, anti-racism and anti-capitalism; Rastafari hostility to 'brown man governments' and Babylon;[3] and the antagonism of the Jamaican government banning yet another subversive person from the island due to a Cold War anti-communism.[4] As I will show, the analysis of neo-colonial capitalism modulated through colonial racism developed by Walter Rodney, and others, was central to Black Power's anti-capitalist politics in the region. This understanding of the mutually constitutive nature of race and class in the West Indies preceded the Black Power moment but Black Power groups and thinkers would reassess these imbricated social and political categories for the post-colonial period. The geopolitics of a decolonising world and the proliferation of various Third World socialisms also saw a West Indian Black Power anti-capitalist politics attuned more to the peoples and places of the Global South than to Euro-American Marxists or even the USSR and Eastern Bloc.

Section 1 – West Indian Black Power articulations of socialism

Reckonings with independence: assessing the political-economy of neo-colonialism and confronting the post-colonial state

In August 1962, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago declared independence with Guyana and Barbados following in 1966 and the smaller islands

of the Eastern Caribbean set on the path towards decolonisation during this period. The two decades after independence were a time of intense ideological contestation where the form and extent of decolonisation had yet to be settled in popular consciousness.[5] The Black Power movement emerged in this regional context, with the influence of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the nearby US also important. Black Power and aligned publications and groups in the West Indies often reported on and drew on the analysis of Black Power leaders from the US. There were also important personal and material connections between the two movements. The one-time honorary Prime Minister of the US Black Panther Party, Stokely Carmichael, was originally from Trinidad and this connection to the Caribbean gave him and his activism particular sway in the region. Important thought-leaders in the West Indian Black Power movement like Walter Rodney were in contact with figures in the North American Black Power movement through attendance at events such as the Congress of Black Writers held in Montreal in 1968.[6]

Black Power and Black Power adjacent groups and actors articulating a socialist politics operated in a very different historical context to their predecessors. This was a context in which independent nation-states had now been established in the region and had to be confronted as they actually existed and not contested in principle or theory. Similarly, the political-economy of capitalist-imperialism and, now, neo-colonialism had also shifted in this new context and Black Power actors provided insightful analyses of these changes.

A core grievance of the West Indian Black Power movement was the foreign ownership of land and resources and the resultant outflow of profits from the region to foreign capitalists. In Jamaica, the Black Power publication *Abeng*, published from February to September 1969, drew attention to the domination of the Bauxite mining industry by four North American companies and the 200,000 acres of good agricultural land owned by predominantly British sugar companies.[7] The impact of thison the population was that Black Jamaicans were either 'mere squatterson the land' forced to rent from foreign landowners or were employed as cheap labour by foreign capitalists to aid in the exploitation of Jamaican resources for profits abroad.[8] These critiques were nothing original *per se* – Caribbean socialists and anti-colonialists had long attacked the exploitation of the region's human and natural resources for profit expatriated to the metropole.[9]

The economic and political grip that King Sugar held over Jamaica and the wider region was a frequent target for attack in *Abeng*, with an April

1969 article noting that 'As has happened since the first white man forced himself on this island, sugar has spoken and Jamaica has trembled'.[10] However, in *Abeng*'s political-economic assessment of Jamaica and the region in a post-independence context there was a sharp focus on the role of the Jamaican government and petit-bourgeoisie in the reproduction of relations of dependency. The Jamaican 'slave government', and its class allies that cooperated with foreign capital in perpetrating 'injustices against the people', were the subject of a sharp neo-colonial analysis by Black Power actors.[11]

In Trinidad, the publications and labour activism of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (OWTU) consistently advanced the position that white capital held too much power over Black labour on the island andthat working class militancy and economic nationalisation were necessary to combat this. The OWTU was the largest and most powerful union inthe country and under the radical leadership of George Weekes was at the forefront of anti-government protests throughout the 1960s culminatingin the union's active participation in the 1970 'Black Power Revolution'. February through May 1970 is known as the Trinidad Black Power Revolution where tens of thousands of protestors became allied with radical unions as the months progressed. By mid-April the Trinidadian government had declared a state of emergency with strike action threaten-ing to cripple strategic sectors of the economy. Events came to a head on the 25th when an army mutiny led by radical young officers threatened to bring down the government.[12] Eventually, order was restored as USand British warships and American marines stood off the coast and the Black Power Revolution collapsed in the face of the re-assertion of state power.[13] OWTU involvement in the Black Power Revolution is representative of the multiple currents that moved through West Indian Black Power. Militant and socialist workers were allied with Black cultural nationalist or generally anti-establishment street protestors and students. This was an alliance that would not hold as the 1970s progressed.[14] As the purchase of Black Power loosened there was a transition to more formal political parties and organisations, particularly on the left. The OWTU was no different and the union entered Trinidadian party politics in the mid-1970s.

In the 1960s the OWTU had exemplified the intersections of socialist and Black Power thought and activity that this paper examines. The OWTU had a long association with Trinidadian Marxist historian and theorist C.L.R. James throughout much of his life. In 1961 James gave a series of lectures on Marxism at the union. He was an ally of OWTU President

General George Weekes with whom he would form the Marxist-populist Workers and Farmers Party in 1965.[15] The OWTU's organ *The Vanguard* routinely published articles in praise of Maoist China and Castro's Cuba with the revolutionary anti-imperialism of the two socialist regimes viewed as inspiration for the OWTU's efforts in Trinidad. OWTU members visited Cuba on numerous occasions – perhaps most notably when President General George Weekes attended the Tricontinental Conference held in Havana in 1966, discussed below. This perhaps prefigured the OWTU's movement away from Black Power in the early 1970s and towards more orthodox socialist activity as the decade progressed.

The OWTU's commitment to West Indian labour is seen in the minutes of a 1968 tripartite conference on the Trinidadian oil industry involving representatives of labour, the government and foreign oil companies. Weekes assessed the meeting to be a confrontation between Black labour and white capital:

> How long must we continue to allow **our destiny** to be controlledfrom New York and London? When shall we take up our bed and walk? When will we drop our bucket right where we are? When willthe Government see that a nation **owned by foreigners** can never be **free** and must always be **slaves** [emphasis in the original].[16]

This quotation demonstrates a clear neo-colonial analysis from Weekes. The continued domination of the economies of newly independent West Indian states by metropolitan capital severely limits political possibilities in the region, and this point is made using the rhetoric of modern-day slavery.

These assessments of West Indian neo-coloniality are developed in the work of the Black Power movement's key thinkers. In his highly influential text *The Groundings with my Brothers*, Walter Rodney launches scathing attacks on the West Indian post-independence settlement. UCL Professor of Caribbean History, Kate Quinn, describes the book as follows:

> Rodney's The Groundings with My Brothers (1969), a series of speeches given in Jamaica and Montreal, remains the foundational text of West Indian Black Power by one of its foremost protagonists and theoreticians and was, along with works by Frantz Fanon and Malcolm X, required reading for any serious Black Power aspirant in the period.[17]

Rodney lays out a basic understanding of Black Power and its necessity in the West Indies with an analysis of neo-colonialism central to his work. Rodney deploys a core-periphery model of a world shaped by imperial- ism where 'every country in the dominant metropolitan areas has a large majority of whites – USA, Britain, France etc.' whereas 'Every country in the dominated colonial areas has an overwhelming majority of non-whites,as in most of Asia, Africa and the West Indies'.[18] Whilst this analysis could be applied to the colonial period Rodney develops his thinking for the period of decolonisation. Countering the notion that independence in and of itself means power for the (neo)colonised world Rodney states that Black men ruling dependent states are 'simply [agents] of the whites in the metropolis, with an army and a police force designed to maintain the imperialist way of things in that particular colonial area'.[19]

Rodney's total analysis of world imperialism and neo-colonialism is anticipatory of Marxist political economy developed through the field of world-systems theory in the mid-to-late 1970s. A number of the founders of world-systems analysis interacted with Rodney and emerged from a shared intellectual milieu through the late 1960s and early 1970s.[20] Terrence Hopkins was a University of the West Indies visiting professor in Trinidad whilst Rodney was at UWI in Kingston in 1968. Hopkins was a founding figure in world-systems analysis and was 'considered the specialist in the field on all methodological questions' whilst he developed the State University of New York-Binghamton's sociology programme over the course of his academic career.[21] Giovanni Arrighiwas also a colleague of Rodney's at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1966-67 and in 1969. In the 1960s, first at the University Collegeof Rhodesia, and then in Tanzania, Arrighi developed Marxist analysesof the proletarianization of labour in southern Africa and the role of African underdevelopment in the development of global capitalism.[22] Arrighi is perhaps most famous for his analysis of the development of capitalism in the longue durée culminating in his well-known work *The Long Twentieth Century.* It was at the Dar school, in Julius Nyerere's African socialist Tanzania, that a number of the theoretical antecedentsto world-systems theory are to be found with Rodney central here. The socialist and decolonised curriculum developed by Rodney and other radical intellectuals in Dar es Salaam had at its centre a Common Course in Social Analysis that was interdisciplinary and decentred thenation-state as the primary unit of political, historical, economic and social analysis.[23] This course, alongside Rodney's other courses on Black history, advanced a global approach to knowledge and developed a

Marxist analysis of the shifting international system of imperialism that Rodney describes in *Groundings*.

Returning to his analyses of the West Indies, Rodney develops an assessment of the ruling class of peripheral dependent states in *Groundings* and later works. In a polemical speech delivered in Montreal in 1968, the day following his banning from Jamaica for supposed subversion, Rodney attacks the class rule of the island's neo-colonial society:

> this power-group is merely acting as representatives of metropolitan-imperialist interests. Historically white and racist-oriented, these interests continue to stop attempts at creative social expression on the part of the black oppressed masses.[24]

Noting the failure of the Jamaican economic policy of development by invitation and reliance on foreign capital, Rodney sees that 'the local lackeys of imperialism' now use the repressive capacity of the state to quell popular dissent.[25] This dissent was rooted in the fact that since independence Jamaica's chronic unemployment issues had if anything worsened and the material conditions of the majority population had changed little since the late colonial period.[26]

In a 1975 article, Rodney builds on Frantz Fanon's conception of aneo-colonial politics as a 'process of retrogression' which he applies to the post-colonial Caribbean.[27] The most significant factor that Rodney seesin shaping this situation in the region is 'the consolidation of the petty bourgeoisie as a class around the state'.[28] Rodney assesses that in the West Indies, independence has led to the strategic control of the state by an emergent Black middle-class that is bureaucratic, careerist and that leverages this state control to consolidate their position as members of the petite bourgeoisie.[29] Control of the state and political institutions secures the class reproduction of this sector of the petit bourgeois. Fellow Guyanese intellectual and Black Power advocate Clive Thomas describes this process in greater detail in his Marxist text *The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies* first published in 1984. Thomas was part of the Black Power-aligned Ratoon group in his native Guyana. Like Rodney,Thomas considers that in the periphery, the capture of political power by this element of the petite bourgeoisie is the basis for consolidating eco- nomic power. State power is expanded not to combat the influence of metropolitan capital, despite common claims, but to instead consolidate the political class's control over local capital.[30] The capture of state power was often used as the basis for strengthening ties with metropolitan capital

and imperialist states to prop up the neo-colonial economy and to call upon assistance when their class rule was challenged.[31]

Beyond his theoretical contributions, Rodney also committed himself to the political work necessary to achieve his anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideals. After returning to his native Guyana in 1974, Rodney became a member of the Working People's Alliance (WPA) an organisation that sought to forge a multiracial front for socialism andanti-imperialism in Guyana in opposition to the racially polarised andauthoritarian political culture at that time.[32] Rodney's involvement with the WPA emerged from his commitments to a politics of Black Powerand Third World socialism and it was for this that he was assassinated in 1980 by the regime of Forbes Burnham. I have documented extensively Rodney's involvement with the emergence and development of Black Power in the West Indies but he also had a long history with socialist poli- tics. Rodney, partially, located his lifelong commitments to anti-racismand socialism to his early experiences in Guyana of the mobilisation and organisation of the Marxist and multi-racial People's Progressive Party (PPP). These tendencies were developed through visits to the Soviet Union and Cuba in the early 1960s and in particular the experience of the early Cuban revolution occurring in a nearby island in the Caribbean hada marked impact on Rodney's political development.[33]

It is to the articulation between racism, imperialism and neo-colonialism that I now turn. West Indian Black Power groups and thinkers clearly understood that the class exploitation of the mass West Indian population was experienced in deeply racialised terms.

Black Power opposition to the racial basis of West Indian neo-colonialism

The dominant political culture of the West Indian middle class that formed the region's post-colonial political class as identified by Rodney and Thomas is often characterised as Creole nationalist or Afro-Saxon. Similar configurations existed within other ethnic communities in the region with Christianised members of the East Indian populations of places like Trinidad and Guyana also supportive of this nationalist political current. Middle-class nationalist leaders and political parties agreed the settlements that led to formal independence in the early 1960s. During post-colonial nation building, colonial systems of knowledge, modes of governance and conceptions of politics remained largely unchanged. The root cause of this problem is identified by many authors as located in a failure to decolonise the nationalist politics and ideology of the West Indian middle-class politicians who

came to form the first independent governments.[34] The political culture of post-World War II mainstream politics in the region was one closed to non-Western knowledge systems and modes of being and so excluded the experiences and history of the mass of the population whilst simultaneously reaffirming the 'specific cosmic vision' of Western modernity.[35]

As C.L.R. James noted in his analysis of this stratum of West Indian society, the political culture of middle-class nationalists was one of deference and imitation of the British colonial state to advance through the bureaucratic ranks.[36] This meant that West Indian nationalist parties and their middle-class leadership were viewed as the legitimate and safe option during the decolonisation process in part because of their uptake and mastery of British culture, political forms and statecraft. Ultimately, this meant 'that the social/psychological imprint of colonialism on the nationalist "heir-apparent" was reinforced by the imperatives for legitimate succession to the colonial estate'.[37]

Nationality and citizenship remained embedded within colonial racial stereotypes and logics in the ideology of West Indian nationalist leaders and parties. Race was the central axis of social stratification within the British West Indies with 'racial boundaries [delineating] the inequitable distribution of liberties, protection and justice … from the early nineteenth century until today'.[38] During constitutional decolonisation, the plantation racial hierarchy was not dismantled – it was retained, albeit modified, with the white colonisers now removed. The post-colonial nation state was headed by a political class which had attained its position by mastering and mirroring the political practices and culture of the imperial metropole. Its nationalist politics would seek to build modern nation states and national citizenries through imitation of the liberal, capitalist nationalisms of the imperial core and in particular the British state and parliamentary system.

West Indian nationalist politics and politicians set the terms for the construction of national belonging and identity using colonially-rooted discourses which linked race to modernity. The outcome was the solidification of a pedagogical politics where nationalist governments and the political class, who could be considered full citizens of the post-colonial nation state, saw their task to be the education of the Afro- and Indo-Caribbean mass population in what it meant to be a modern citizen,[39] with national citizenship couched in racial terms. The Jamaican political scientist Maziki Thame has developed a Fanonian reading of this situation. She asserts that nationalist governments had adopted the Manichean divisions of colonial rule with:

> citizenship in the postcolonial Caribbean … therefore constructed through skewed understandings of humanness, specifically questioning whether Blacks [and Indo-Caribbeans] were truly human and of value [and] whether they could truly belong and have rights and privileges in an independent nation.[40]

In Jamaica this saw the establishment of an official ideology of multi-racialism wherein the new nation state and its people were said to be of mixed racial origin in a way that occluded the largely African heritage of the majority population. This position was encapsulated by the national motto: 'Out of Many One People'. In this formulation, a new cultur- ally and ethnically hybrid people had emerged from the experiences of slavery and colonialism. This was a move to disarm politicised forms of Black consciousness, and to sever ties between the new Jamaican stateand people, and Africa as a diasporic homeland. This Creole Nationalist delineation of the state and citizenry as being of mixed race designated any race-based politics as illegitimate in a supposedly racially harmoni- ous post-independence society. Importantly, such a nationalist ideology elided any discussion of the linkage between race and class in the West Indies and the continued legacies of racial slavery and structural white supremacy under colonial rule. In this context; 'the political leadershipand other dominant forces now designated racial consciousness as anatavism – a "throwback" to old contradictions now long resolved'.[41] Black Power as a race-conscious politics was seen as a threat to the new nation states of the West Indies, as it challenged the very underpinnings of the Creole Nationalist construction of nation and citizen.

In the Jamaican Black Power journal *Abeng* a recurring theme was an assessment of the neo-colonial politics of retrogression described by Rodney and Thomas, but understood through a critical Black consciousness. *Abeng* articles note that the Creole middle class that had secured state power was increasingly reliant on repression and coercion to secure its rule. In issue six of *Abeng,* published March 1969*,* an article entitled 'Brute Force Mentality' reports on the Chief of Staff of the Jamaican Defence Force (JDF), the island's standing army, stating that the new nation's 'growing pains' required the 'cure' of the JDF.[42] *Abeng* diag- nosed these pains as symptomatic of a situation where 'one out of every five persons is without work. Nearly 100,000 children in the school age group are out of school. A handful of foreigners and their local henchmen control and exploit our natural resources'.[43] Evidenced here is the coercivecharacter of Jamaican class rule, the political economy of neo-colonialism

that secures that position and the deleterious effects of capitalist imperialism on the Jamaican people.

The article directly below 'Brute Force Mentality' on the paper's front page demonstrates how anti-Black racism was articulated with the above political-economic factors to lead to the race *and* class oppression of the Afro-Jamaican population. The article describes the police harassment and brutalisation of Rastafari fishermen whose hut and belongings were burnt by the officers. Further, after 'a Rastafarian brother' went to speak to the local Police Inspector 'four policemen ran him down on the street beating him with a gun and sticks'.[44] The justification for these violent assaults was that the Rastafarians had been accused of squatting on Government-owned land. The Rastafarians' transgression of the laws of private property ownership that underpinned the liberal, capitalist Jamaican state saw the deployment of brutal state violence against members of the racialised underclass. Rastafarians were a core element of the Black Power movement in Jamaica and their presence highlights the diversity of social forces present in the West Indian Black Power movement discussed earlier in relation to Trinidad. As in Trinidad, in Jamaica there would be a splitin the former Black Power bloc as the more Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist Rastafari elements would be left by those more interested in explicitly socialist politics as the 1970s progressed.[45]

This analysis of Creole Nationalism's race politics is found running throughout *Abeng* and is articulated with multiple antagonisms. In the first issue published in February 1969, there is a denunciation of the imposition of minimum five-year sentences with flogging for acts of robbery designed to target Kingston's poor, urban Black youth. It is said:

> Very soon these youths must inevitably begin to doubt the moral pretensions of a society and its legal system which turn a blind eye to robbery in high places but **commands the jailer to whip and imprison Quashie**.[46] [emphasis mine]

Abeng contrasted the crimes of the political and middle class (corruption, the selling out of Jamaican resources and labour to foreign capital) and the petty crimes of the poor, Black, mass population. Again, the neo-colonial state structure and the political economy upon which it rests was understood to be maintained and experienced through colonial logics of race and racism. The continued coloniality of the Jamaican state and criminal justice system were highlighted as *Abeng* locates the handing down of sentences of flogging from independent West Indian governments as an

act of social discipline rooted in the same racist logics and stereotypes of the slave plantation.

In opposition to the dual race-class oppression outlined, West Indian Black Power articulations of socialism emphasised class solidarity. This too was articulated in racial terms as is described in the next section that examines formation of transnational solidarities.

Section 2 - Transnational solidarity and Third Worldism

Black Power politics in the West Indies was assuredly global in outlook. The analysis of a world system of imperialism and the relations between core and periphery that underpinned the political-economic thought dis- cussed at length in the first section necessitated a similarly transnational politics of solidarity in opposition.

Africa

The anti-imperialist and national liberation wars waged across the Global South in the late 1960s were a constant point of reference for West Indian Black Power. With many of these struggles being led by socialist or Communist guerrillas and parties, Black Power actors articulated a politics of solidarity along class and race lines. Such solidarities emerged from an analysis of world imperialism and neo-colonialism that understoodrace and class to be mutually constitutive axes of oppression.

Abeng featured a regular column entitled 'African Battleline' that covered the 'many battles being fought in Africa' against foreign imperialist aggression and domination.[47] Many of these struggles were led by socialist anti-colonial revolutionaries. In a March 1969 piece surveying the anti-colonial wars of southern Africa, *Abeng* highlighted the struggle for liberation against Portuguese imperialism in Angola and Mozambique with these efforts led by the Communist-aligned MPLA and FRELIMO. The same article noted the international, reactionary alliance that opposed these freedom struggles. Ian Smith's Rhodesia, Apartheid South Africa and Fascist Portugal were co-operating in the repression of Black and social- ist revolution across southern Africa aided by some neo-colonial leadersof nominally independent African states.[48] This reactionary coalition was said to construct themselves as 'the defenders of "Christianity" and "civilisation" against Black Power and Communism'.[49] In these anti-colonial struggles in Africa, the dual goals of Black Power and Communism were seen to be tied by Black Power actors in the West Indies, with African

socialists at the forefront of efforts to win these goals. This attaching of the Black Power 'label' to anti-colonial movements in Africa was a projection on the part of West Indian Black Power actors, but, notably, this fusion of Caribbean Pan-Africanist and Black Nationalist traditions with communist traditions represented an authentic innovation on the part of West Indian Black Power.

Abeng covered the struggle in another Portuguese colony, Guinea-Bissau, in greater detail. In a February 1969 article entitled 'Guinea and the Struggle', *Abeng* noted the scale of the conflict with Portugal having 'about 30,000 troops in Guinea which is proportionally equal to the number of American troops in Vietnam'.[50] The reference to Vietnam was no coincidence as *Abeng* reported that the imperialist states of the West and predominantly the US were supplying military aid to Portugal in its colonial wars. US napalm was 'used to set light to African villages and burn black men, women and children'.[51] This heinous example provided evidence of the maintenance of colonial, class and racial oppression across the world by the imperial core. Amilcar Cabral as leader of the liberation struggle was praised both for his national and class consciousness. *Abeng* noted that, with his higher education in the metropole, Cabral could have turned his back on the masses of Guinea-Bissau. However, he was praised for committing himself to national liberation to end the oppression of the Guinean people. *Abeng*'s position here aligns with Walter Rodney's on the role of the Black intellectual. For Rodney, the 'black intellectual … must attach himself to the activity of the black masses' or else the black intellectual becomes 'as much a part of the system of oppression as the bank managers and plantation overseers'.[52] Both Rodney and *Abeng* noted that class collaboration and incorporation into (neo)colonial regimes of domination sees the Black intellectual/middle class/bourgeoisie complicit in both race *and* class oppression of the masses.

The class character of the Guinean liberation war was also discussed. A dockworkers strike in 1959 that had been brutally suppressed by the Portuguese colonial police is seen to have instigated the independence war. Further, in an excerpted interview reprinted in *Abeng*, Cabral describes how the national liberation war is transforming the Guinean people producing 'new … politically and patriotically aware' men, women and children.[53] The liberated regions of the country saw the development of a new society where conscious Guineans are discarding the 'remnants of tribal ideas'.[54] This was contextualised against the Portuguese having exploited tribal contradictions and the class cleavages produced by 'the privileged position of the traditional chiefs'.[55] Finally, Cabral emphasised

the gender equality of the revolution with women represented at all levels of the revolutionary party and 'in charge of the committees in the villages and the zones and even of interregional committees'.[56] *Abeng*'s coverage of the Guinean liberation war, and other anti-colonial and anti-impe- rial struggles in Africa, consistently emphasised the dual race and class oppressions of colonial rule and capitalist-imperialist exploitation on the continent. Only the collective victory of African workers and peasants could end this situation, and this analysis was taken as instructive for domestic political struggle in Jamaica.

Cuba

For Black Power actors in the West Indies who articulated a socialist politics there was a Third Worldist Communist revolution closer to home: Cuba. The 1966 Tricontinental Conference held in Havana drew together the African socialist threads discussed in the previous section directly with Black Power figures and their antecedents in the West Indies, in the capital of revolutionary Cuba. Delegates from eighty-two nations attended the 1966 Tricontinental Conference which produced an alliance against imperialism called the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). OSPAAAL generated a voluminous cultural and literary production that articulated what might be called a 'tricontinentalist' anti-imperialism. OSPAAAL produced publications that analysed global events such as the US Civil Rights movement and anti-colonial liberation struggles from this anti-imperialist position. They were distributed internationally in a range of languages. Radio programmes and newsreels produced by the Cuban Film Institute were also transmitted globally by OSPAAAL. However, despite this seeming global reach, the organisation had little to no influence 'on the ground' with Black Power actors in the West Indies. In contrast to the anti-imperial politics outlined at the Bandung Conference of 1955 that was intimately tied to post-colonial nationalism and the founding and defence of nation states, the Tricontinental articulated a politics of anti-imperialism through a subaltern subjectivity not tied to nationality.[57] The Tricontinental included peoples located in the Global North that were oppressed by a racist, capitalist, imperialist world system just as peoples of the Global South were. Delegates from the US Black Power movement were prominent figures at the Conference, as were representatives of organisations not attached to national governments or formal political parties.

The Conference was attended by Amilcar Cabral as president of his revolutionary party, the leadership of FRELIMO from Mozambique and the Angolan MPLA that *Abeng* supported so vociferously, as dis- cussed earlier.[58] Alongside such figures were West Indian socialists and organisations that supported, and were to play prominent roles in, the development of Black Power politics in the region in the coming years. From Guyana, the Communist PPP sent a delegation with party leader Cheddi Jagan as head.[59] In 1970, Jagan and the PPP publicly backed the Black Power Revolution in Trinidad as well as condemning West Indian governments for barring US Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael from entering their territories.[60] The Jamaican delegation included the Vice President of the Young Socialist League (YSL), which was the radical youth wing of Jamaica's People's National Party.[61] A number of *Abeng*'s editors and contributors were or had been members of the YSL including Trevor Munroe, George Beckford and Robert Hill. Lastly, the Trinidadian delegation was headed up by George Weekes, the General Secretary of the OWTU.[62] Weekes and his union were major supporters of the Black Power Revolution in 1970.

This brief snapshot of West Indian attendees demonstrates the inter- connection between socialist and Black Power politics. It must be noted however, that those attending the Tricontinental Conference did so as members of explicitly left or socialist parties, organisations and unions. With the popular emergence of Black Power in the West Indies in 1968, these organisations and figures attached themselves to this popular move- ment that contained revolutionary potential and analysis. However, as the 1970s progressed these groupings moved away from Black Power, back towards more orthodox socialist political organisation and positioning; their attendance at the Tricontinental Conference prefigured this move. The legacies of the Black Power period, however, had an impact on sub- sequent direction.

US Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael in a speech at the Conference described Fidel Castro as 'one of the blackest men in America', a quota- tion repeated by Walter Rodney in *The Groundings with my Brothers*.[63] This quotation fits Rodney's neo-colonial analysis of West Indian petit- bourgeois political leaders and his expansive conception of a radical Black politics that included East Indian populations. In the West Indies, the term East Indian refers to people descended from indentured labourers drawn from the Indian subcontinent who were brought to the British colonies of the Caribbean during the nineteenth century to maintain the region's plantation economies following the emancipation of African enslaved

peoples. Guyana and Trinidad have the largest East Indian populations in the West Indies and are indeed ethnic pluralities. The socialist and anti-imperialist politics of the Tricontinental and West Indian Black Powerthen were not rooted in essentialist conceptions of race and racial nationalism.[64] The more phenotypically 'white' Fidel Castro was portrayed by Black Power figures to be pursuing a politics of radical Blackness through the anti-imperialism and socialism of the Cuban Revolution as well as through Cuban solidarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles across the 'Third World' *and* oppressed peoples in the imperial core.

Connections between West Indian Black Power and Cuba extended beyond the Tricontinental Conference. The Cuban Revolution, and the personification of that revolution in figures such as Castro and Guevara, were often understood as symbols of the global revolutionary upsurge that had occurred throughout the 1960s. In the OWTU's official organ *The Vanguard*, an article from 1969 assessing these multiple revolutionary currents positioned Black youth across the world as the catalyst for change. The article noted a protest march led by UWI students in Port of Spain had been organised in response to the Smith regime of Rhodesia executing Black independence fighters. Quoting the article; 'In so doing they [the students] were defending armed revolution of their black brothers'.[65] The article went on to say that a global system of white capitalist imperialism is maintained by systematic violence and thus violent struggle against it can be justified. In closing, the article draws strength from the examples of figures who opposed this oppressive world system; 'Only the black heroes are worthy of emulation – Lumumba, Malcolm X, Nkrumah, Castro, Stokely Carmichael, Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara'.[66] In this piece we see the interconnection of a number of threads picked out in this paper. Firstly, there is an analysis of world imperialism that is understood to oppress subaltern groups along the mutually constitutive categories of race and class. Secondly, this system, upheld by all manner of violent injustices, necessitates consistent, potentially violent, but certainly revolutionary opposition to overcome it. Finally, that blackness in many senses denoted a subaltern, political subjectivity that could incorporate all manner of groups and identities through either common experience of race and class oppression or commitment to anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and anti-racist struggle.

On that latter point, the expansion of blackness to include potentially all subaltern peoples and struggles against capitalist imperialism again points towards the transition away from Black Power that many associated with the movement would complete during the 1970s. Those who

came to Black Power from a socialist or class-based political background could dispense with the typically Black nationalist or Pan-Africanist slogans and aesthetic of Black Power and pursue a more explicitly social- ist or communist programme of revolution and, generally Third Worldist, anti-imperialism.

Conclusion

By the early 1970s the West Indian Black Power movement reached its apogee. The 1970 Black Power Revolution in Trinidad supported by an army mutiny had almost toppled a sitting Caribbean government; in Jamaica, the Black Power groupings surrounding *Abeng* moved intoalliance with a growing independent trade union movement; and in the eastern Caribbean Black Power groups sprang up across multiple islands. Most notable of these later formations, in Grenada the groupings Forum and the Movement for the Assemblies of the People would merge to form JEWEL which launched a successful socialist revolution in 1979.

By the mid-1970s the popular enthusiasm for Black Power had waned and many figures and groups associated with the movement either dis-appeared or transitioned into more explicitly left political parties and movements.[67] Many moved into Marxist-Leninist parties, often jettison- ing the race consciousness and mass-based politics of Black Power for the democratic centralism and vanguardism of the Leninist revolutionary organisation. This movement is not entirely surprising if we consider the various currents that moved through West Indian Black Power. The more Black or cultural nationalist adherents of Rastafari or Pan-Africanism often sat uneasily with those who saw in Black Power the legacies of Caribbean socialism and more of a class-based commitment to anti-imperialism than the racial solidarity articulated by the former groups.

Former *Abeng* editor, Trevor Munroe, founded the Worker's Liberation League in Jamaica in 1974, and later the Worker's Party ofJamaica, a Communist vanguard party. Other *Abeng* editors and organ- isers moved into Michael Manley's People's National Party, in supportof the party's leftward movement in the early 1970s, which culminatedin the adoption of a programme of Democratic Socialism in 1974.[68] In Trinidad, the ultimate failure of the 1970 Black Power Revolution saw popular radical energies channelled into trade union politics from which a strong electoral opposition to the sitting government would emergeby the mid-1970s. More dramatically, some Trinidadian youth drawn towards Black Power prior to the Revolution formed a focoist guerrilla

cell and took to the mountains to wage an ultimately failed campaign of revolutionary violence.[69] Lastly and perhaps most famously, Grenada's JEWEL movement that emerged from Black Power organisations on the island originally adopted a Jamesian socialist approach that was anti-vanguardist, popularly inclusive and adopted an ideology of spontaneous revolution.[70] Following the violent suppression of JEWEL's attempt to oust the government through a general strike in 1974 the party adopted a Leninist, vanguard structure and in 1979 successfully seized state power through the usage of a clandestine cell network.

What are we to make of this? In one sense these shifts can be read in much the same way as the moment of the late 1960s when Black Power emerged in the West Indies. Caribbean peoples and groups were again interpreting global trends in revolutionary politics; in the former case the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the US along with the impulse towards mass protest politics of the '68 movements; in the latter, the successful revolutions waged by Leninist parties across the Third World that had successfully removed the US from Vietnam and the Portuguese from Africa. Despite ideological and organisational differences, these later Marxist parties were in many senses built on the foundations laidby preceding Black Power groups. These later organisations often owed their founding and a good deal of their membership to the channellingof popular dissatisfaction into radical political opposition and to someform of anti-capitalist critique achieved by Black Power. The experience of activists in publishing and circulating agitational literature, experiment-ing with different organisational forms for political protest and in directly confronting state power and capital all provided invaluable experience for efforts organised through more doctrinaire socialist and Marxist organisations in the later 1970s.

West Indian Black Power was successful in animating popular consciousness around notions of revolutionary change in the Caribbean in the post-colonial period and in sharpening critiques of Caribbean neo-coloniality – often from a socialist perspective. The movement reached its limits in actually effecting significant revolutionary change or taking the post-colonial state head on. In such confrontations the lack of a clear and consistent ideological position and organisational form represented a strategic weakness. By the time the shift to Marxist party organisa- tion occurred in the region the question was not *whether* revolutionary change was required after independence but *how* best to achieve this.The efficacy of Leninist party structure and strategy was to an extentborne out in Grenada but this success of the vanguard party was not

repeated in other West Indian islands. In the transition away from Black Power there was often something lost, that Brian Meeks describes as 'an openness and diversity of political forms and politics and, critically, an appreciation of the importance of countersymbolic and counterhegem-onic popular forms'.[71] The latter point is, I think, a crucial contribution of West Indian Black Power to socialist politics. Black Power was successful in that it was able to articulate a socialist politics and analysis in a local idiom and popular forms. That is why I have frequently turned to the work of Walter Rodney in this article. He was able to combine Marxist, political-economic analysis of the post-colonial Caribbean with an appreciation of popular narratives of resistance to inaugurate a mass-based politics that could challenge *both* racial and class oppression in the West Indies in terms intelligible and proximate to the peoples of the region.

Notes

1 For a detailed account of the Rodney Riots, see Rupert Lewis, *Walter Rodney: 1968 revisited*, Kingston, 1998.
2 David Austin, *Moving Against the System: the 1968 congress of black writers and the making of a global consciousness,* London, 2018, p1.
3 Rex Nettleford, *Mirror, mirror: identity, race and protest in Jamaica,* Kingston, 1970, p125.
4 See the chapter 'The Advent of Black Power and the State's Reaction' in Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960 – 1972,* Knoxville, 1991, for discussion of the Jamaican state's crackdown on individuals deemed subversive of the national interest and the Jamaican Labour Party government's anti-communism.
5 See Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*, for a sense of the contested visions of independence articulated at this time. Brian Meeks charts the tendencies in the Caribbean left and Black Power movements in 'The Rise and Fall of Caribbean Black Power', in Michael West, William Martin and Fanon Che Wilkins (eds), *From Toussaint to Tupac: The black international since the age of revolution,* Chapel Hill NC, 2009.
6 See David Austin's *Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal*, Toronto, 2013, and *Moving Against the System: The 1968 Congress of Black Writers and the Making of Global Consciousness*, London, 2018, for detailed accounts of the Congress of Black Writers and the various Black Power figures in attendance.
7 Articles on the foreign ownership of land and Bauxite resources can be found in *Abeng*, No. 6, (1969): 1, and *Abeng*, No. 12 (1969): 1.
8 *Abeng*, No. 3 (1969): 3.

9 Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill NC, 1994, is perhaps the paradigmatic exemplar here.
10 *Abeng*, No. 12 (1969): 1.
11 Ibid.
12 Foreign & Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO), *Telegram to Foreign & Commonwealth Office on Discussions with Williams Regarding the Mutiny – 22nd April 1970,* [Document] The UK National Archives (hereafter TNA), FCO 63/592 and FCO, *Letter from British High Commission in Port of Spain to FCO – 17th April*, [Document] TNA, FCO 63/592.
13 FCO, *Speaking Notes on Trinidad for use of Thomson at Cabinet Meeting*, [Document] TNA, FCO 63/592.
14 See Selwyn Ryan and Taimoon Stewart, *The Black Power Revolution, 1970: A Retrospective*, St Augustine, 1995, for an overview of the composition of the 'revolutionaries'.
15 See Consuelo Lopez, 'C.L.R. James: "Cleaning Up the Mess" in the 1966 Trinidad-Tobago Election', *Caribbean Quarterly*, No. 2 (1984): 18-32 for discussion of the Workers' and Farmers' Party and James's involvement.
16 Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, *Speeches by George Weekes: At the tri- partite conference on employment and retrenchment,* San Fernando, 1968, pp30-31.
17 Kate Quinn, *Black Power in the Caribbean*, Gainesville, 2014, p10.
18 Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with my Brothers*, London, 1990, p18.
19 Ibid.
20 Yousuf Al-Bulushi discusses this intellectual history and the Marxist scholars influenced by and connected to Rodney in 'Thinking racial capitalism and black radicalism from Africa: An intellectual geography of Cedric Robinson's world-system', *Geoforum,* (June 2022): 254.
21 Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Obituary: Terrence Kilburn Hopkins', *ASA Footnotes*, March, 1997, p15.
22 See Giovanni Arrighi, 'Labour supplies in historical perspective: A study of the proletarianization of the African peasantry in Rhodesia', *The Journal of Development Studies*, No. 6 (1970): 197-234 for an example of his work on African labour.
23 The courses in social science developed and taught by the Marxist scholars, including Walter Rodney, are discussed in Jo Sharp, 'Practicing Subalternity? Nyerere's Tanzania, the Dar School, and Postcolonial Geopolitical Imaginations' in Tari Jazeel and Stephen Legg (eds), *Subaltern Geographies*, Athens, 2019, and in Al-Bulushi, 'Thinking racial capitalism'.
24 Rodney, *Groundings*, p12.
25 Ibid., p13.
26 See Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*, p43.
27 Walter Rodney, 'Contemporary Political Trends in the English Speaking Caribbean', *The Black Scholar*, No. 7 (1975): 15.

28 Ibid., p16.
29 Ibid., p15.
30 Chapter 5 of Clive Thomas, *The Rise of the Authoritarian State in Peripheral Societies*, London 1984, discusses this class character of state expansion in post-colonies most specifically.
31 See Rodney, 'Contemporary Political Trends', p17.
32 See Nigel Westmaas, 'Resisting Orthodoxy: Notes on the Origins and Ideology of the Working People's Alliance', *Small Axe,* No. 15 (2004), for an overview of the WPA and its activities.
33 See Walter Rodney, *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual*, Trenton, 1990, pp1-18, for details on his early life.
34 See Maziki Thame, 'Racial Hierarchy and the Elevation of Brownness in Creole Nationalism', *Small Axe*, No. 3 (2017): 121-123. Anthony Bogues provides an intellectual and political history of the consolidation of Creole nationalist politics in Jamaica in Bogues, 'Politics, Nation and PostColony: Caribbean inflections', *Small Axe*, No. 1 (2002): 1-30.
35 Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, No. 2 (2007): 177.
36 See C.L.R. James, 'Social Groups and the Political Process' in *Party Politics in the West Indies*, San Juan, 1984.
37 Ibid., p77.
38 Maziki Thame, 'Reading Violence and Postcolonial Decolonization through Fanon: The Case of Jamaica', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, No. 7 (2011): 77.
39 See Bogues, 'Politics, Nation and PostColony', for detailed discussionof the educational role that Creole nationalist politicians saw themselves occupying.
40 Thame, 'Reading Violence and Postcolonial Decolonization', p77.
41 Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica*, p56.
42 *Abeng*, No. 6 (1969): 1.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Rupert Lewis and David Scott, 'The Dialectic of Defeat: An Interview with Rupert Lewis', *Small Axe*, No. 10 (2001): 85-102, gives a good account of the various tendencies within Jamaican Black Power and surrounding *Abeng* in particular.
46 *Abeng*, No. 1 (1969): 3.
47 Ibid., p4.
48 *Abeng*, No. 8 (1969): 4.
49 Ibid.
50 *Abeng*, No. 4 (1969): 4.
51 Ibid.
52 Rodney, *Groundings*, pp62-63.

53 *Abeng*, No. 20 (1969): 3.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 See Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, radicalism and transnational solidarity,* Durham NC, 2018, for an account of this politics.
58 United States Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, *The Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian,and Latin American Peoples: a staff study,* Washington 1966, pp49 and 56.
59 Ibid., p54.
60 FCO, *Guyanese Reaction to Events in Trinidad*, [Document] TNA, FCO 63/463 and FCO, *The Times Reports on Carmichael's Visit to Guyana,* [Document] TNA, FCO 63/463.
61 US Congress, *The Tricontinental Conference,* p55.
62 Ibid., p60.
63 Rodney, *Groundings*, p31.
64 Anne Garland Mahler, 'The Global South in the Belly of the Beast: Viewing African American Civil Rights through a Tricontinental Lens', *Latin American Research Review*, No. 1 (2015): 97.
65 Oilfield Workers' Trade Union, *The Vanguard*, No. 115 (San Fernando 1969): 2.
66 Ibid.
67 Meeks, *Rise and Fall*, charts this transition well.
68 The end of Anthony Bogues's chapter, 'The Abeng Newspaper and the Radical Politics of Postcolonial Blackness' in Kate Quinn (ed.), *Black Power in the Caribbean*, Gainesville, 2014, covers this well.
69 See Brian Meek's chapter on the National Union of Freedom Fighters in, *Narratives of Resistance: Jamaica, Trinidad and the Caribbean*, Kingston, 2000.
70 See Meeks, *Rise and Fall*, for discussion of the New JEWEL movementand revolutionary Grenada as well as David Scott, *Omens of Adversity:Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*, London, 2014.
71 Meeks, *Rise and Fall*, p210.