Marxism, Anti-imperialism and Radical Transformations: A Life-Geography of Walter Rodney's Political Thought and Activism (1968-1980)

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By Chinedu Chukwudinma

School of Geography and the Environment

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Abstract

In the decades since his murder in June 1980, enduring and renewed interests in the Afro-Guyanese historian Walter Rodney and his Marxism reveal a striking paradox. Scholars have often portrayed his Marxist identity as more unorthodox, independent, "black", and "Pan-African" than warranted. These qualifiers often blur what defines Marxism while reinforcing the problematic belief that Marxism is Eurocentric. Rodney's praxis, therefore, demands further study as it clarifies the meaning of Marxism and affirms its relevance to the Global South. This thesis examines how Marxism influenced Rodney's thought and activism across time and space.

It argues that Rodney's political development and engagement in anti-imperialist struggles express a transformation pattern from socialism from-above to socialism from-below. According to Hal Draper (1966), variants of socialism from-above, exemplified by Stalinism and reformism, dismiss the working class's ability to create egalitarian societies through its own struggles, while socialism from-below, associated with Marx and Engels, poses the working class as the agent of social change. Rodney's life embodies the contradiction between these two socialisms in the first decades of independence in Africa and the Americas. His political development also reveals the setbacks and incompleteness of his shift towards working-class socialism. While much of the literature emphasises the independent character of Rodney's Marxism, this research presents its originality as stemming from his growing commitment to the orthodoxy of socialism from-below, in contrast to the prevailing socialisms in the Global South during the Cold War.

This research focuses on Rodney's militant years of activism from 1968 until 1980. It draws on archival materials from the United Kingdom, the United States, Tanzania, and Guyana, collected between November 2022 and August 2023. It includes insights, memories, and perspectives from 32 interviews with Rodney's friends, family, comrades, and acquaintances. By applying dialectical materialism to Rodney's life-geography, this study provides a systematic analysis of his political development over time and space, considering its constant evolution, shaped by his interactions with real-world developments in post-independent Africa and the Americas. It demonstrates that Rodney's political development underscores the contemporary significance of Marxism as an anti-racist and anti-imperialist strategy centred on the self-emancipation of the international working class.

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Abbreviations

ASCRIA	African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa
CCWU	Clerical and Commercial Workers Union
CDD	Committee for the Defence of Democracy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNS	Council of National Safety
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Mozambique
GAWU	Guyana Agricultural Workers Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPRA	Indian Revolutionary People's Associates
JLP	Jamaican Labor Party
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
NAACIE	National Association of Agriculture and Industrial Workers' Union
NCPT	New Creation Peacemakers Tabernacle
NJM	New Jewel Movement
OWP	Organisation of Working People
PAC	Pan-African Congress
PCD	Patriotic Coalition for Democracy
PNC	People's National Congress
PPP	People's Progressive Party
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union
TYL	TANU Youth League
UDSM	University of Dar es Salaam
UN	United Nations
USARF	University Students African Revolutionary Front

UWI	University of the West Indies
WARCOI	Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry
WPA	Working People's Alliance
WRP	Walter Rodney Papers
WPVP	Working People's Vanguard Party
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Rodney and the relevance of Marxism in the Global South

On 20 June 1980, members of the Caribbean community in London gathered at Conway Hall to remember the life and legacy of the Afro-Guyanese Marxist Walter Rodney, assassinated by the Guyanese state only one week earlier. The keynote speaker was none other than the Trinidadian Marxist C L R James, Rodney's mentor and the person most responsible for introducing him to Marxism during his doctoral studies in London in 1964 (James, 1980). Though they had parted ways, their correspondence shows that James continued to follow Rodney's political development in the Global South from afar (James, 1974). They occasionally crossed paths, including at the Montreal Congress in 1968, and later in the United States and Tanzania during the 1970s (*Caribbean Unity Conference*, 1972; Austin, 2018). *Mzee* James, as Rodney affectionally called him using the Swahili title of respect, was thus well placed to deliver a powerful and emotional tribute to his fallen mentee (James, 1980). His solemn remarks instilled in those present a profound awareness of the loss they had suffered:

> It is not only that we of the Caribbean would have had somebody in Walter Rodney who would have helped to knit the Caribbean to Africa and to the people in the United States. *It is in that general unity of the working-class people, we had a representative* who was able to meet any member of the opposite movement, any part of England, any part of Europe, meet them on their level and show them that he understood not only the African people and the people of the Caribbean, but he understood their movement as well (James, 1980, p. 28. Emphasis mine).

Rodney not only embodied a unique connection between the people of the African diaspora; but he also belonged to the working-class movement more globally. This commitment was evident in his unwavering readiness, wherever he went, to defend the philosophy he considered to represent the interests of the exploited and oppressed (Kwayana, 1988; Zeilig, 2022).

Discussions on the relevance of Marxism to African, black, and Third World liberation often brought Rodney's lectures to life. Speaking in 1974 to black students at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Rodney addressed those who dismissed Marxism as a

European phenomenon and a form of white cultural domination. “So, Marx was a white boy?” he provocatively asked before adding: “Some reject Marx because he was white, yet they do not hesitate to use the sub-machine gun and electronics, which [were] also invented by members of the same race” (*The Hilltop*, 1974, p. 1). Rodney was not afraid to brandish his wit to convince his audience that racism should not prevent anyone from recognising the universal value of Marxism as a tool for liberation.

He developed this point more forcefully in another speech a year later at Queens University, New York. There, he defended Marxism as a science akin to electronics because it offered a methodology that was “independent of time and place” (Rodney, 1986). He argued that Marxism is a method for analysing social relations based on how humans cooperate to produce wealth (Rodney, 1986). However, Rodney also contended that Marxism differs from electronics because it functioned as an ideology advocating for the production of classes under capitalism and guiding their struggle for liberation. He stated: “Scientific Socialism arose within capitalist society to speak to the interest of the producers in that society, to speak to the interest of those who are exploited and expropriated” (Rodney, 1986). Rodney defined Marxism in line with the view that it is both a theory and a practice of proletarian revolution, as conceived by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. (Draper, 1966, Lukács 2009, Marx and Engels, 2018).

What is at stake

Despite Rodney’s profound insights into Marxism, much of the brilliant scholarship produced in the four decades since his death has discussed his Marxism with limited attention to its meaning, its development over time and space, and its relationship to the broader socialist tradition. Instead, Rodney scholars tend to emphasise the unorthodox character of Rodney’s Marxist praxis (Lewis, 1998; Bogues, 2003; Hinds, 2008; Gibbons, 2011; Andaiye, 2020;

Austin, 2023). Consider the excellent article by the Afro-Canadian scholar David Austin, a leading Rodney scholar, to a special issue celebrating 50 years since Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Austin responded to Black feminist philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva's argument in *Unpayable Debt* that historical materialism, rooted in Western post-Enlightenment thought, fails to address the plight of those facing racial and colonial oppression (Silva, 2022; Austin, 2023). Austin challenged Silva's critique on the grounds that Rodney's work itself counters her concerns with the Eurocentricity of Marxism, as it applied Marxist analysis to issues of race, racism, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Austin, however, supports his stance by claiming that Rodney followed Frantz Fanon's suggestion that Marxism must be "stretched" to colonial and postcolonial contexts (Fanon, 1963, p. 40). He writes:

> Rodney, a Marxist, addressed the very issues that Ferreira da Silva suggests historical materialism cannot or refuses to. In doing so in his various books, essays, and lectures, Rodney stretched the boundaries of conventional Marxist theory—as Frantz Fanon insists is necessary—providing a heterodox approach to orthodox Marxism that nonetheless remained faithful to Marx's methodology (Austin, 2023, p. 120).

Yet, unless one concedes Silva's claim that Marxism is inherently limited in addressing issues of race and class, it is unclear why Rodney's writings covering these topics, such as his *History of the Guyanese Working People*, should be viewed as broadening Marxism (Rodney, 1981; Silva, 2022). If Marxism needs to be stretched, at what point does it cease to be Marxism? And what exactly constitutes the orthodoxy of Marxism?

One danger here is to idealise Rodney's Marxism as always breaking down conventions. While this is not the case with Austin, this perspective could lead one to think that Rodney's contribution to the struggle against imperialism had little to do with Marxism. Accepting this reductive perspective risks overlooking the themes and concepts raised by Marxists in support of liberation struggles across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Ideas such as proletarian self-emancipation and unity, wildcat strikes, exploitation, organisation versus

spontaneity, and the vanguard party all shaped Rodney's politics during the 1960s and 1970s. The potential pitfalls associated with idealising his alleged unorthodoxy are worth considering in light of the numerous qualifiers often attached to Rodney's Marxism in the literature. Rodney has been described as a "Black Marxist", a "Pan-Africanist and Marxist", and more recently, a proponent of "decolonial Marxism" (Campbell, 1987; Bogues, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Rodney, 2022b). While these qualifiers are not inherently problematic, their existence as a collective mass suggests a broader ambiguity about the meaning of Marxism itself.

This ambiguity presents a problem when interpreting Rodney's life and legacy, particularly in the context of contemporary movements, such as Black Lives Matter and the resistance to genocidal colonialism in Palestine. These movements have explored theoretical and strategic questions on how to understand and challenge racism and imperialism. However, they do so in contemporary times marked by scepticism and incredulity of the political left toward Marx's insistence on the revolutionary agency of the working class (Choonara, 2019b). This intellectual environment hinders rising social movements from engaging with Marxism as a tool for their liberation. David Harvey, the godfather of Marxist geography, conveyed this scepticism in a *Jacobin* interview, stating: "The classical working class no longer exists in many countries and the basis of traditional-left politics has disappeared along with it.…So, we need a new form of left approach focused on what I'd call anti-capitalist politics: not simply focused on the workplace" (Harvey, 2019).

Harvey did not clarify what he meant by the classical working class. However, data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) suggests that the global proletariat is growing, not declining. In 2022, its Global Wage Report estimated the number of salaried and wage workers at 1.74 billion, amounting to over half of global employment (ILO, 2022, p. 36). The ILO does not define the working class in Marxist terms—as an exploited class deprived of

the means of production and compelled to sell its labour power for a wage. Nevertheless, its 2019 report noted an increase of 760 million wage labourers since the mid-1990s (ILO, 2022, p. 2). Paradoxically, scepticism towards the proletariat's capacity for self-emancipation persists at a time when the objective potential for a global working-class uprising is greater than at any previous point in history (Choonara, 2019a).

Such doubts are not new. Rodney grappled with forms of socialism that assigned the central revolutionary role to the petty bourgeoisie—whether peasants or intellectuals—while dismissing working class agency.[1] Examining his political change through his encounters with the strains of socialism in vogue in the Global South during the Cold War reveals his struggle to identify the social forces capable of challenging capitalist imperialism. This struggle holds lessons for movements today. Rodney's Marxism distinguished itself by recognising the potential of the working class, even in places where its numbers were small, to act as the gravedigger of capitalism (Kwayana, 1988; Chukwudinma, 2022; Zeilig, 2022). Thus, understanding the development of Rodney's praxis becomes essential, as it not only clarifies the meaning of Marxism but also affirms its importance to the Global South. This thesis pursues this aim by examining the influence of Marxism on Rodney's thought and activism across Africa and the Americas from 1968 until his death in 1980.

Thesis statement

Flowing from this overarching aim are three areas of inquiry regarding the most militant period of Rodney's life. The first investigates what Rodney's political development across Africa and the Americas reveals about the meaning of socialism. It delves into his engagement with the socialist currents prevalent in these regions and the social classes they purported to

[1] The term petty bourgeoisie designates myriads of social strata in-between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, each possessing different conditions of existence (Molyneux, 2012). Marx generally used the term to refer to the old petty bourgeois peasants and small businesses that employ their own labour. However, Rodney refers to petty-bourgeoise in the Global South as an educated middle class or an intelligentsia composed of students, intellectuals, civil servants, and salaried professionals (Rodney, 2022a).

represent. Secondly, it explores how Rodney's journey as a Black Power activist and, later, as a revolutionary organiser in Guyana shaped his understanding of the interplay between Marxism, race and class in the context of anti-imperialist struggles. Finally, it examines how Rodney's activism addresses the related questions of organisation-building and the seizure of state power.

Through its analysis of these problematics, my thesis reveals how Rodney's Marxist political development embodied the contradictions between two contending forms of socialism in the early decades of post-independence Africa and the Caribbean. It draws inspiration from Hal Draper's distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below to introduce a new theoretical framework for situating Rodney within the Marxist tradition, challenging assumptions surrounding his unorthodoxy, and building on important discoveries to rethink themes in Rodney scholarship (Draper, 1966, 1978). According to Draper (1966), variants of socialism from-above, exemplified by Stalinism and reformism, dismiss the working class's ability to create egalitarian societies through its own struggles. In contrast, socialism from-below, associated with Marx and Engels, rests on the conviction that the self-activity of the working class is the driving force of social change.

The argument of this thesis is that Rodney's political development and engagement in anti-imperialist struggles in Africa and the Americas present a distinct pattern of transformation from socialism from-above to socialism from-below. Rodney's distinct experiences in the Global South often led him to formulate conclusions that distinguished his praxis from the dominant Third World socialism and Stalinism during the Cold War. First, Rodney recognised the power of the workers through his evolving scrutiny of the Tanzanian revolution, which led him to refine his criticism of the African and Caribbean ruling classes. Second, after shifting away from Black Power, he emphasised the importance of class struggle in challenging racial divisions in Guyana. Third, Rodney came to consider the revolutionary socialist party as the

form of organisation capable of uniting the working class and the oppressed against the Forbes Burnham's regime. While much of the literature lays emphasis on his unorthodoxy, my research presents Rodney's most original contribution as stemming from his growing commitment to the orthodoxy of socialism from-below, also known as classical Marxism.

This thesis also argues that Rodney's journey towards classical Marxism unfolded as an incomplete process fraught with setbacks, unmasking inconsistencies in his Marxist analysis and organising strategies at every turn. During his nine month stay in Jamaica amidst the global upheaval of 1968, Rodney's Black Power activism, particularly among Rastafarians and unemployed youths, demonstrated a deep commitment to grassroots organising from-below. However, his approach possessed an inherent weakness owing to his identification with classes outside the proletariat as the agents of revolution. At times, Rodney presented himself as a staunch supporter of state-led socialism, as exemplified during his years involved in the Tanzanian socialist experiment from 1967 to 1974. However, this thesis will argue that even while supporting state-led socialism, Rodney demonstrated a commitment to international solidarity and advocated for the interests of workers, peasants, and the oppressed. In contrast, his advocacy of socialism from-below in the late 1970s in Guyana, where he worked as a full-time organiser of working people, encountered limitations owing to the decisions that he and his party made in challenging circumstances, particularly regarding their stance on armed struggle and their approach to forming alliances against the dictatorship.

Together, these arguments illuminate the complexity of Rodney's political development as a radical transformation in his Marxist thought and practice, shaped by challenges and limitations amid shifting dynamics in the imperialist struggle across the Global South.

The contribution to the literature on Rodney and beyond

Over four decades after Rodney's assassination, three remarkable biographies have been published, covering his life and work across Africa, Europe, and the Americas. These biographies have directly informed the writing of this thesis. In 1998, Jamaican scholar Rupert Lewis (1998) published *Walter Rodney: Intellectual and Political Thought*, where he convincingly places Rodney within a longstanding tradition of Anglophone Caribbean intellectuals who engaged with liberation struggles in Africa, drawing lessons for the diaspora. Rodney advanced this tradition by critiquing the postcolonial elite in both Africa and the Caribbean, who were held responsible for betraying the promise of independence and maintaining close ties with imperialist powers. The biographies that followed Lewis's work further explored Rodney's critique of imperialism, filling the gap of comprehensive studies of his life across continents.

In 2018, Afro-French historian Amzat Boukari-Yabara published *Walter Rodney: Un historien engagé (1942-1980)*, available only in French. This biography is an intellectual history that uncovers overlooked aspects of anti-imperialist thought and Pan-Africanism through Rodney's life (Boukari-Yabara, 2018). It provides a more extensive account than Lewis's work, emphasising the geographical contexts and intellectual influences that shaped Rodney's development as a scholar and historian. Leo Zeilig's (2022) recent biography, *A Revolutionary for Our Time*, distinguishes itself by exploring Rodney's contributions to Marxist theory and history, closely examining the evolution of his thinking. Zeilig (2022) offers a detailed analysis of Rodney's activism and its dialectical interaction with his intellectual work, showcasing Rodney's ability to learn and adapt from the struggles around him, particularly those involving the working class.

This thesis contributes to the existing literature by using the theoretical distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below as a new lens to interpret the evolution of Rodney's Marxism within the context of the Global South. It addresses a tendency

in Rodney's scholarship to overstate the unorthodox nature of his Marxism. While examining Rodney's Marxist heterodoxy provides valuable insights into how his politics diverged from Stalinist currents within the Caribbean left, it often leads to a one-dimensional portrayal of his socialist politics. However, the recent publication of Rodney's writings on the Russian Revolution and his Marxist perspectives, along with scholarly and first-hand accounts of his life in Tanzania and Guyana, complicates this picture. Among all things, they unveil Rodney's support for certain forms of state-led socialism (Hirji, 2018; Rodney, 2018, 2022; Zeilig, 2022).

Furthermore, this thesis contributes to discussions on the relevance and significance of the Marxist tradition within academic discourses concerned with its global expansion and relationship to the Global South. It takes a different approach from studies that either view Marxism as Eurocentric or assert its universal relevance without distinguishing between the various forms of socialism (Bogues, 2003; Glaser and Walker, 2007; Johnson and Lubin, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Robinson, 2021; Fadaee, 2024). Instead, it aligns with those who seek to define what constitutes true orthodoxy in Marxism, arguing that its universality lies in its method, its class basis, and its commitment to internationalism (Shivji, 1976; Molyneux, 1985; Lukács, 2000; Renton, 2008; Das, 2017, 2022; Zeilig and Dwyer, 2018; Perry, 2021). To achieve this, it adapts and expands Hal Draper's framework to encompass the Global South, exploring the meaning of socialism through the various strands and thinkers that Rodney engaged with across Africa and the Americas. It also incorporates perspectives from Marxist scholars who have analysed the global expansion of socialism, offering a view that acknowledges both Marxism's universality and its diverse, context-specific adaptations.

This thesis re-examines three crucial themes in Rodney's political development: the principle of proletarian self-emancipation, the Marxist view on the relationship between race and class, and the question of organisation-building. Building on the studies of Eusi Kwayana (1988) and Zeilig (2022), which have acknowledged the relationship between Rodney's

political praxis and Marx's concept of self-emancipation of the working class, this thesis uses a dialectical materialist approach to provide a systematic analysis of how Rodney's politics evolved between 1967 and 1978. It addresses gaps in Zeilig's (2022) analysis by demonstrating that Rodney's transformation was not fully complete, as he continued to support certain forms of socialism from-above. Moreover, during his final years in Guyana, his stance on armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliances sometimes diverged from his commitment to the principle of self-emancipation.

This research addresses conflicting interpretations in the literature regarding Rodney's position on race and class, sometimes presented as opposing each other (Dupuy, 1996; Young, 2008). It argues that using the theoretical distinction between different forms of socialism, and examining Rodney's development over time and space, provides a more precise way to explore their interconnection. It highlights that Rodney's writings on racial divisions in Guyanese history belong to the classic Marxist approach to race and class, present in the works of Karl Marx (1870) and African American writer W E B Du Bois (1935). This perspective diverges from a Caribbean historiography that often treats race as independent from the social relations that created it (Smith, 1961; Hoetink, 1967). More importantly, this thesis underscores that the class struggle is central to overcoming racial divisions.

Finally, this thesis seeks to overcome controversies in the Rodney scholarship concerning organisation-building, particularly the confusion about the concept of the vanguard party and the nature of Rodney's party, the Working People's Alliance (WPA). This debate relates to the issue of orthodoxy in the Marxist tradition, leading to differing interpretations among former WPA members. Some view the vanguard party as authoritarian and argue Rodney supported a broad mass party, while others claim he backed a cadre organisation (Roopnaraine, 2012; Andaiye, 2020). This thesis contends that understanding Rodney's approach requires distinguishing the classical Marxist concept of the vanguard party from its

Stalinist distortions, revealing a more nuanced view of his stance. Another aspect of this debate involves the WPA's approach to armed struggle and alliance-building. This thesis engages with C L R James's analysis of Rodney's death and Roopnaraine's response (James, 1981; Roopnaraine, 2012). Adding new evidence and oral testimony to the debate, it argues that the WPA's approach often substituted their own actions for the self-activity of the masses, undermining their challenge to Burnham's regime.

On the methodological contribution to life-geographies

This thesis makes significant methodological contributions to the field of life-writing within historical-geography, or life-geographies, which develop approaches exploring how space and networks shape individual agency alongside broader historical contexts (Daniels and Nash, 2004; Thomas, 2004; Ogborn, 2008; Lester, 2012; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012; Hodder, 2017; McGeachan, 2018; Smith, 2019; Rupke, 2021; Baigent, 2024). Life-geographies inspired this thesis to consider the geographical dimensions of Rodney's transnational activism, revealing that his militancy for global socialism was always rooted in the specific challenges and dynamics of particular locations and communities (Lewis, 1998).

By challenging the tendency in existing literature to idealise Rodney's politics, this thesis employs a dialectical materialist approach—grounded in Marxist epistemology and ontology—to examine his political thought and activism as evolving, shaped by interactions with real-world developments in post-independence Africa and the Americas (Harvey, 1996, 2000; Rees, 2005; Lefebvre, 2009; Marx and Engels, 2010b; Molyneux, 2012; Royle, 2014; Sheehan, 2017; Engels, 2020; Kangal, 2020; Garrido, 2024). This approach aligns with life-geography's goal of moving beyond the "great man" narrative by focusing on the dynamic interplay between structure and agency (Callinicos, 1995, 2004; Trotsky, 1998, 2005; Rees, 2005; Berghahn and Lässig, 2008; Caine, 2010; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012). This thesis further argues that a dialectical materialist approach can overcome some limitations

posed by postmodernist influences on life-geography by rejecting its scepticism toward truth and building a stronger connection between the individual and the personal.

To support its dialectical approach, this thesis undertook extensive archival research, surpassing previous biographies (Lewis, 1998; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Zeilig, 2022). From October 2022 to August 2023, I examined various archival collections across the United States, the United Kingdom, Tanzania, and Guyana. I spent seven weeks at the Walter Rodney Papers (WRP) and Collection at Woodruff Library, Clark Atlanta University—the primary repository for Rodney's work from 1960 to 1980. In the UK, I consulted the Huntley Collection at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) and documents from the Senate House Library, focusing on Rodney's later years. Research on Rodney's time in Tanzania involved conducting research at the East Africana Collection at the University of Dar es Salaam. The archive contains Tanzanian newspapers such as *The Nationalist* and *The Standard*, and student magazines *Cheche* and *Maji Maji*, which feature Rodney's contributions. Missing Tanzanian newspapers were found at the British Library in London (see Figure 1. Archival collections and sites).

For Rodney's final years in Guyana (1974-80), I accessed the extensive WPA newssheet *Dayclean* (1978-80) shared by Nigel Westmaas, a former WPA leader and archivist. Additional documents on the late 1970s struggle in Guyana were sourced from the personal archive of Anne Braithwaite, a WPA support group member who hosted Rodney in London. The *Catholic Standard* archives in Georgetown also aided in constructing a chronology of Rodney's last years in Guyana. I consulted the U.S. National Archives for declassified telegrams and other materials related to Rodney's mid-1970s activities in the United States, including articles he wrote for Howard University's *Hilltop* newspaper.

My archival research draws on the transnational turn in archival studies, employing strategies to locate and connect Rodney's dispersed records. Among other things, this approach

has allowed me to navigate and mitigate challenges related to the inaccessibility of archives in Guyana and the damage to sources in the Tanzanian newspaper archive (see Stoler, 2009; Putnam, 2016; Hendrickson, 2017, 2022; Hodder, Heffernan, and Legg, 2021). By attempting to bridge these geographical and institutional gaps, I have been able to piece together a more expansive picture of Rodney's life and work. This endeavour aligns with the thesis's goal of elucidating Rodney's Marxist political thought and activism, viewing them as shaped by contradictions linked to changing historical-geographical contexts across local, regional, and global scales. While acknowledging the transnational turn's emphasis on the conditions of archival production, the thesis integrates these within a Marxist epistemological framework that treats archival sources as direct references to the past.

In addition to archival research, this thesis draws on oral history, consistent with the "history from-below" approach, which seeks to uncover marginalised stories and restore agency to those often overlooked (Thompson, 1966; Blackledge, 2006). However, the thesis extends beyond the traditional "history from-below" by integrating these narratives with "history from-above", inspired by Trotsky and C L R James, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between grassroots agency and larger structural forces.

I conducted 32 interviews—both in-person and online—including initial interviews with Rodney's wife in Atlanta and close friends, following the approach of earlier biographers like Lewis and Zeilig (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022). In Dar es Salaam, I interviewed seven of Rodney's former colleagues and students. Additionally, I captured voices absent from the major biographies such as two Black Power activists who met Rodney in the U.S. between 1972 and 1975, and a contact in Hamburg, Germany, who met him in strange circumstance in May 1980, just a month before his death. More importantly, in Guyana, 17 of the 32 interviews I conducted were with activists, political figures, and individuals connected to Rodney's life in Guyana (see Figure 2. Interview table). These interviews included current and former WPA

leaders, rank-and-file activists, those who later became WPA leaders, two former high officials in People's National Congress (PNC) under Forbes Burnham, two members of the opposition People's Progressive Party (PPP) under Cheddi Jagan, and a trade union leader unaffiliated with the WPA. These diverse perspectives provide more information on Rodney's activities in his homeland.

Limitations of this thesis

There are several alternative ways in which this thesis could have been developed. One such approach could have amounted to building an intellectual history that delves deeper into Rodney's ideas and compares them with those of his contemporaries. As mentioned earlier, Boukari-Yabara's (2018, 2010b) research also provides a comprehensive and detailed history of the intellectual context that shaped Rodney's ideas. However, this thesis has consciously avoided an intellectual history to focus on a different type of analysis. Instead, it examines how Rodney's Marxist consciousness and political practice were influenced by his engagement with historical processes and events, paying particular attention to his activism within movements and organisations across geographies. This approach is particularly significant as Rodney's work gains more attention in academia, especially regarding his views on African and Caribbean political economy as articulated in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. While this growing interest is encouraging, there is a danger of presenting a decontextualised Rodney, detached from the historical and geographical realities that shaped his thought. This thesis acts as a reminder that any meaningful engagement with Rodney's praxis must consider the specific contexts and locations where his ideas were developed.

Furthermore, this thesis has not included a lengthy chapter on Rodney's most famous work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, or his engagement with dependency theory and African political economy. This decision is based on the extensive existing scholarship on the subject. The works of Karim Hirji, Zeilig, and Boukari-Yabara provide robust analyses and thorough discussions of the debates surrounding the book (Hirji, 2017; Boukari-Yabara, 2018;

Zeilig, 2022). Additionally, on the 50th anniversary of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the *Small Axe* Journal published a special issue dedicated to the book (Scott, 2023), further contributing to the ongoing discourse.

Additionally, this project does not delve into the family-run Walter Rodney campaign for justice, as this has already been well-documented in previous biographies (Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Zeilig, 2022). Regular updates on this campaign can also be found on the official website and social media channels of the Walter Rodney Foundation. However, this thesis supports the campaign's vital struggle to achieve justice and reparations for Rodney's assassination and to restore his legacy in Guyana and globally. In its own way, this work joins the endeavour to promote Rodney's life and work for new general global activists and intellectuals engaged in the current era of Black Lives Matter and Palestine solidarity movements.

Finally, considering these political imperatives and their contribution to knowledge, this thesis has limited its scope from 1968 to 1980. This period encompasses the pinnacle of Rodney's engagement with Marxism in the Global South and his contribution to the anti-imperialist struggle. Consequently, it excludes a detailed exploration of his early years, including his childhood and student life in Jamaica, London, and Guyana from 1942 to 1967. Nevertheless, as this early period is important for understanding his initial journey toward Marxism and his later development, the following section offers biographical and contextual notes on his early years.

The making of a Marxist: the early political development of Rodney amid the Cold War and Decolonisation (1942-68)

Walter Rodney was born on 23 March 1942 in Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana, during the Second World War (Zeilig, 2022). His life and ideas would be shaped by the intersection of two significant processes following the Allies' victory over the Axis powers. First, the Cold War, spanning from 1945 to 1991, marked a period of intense economic and

geopolitical rivalry between the imperialist superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union (Callinicos, 2009; Birchall, 2014; Harman, 2018; Smith, 2019). The contending powers justified the conflict in ideological terms between the free world and the unfree communism. In reality, it was an articulation of two different forms of capitalism, liberal and statist, each with conflicting views on how to reorganise the world economy (Callinicos, 2009).

The United States, emerging from the Second World War with unmatched economic and military power, pursued an open-door policy. This approach involved imposing free trade internationally to create outlets for its most productive industries and the promotion liberal democracy abroad. The Soviet Union's imperialism manifested itself through the establishment of satellite states in Eastern Europe after World War II and the consolidation of a protectionist bloc to counter its inability to compete with the more productive American-led free trade system (Callinicos, 2009). Geographer Neil Smith remarked: "The abstention of the Soviet and Chinese blocs from international capitalism again frustrated the promise of a liberal globalism" (Smith, 2019, pp. 455–456). The nuclear arms race that defined the Cold War imposed significant constraints on the expansion of liberal capitalism, as any conflict with the Soviet Union risked the destruction of the planet (Smith, 2019).

In the Global South, the Cold War manifested through a series of proxy wars, coups, and intrigues, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Algerian War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the American overthrow of the Arbenz government in Guatemala (Callinicos, 2009; Fraser, 2013; Babiracki and Jersild, 2016; Harman, 2018; Mark and Betts, 2022). These events reflected the Cold War's intersection with a second process that shaped Rodney's life: the national liberation struggles against colonialism and imperialism across Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Fraser, 2013; Mokhtefi, 2020; Mark and Betts, 2022; Roberts, 2022). According to Callinicos (2009), the American open-door policy sought to impose imperial rule without the moral drawbacks and deficiencies of traditional colonialism, as it

pressured Britain to abandon its protectionist Imperial Preference and eventually dismantle its empire. Yet, the United States struggled to make decolonisation conform to its worldview, as the Soviet Union's support for national liberation movements among colonised peoples seeking self-determination complicated the process (Smith, 2019; Mark and Betts, 2022).

The complexities of the Cold War and the rise of national liberation movements significantly shaped the anti-colonial struggle that defined Rodney's early years in British Guiana during the 1950s (Jagan, 1972; Premdas, 1979; Rabe, 2005; Palmer, 2010; Nehusi, 2018; Spinner, 2021; Seecharan, 2023; Lewis, 2024). Rodney's working-class Afro-Guyanese parents were staunch supporters of the PPP, led by Indo-Guyanese dentist Cheddi Jagan. The PPP dominated the anti-colonial movement, uniting Guyanese of African and Indian descent against British colonialism through its mass rallies—an impressive feat, considering the British had long used a "divide and rule" strategy to maintain control over these communities (Mohamed, 2014). In his recollection of his childhood in 1975, Rodney said that he embraced Marxism without hesitation because "the PPP was the only mass party...and its leadership explicitly said, 'we are socialist, we are Marxists'" (Rodney, 1990, p. 9). However, Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union disrupted the momentum for Guyanese independence. The PPP's landmark landslide victory in the colonial legislature in 1953 lasted only 133 days. Pressured by the United States, Britain deployed troops to the colony to oust the PPP and curb what both nations perceived as the spread of communism (Palmer, 2010).

Rodney, who excelled in school, belonged to a unique generation that benefited from the PPP's educational reforms, aimed at increasing the number of educated Guyanese (Lewis, 1998). He won a scholarship to attend Queen's College, the country's most prestigious secondary school. In 1960, he earned another scholarship to study history at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Kingston, Jamaica. His time at UWI coincided with the advent of

Jamaican independence from Britain in 1962. During his undergraduate years, he observed the university undergo a nationalist awakening, aimed at severing ties with its colonial past (Rodney, 1990; Lewis, 1998). The UWI history department required its students to read Eric Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* and C L R James's *The Black Jacobins* (Rodney, 1990; Lewis, 1998). These readings inspired Rodney to explore the many factors shaping Caribbean identity. Rodney co-wrote an article titled *The Negro Slave*, which examined the cruelty of slavery (Rodney and Augustus, 1964). Yet, his academic inquiries into the Caribbean's past were always undertaken with an eye on the problems and possibilities of the post-independence era.

Rodney also became a prominent activist within the student union, engaging in campaigns for the West Indies Federation—an ultimately unsuccessful regional project aimed at merging former British colonies into a single independent state (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022). At the same time, he was deeply concerned with the racial violence that erupted in Guyana during the 1960s. This violence was exacerbated by imperialist interventions, which caused a split within the PPP of the early 1950s, along racial lines. The Indian majority aligned with Cheddi Jagan's PPP, while the African majority sided with Forbes Burnham's splinter group, the PNC (Rabe, 2005; Seecharan, 2023). During this period, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) financed civil unrest against Jagan's government (Waters and Daniels, 2005).

Given his concern for the political situation in Guyana, Rodney intended to pursue postgraduate studies on "race relations in British Guiana and Trinidad at Oxford or the London School of Economics (LSE)" (Rodney, 1962). However, his exploration of Caribbean identity led him to develop an interest in African history. Rodney (1990, p.13) explained the nationalist question "ultimately pointed me, for instance, in the direction of Africa. From Caribbean history, from looking at the slave trade, one decided…to understand slavery and understand the cultural background of Africa".

Consequently, he abandoned his application to the University of Oxford after being accepted into a doctoral programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London and the University of Cambridge. He chose SOAS over Cambridge University because SOAS offered an undergraduate course in African history, which UWI also lacked (Rodney, 1963). By making the decision to travel to London, Rodney cemented his romantic relationship with a young nursing student named Patricia, whom he married in 1965 (Boukari-Yabara, 2018).

During his student years at UWI, Rodney deepened his engagement with socialist politics. He travelled to Cuba in 1960, only a year after Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, leaders of the 26th of July Movement, had overthrown the pro-American dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. He returned in 1962 after the Cuban revolution was declared socialist. Reflecting on his experiences in Cuba, Rodney observed that "Cubans were up and about, talking and bustling and running and jumping and really living the revolution in a way that was completely outside of anything that one could read anywhere" (Rodney, 1990, p. 18).

In the same year, Rodney attended the International Union of Students conference in Leningrad as a representative of the UWI branch, which merged with the British delegation of West Indian students led by Richard Small. During a sparsely attended morning session, his delegation made an unpopular intervention against the construction of nuclear weapons (Small, 2023). Despite this, Rodney was fascinated to see workers and peasants participating in experiences typically reserved for the wealthy in Western nations, such as air travel and ballet performances. These experiences further fuelled his intellectual pursuits; he returned from his travels with socialist literatures and a keen interest in Lenin, even writing a paper on Lenin's leadership of the October 1917 Russian Revolution (Rodney, 1990).

Yet, Rodney's formal training in Marxist theory occurred during his doctoral studies in London from 1963 to 1966. In 1964, he joined an informal study group led by the Trinidadian

Marxist C L R James in his home in Willesden Green, North London. James introduced his students, including Rodney, to the key texts of Marxism and the Russian Revolution of October 1917. They studied foundational works in Marxist literature, including selections from Marx's *Capital, Volume I*, the complete text of *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, and Lenin's *What Is to Be Done*. James also encouraged his students to give presentations on topics of their choice (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022; Small, 2023). Rodney chose the topic "Marxism and Democracy", a theme that would later inform his lectures on the Russian Revolution (Lewis, 1998; Rodney, 2018). Rodney's Marxist education went hand-in-hand with his political activism during these years. He spent much of his spare time at Hyde Park Corner, which was then a well-known meeting place where West Indians gathered to discuss politics. He frequently spoke about racism in Britain, Caribbean politics, Zimbabwean national liberation and Apartheid in South Africa (Boukari-Yabara, 2018).

At the same time, Rodney was disappointed with his encounters with the British Marxist Left. He recoiled at the sectarianism he noticed within the Communist Party and the Trotskyist sects he encountered. They appeared to him more focused on internal theoretical debates than mobilising workers or supporting migrants. "Very seldom did I hear these people talk about how they expected, if at all, to mobilise workers or to deal with migrants and so on. Besides, they were racist and that's another trip", he wrote (Rodney, 1990, p. 31). Rodney (1990) shared his resentment to the paternalism and the subtle, and sometimes overt, racism he encountered from some members.

Rodney also expressed dissatisfaction with his PhD dissertation for lacking a strong Marxist perspective, a shortcoming he attributed to the conservative political environment at SOAS (Rodney, 1966a, 1990). Yet, Pan-African and peace studies scholar Horace Campbell described his dissertation *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast, 1545-1800* as the work of a "people's historian" (Campbell, 1981). In this text, Rodney challenged Western scholars who

portrayed precolonial West Africa as backwards, depicting the region's societies as innovative and culturally rich. He denounced the disruptive and destructive demographic, economic and social impact European intervention had on African societies through the slave trade (Rodney, 1970a; Campbell, 1981).

Alongside his many academic and non-academic articles on African history published between 1966 and 1972, his thesis contributed to his expertise, laying the groundwork for his seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) (Rodney, 1965, 1966b, 1967a, 1967d, 1968b, 1969a, 1969b, 1969f, 1971a, 1971b, 1971d). Rodney's most famous book was meant for progressives in Africa who, after living through the independence era of the 1960s, were now confronting the issue of continued economic domination by Western powers. Rodney argued that "African development is only possible on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system" (Rodney, 2012, p. xi) To support this claim, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* offered a Marxist analysis combined with dependency theory, demonstrating how centuries of foreign intervention, from the slave trade to colonialism, had condemned Africa to underdevelopment while enriching the Western ruling class (Rodney, 2012).

However, on 5 July 1966, Rodney's life-geography was about to take a new direction. He had just completed his thesis, and this milestone was marked by the birth of his first-born son, Shaka, which also signalled the end of his time in London. In October 1966, the Rodney family moved to Tanzania, where Walter had accepted a short-term lecturing position at the University of Dar es Salaam and would engage with the African struggle for national liberation from imperialism, before returning to teach at UWI in January 1968 (Boukari-Yabara, 2018). This thesis will explore in depth the years of Rodney's most vigorous engagement in the anti-imperialist struggles across Africa and the Americas, a period critical to the development and maturation of his Marxist thought.

Outline of thesis

Chapter 2 presents a conceptual paradigm for analysing the evolution of Rodney's Marxism in three parts: the research problem, a theoretical framework, and a literature review. It begins with a discussion on the issue of unorthodoxy in approaches to Rodney's Marxism, as discussed earlier in this introduction. It then proposes a solution by adopting and expanding Hal Draper's framework to analyse Rodney's political development in the Global South (Draper, 1966, 1978). The chapter argues that this analytical distinction helps to define what constitutes Marxism, clarifying what is or is not Marxist, and situates Rodney within the socialist tradition among the various trends and thinkers he encountered. It also enriches Draper's framework by incorporating perspectives from Marxist scholars who have examined the global expansion of socialism. Finally, guided by this framework, the chapter reviews the literature, identifying breakthroughs and gaps in research that have explored Rodney's relationship with the working class, while engaging in scholarly debates on Rodney's approach to questions of race, class, and the problem of organisation.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for constructing a life-geography of Walter Rodney, a revolutionary scholar-activist. It advocates for a dialectical materialist approach to life-geography to study the changes in Rodney's political thought and activism in relation to the social contexts and locations he encountered. This approach addresses the challenge faced by life-geographers of articulating the dynamic interaction between agency and structure (Berghahn and Lässig, 2008; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012). The chapter then explains the transnational archival research and semi-structured interviews conducted across the United States, the United Kingdom, Tanzania, and Guyana. It further details how the transnational turn in archival studies inspired this thesis's archival research process, while it remained grounded in the materialist epistemological foundations of Marxist dialectics. Finally, it discusses how

the approach to oral history through interviewing sought to both build upon and transcend the methodology of history from-below.

Chapter 4, the first empirical chapter, builds on the methodological approach by examining the agency-structure relationship in Rodney's transnational life. It does so by exploring the significance of Rodney's activism and political thought in 1968 and how that year of global revolts shaped his radical outlook. The first section examines Rodney's Black Power praxis during his nine months in Jamaica, presenting it as an embodiment of the contradiction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below. Drawing upon Harvey's (2000) metaphor of the insurgent architect, it argues that understanding Rodney's historical role requires viewing his activism as part of a chain of global revolts that defined 1968. The second section discusses how the revolts of 1968 influenced Rodney's politics during his third visit to Cuba, from November 1968 to June 1969. Using unexamined drafts, the chapter argues that Rodney expressed Harvey's (2000) concept of dialectical utopianism by envisioning a successful Black Power guerrilla revolution in both Jamaica and the United States, arising from class contradictions in each society.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed account of Walter Rodney's immersion in Tanzania's anti-imperialist socialist experiment and his efforts to strengthen the movement with Marxist theory from 1967 to 1972. While this chapter, like the previous one, is concerned with the relationship of the individual to the movement within society, it does not make any grand claims regarding the dialectic method. Instead, it draws the reader's attention to the gradual build-up of tensions between Rodney and the Tanzanian one-party state, setting the stage for a discussion in the next chapter about the dialectical laws that might be deduced from this development. My first argument is that, while Rodney initially saw the Tanzanian one-party state as a genuine force for socialism and anti-imperialism, he gradually developed non-conformist views on the rule of Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) through his active

support for its socialist experiment. My second contention is that Rodney and the radical students on campus found themselves in a tug-of-war with the one-party state due to their non-conformist stance. Although they sought to push Tanzanian policy further to the left, they encountered strong resistance from Julius Nyerere's party, which was under pressure from Cold War dynamics and African liberation struggles.

Chapter 6 traces the development of Rodney's Marxism through his changing perspective on Tanzania's socialist experiment between 1972 and 1978. It argues that Rodney's application of Marxist theory to engage with Tanzanian socialism, also known as Ujamaa, led to a fundamental shift in his approach to socialism. Rodney gradually moved away from his belief that socialism could be delivered by the Tanzanian bureaucracy and its president, Julius Nyerere, toward the idea that it must be achieved through the self-emancipatory struggles of the working class. This shift illustrates the dialectical principle of the transformation of quantity into quality, where the gradual accumulation of tensions with the Tanzanian state, as discussed in the previous chapter, resulted in a sudden change in his politics. This change also had a geographical dimension, as Rodney's international travels between the United States, Guyana, and Germany play a central role in his shift. However, I point out that Rodney's transition from advocating socialism from-above to socialism from-below remains, in some ways, incomplete by his continued support for state-led socialism.

Chapter 7 deciphers the dialectical process that shaped his transformation into a full-time organiser of working people during his final years in Guyana, from 1974 to 1980. It argues that Rodney made significant contributions to socialism from-below during this period. First, he elaborates a dialectical materialist explanation of the relationship between race and class in Guyanese history that convinces him of the utmost importance of the class struggle in overcoming racial divisions among African and Indian workers. Second, Rodney's efforts at building the WPA to challenge Burnham's dictatorship reveal that his theoretical insights

translated into a practical solution; he identified the revolutionary political party as the necessary form of organisation to unite workers against Burnham's dictatorship. This chapter begins by uncovering the development of Guyanese society from the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s up to Rodney's return in 1974. Then, it intersects this first process with a second one, which concerns Rodney's leap out of Black Power after the Sixth Pan-African Congress in June 1974. The third process articulates Rodney's conscious intervention in Guyanese history as a WPA leader as it gradually becomes a political party.

Chapter 8 analyses Rodney's and the WPA's approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliance as part of their overall failure to grapple with the question of state power. It thereby intervenes into a key debate, opposing Rodney's mentor C L R James (1981) and Rupert Roopnaraine (2012), surrounding the events that led to Rodney's death. It offers a novel interpretation of Rodney and the WPA's approach to the conquest of power while also beginning a discussion on uncertain evidence, such as a draft military plan against the dictatorship. This chapter argues that Rodney and the WPA's approach to armed struggle and building an anti-dictatorial alliance deviated from their commitment to socialism from-below by substituting their own action for those of working masses. To illustrate this point, it employs a dialectical approach to distinguish the WPA's representation of itself from its historical reality. This way of proceeding entails connecting pieces of fragmented evidence and placing them within the context of the Guyanese class struggle to uncover a fuller picture of the WPA's approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliance.

Chapter 9 concludes this thesis by reaffirming its contribution to knowledge and summarising its main arguments. It reflects on the enduring relevance of Walter Rodney's Marxism in contemporary social and political struggles. The chapter explores the importance of revisiting Rodney's case for a revolutionary socialist party in light of the shortcomings of the WPA in the years following his assassination in Guyana. It discusses the significance of

Rodney's Marxist understanding of racism for the era of Black Lives Matter. It considers how his focus on working-class power and international solidarity resonates with the struggle for Palestinian liberation. The thesis concludes with recommendations for further research into Rodney's engagement with Marxism and the broader impact of this study.

Chapter 2: On the meaning and the spatial-temporal horizons of Rodney's Marxism

Four decades after his death, the literature on Rodney has offered various interpretations of his Marxism. Several authors, including Rodney's first biographer, Lewis, emphasised the unorthodox character of his Marxism (Lewis, 1998; Bogues, 2003; Westmaas, 2004; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Gibbons, 2011; Hinds, 2015; Andaiye, 2020; Kelley, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Guerra, 2022a; Austin, 2023). While this perspective has provided a valuable lens on Rodney's unique trajectory and political autonomy from the pro-Soviet Marxism prevalent in the Caribbean, it often presents an idealised and one-sided view of Rodney's politics as eternally challenging or stretching Marxism. This pitfall conceals a more profound ambiguity surrounding the meaning of Marxism within Rodney's scholarship and beyond. Whether hostile or sympathetic, many scholars tend to interpret the Marxist tradition through its Stalinist distortions, leading some to portray Marxism as rigid dogma and a Eurocentric ideology. However, both older and more recent works have revealed different dimensions of Rodney's Marxism. Among them, Zeilig's (2022) biography sheds light on the connection between Rodney's and Marx's conception of proletarian self-emancipation. This thesis aims to capture the complexity of Rodney's Marxism, inspired by these works.

Exploring the evolution of Rodney's politics is not a new endeavour. To some extent, all the biographers above have concerned themselves with this task. Nevertheless, this endeavour remains worthwhile because the changes in Rodney's politics often elude those studying them. The innovation of this thesis lies in proposing a more rigorous approach to this analysis. This chapter argues that offering a precise and thorough definition of Marxist and socialist traditions within the study of Rodney's life and work makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature. Its theoretical framework on Marxism addresses the challenges of tracing Rodney's ideological trajectory by situating him within the Marxist tradition and

discerning the scope of his contributions to the anti-imperialist struggle in the Global South. It captures the diversity, nuances, similarities, and qualitative differences among the various forms of socialism Rodney engaged with during his militant years. However, the framework alone is insufficient to fully understand how Rodney navigated these multiple forms of socialism as he progressed through life, drawing connections between them, leaving some behind, and embracing others. A method that explicitly addresses how individuals and societies change is necessary, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. What is essential here is to clarify the meaning of Marxism.

This chapter begins by examining the recurring problem of orthodoxy within the scholarship and broader discourses on Rodney and his relationship to Marxism. In light of this problem, it proposes a theoretical framework to define Marxism, drawing inspiration from American Marxist Hal Draper's (1966) distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below. It expands this framework by applying it to the Marxist or socialist currents that Rodney encountered throughout his active years in the Global South from 1968-1980. The chapter then returns to the literature to demonstrate how these theoretical insights on Marxism build upon findings in Zeilig's (2022) recent biography, particularly in its focus on self-emancipation. From there, it demonstrates how this framework intersects with debates in the scholarship on Rodney concerning race and class, the controversial questions of organisation-building, and the seizure of power. In so doing, it seeks to open new avenues for understanding Rodney's approach to these themes.

An unorthodox Marxist? The Rodney scholarship and the meaning of Marxism

Since his murder, scholars have attached various qualifiers to Rodney's Marxism, labelling him a "Black Marxist", a proponent of "decolonial Marxism", and both an "unorthodox" and "heterodox" Marxist (Lewis, 1998; Bogues, 2003; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Hinds, 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Austin, 2023). Upon closer examination, the sheer variety

of these labels points to a common thread within the literature: Rodney is described as an unorthodox Marxist who challenged conventional Marxist thought (Lewis, 1998; Bogues, 2003; Westmaas, 2004; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Gibbons, 2011; Hinds, 2015; Andaiye, 2020; Kelley, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Guerra, 2022a; Austin, 2023). This section explores why this idealisation of Rodney exists and persists, examining the motives and potential pitfalls associated with emphasising Rodney's unconventionality within Marxism. It thereby engages with Lewis's influential biography, perspectives from Rodney's WPA Guyanese comrades, and the Black Radical Tradition. The aim is to signpost the need for a theoretical definition of Marxism that better frames Rodney's politics within that tradition.

In 1998, Lewis published *Walter Rodney's Intellectual and Political Thought*, the first biography of Walter Rodney covering his political ideas and activism across Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean. Lewis wrote his biography as a critique of the dogmatic practices of the Caribbean Marxist-Leninist left, including the Workers' Party of Jamaica (WPJ) led by Trevor Munroe, the New Jewel Movement in Grenada under Maurice Bishop, and Cheddi Jagan's PPP (Interview with Lewis, 2022). A founding member of the WPJ, Lewis became disillusioned with its Stalinist politics, anti-democratic structure, and divisive tactics, such as causing splits within the New Jewel Movement that led to Maurice Bishop's assassination (Lewis, 2019). Eight years after the Soviet Union's collapse, which accelerated the decline of the Caribbean left after the American invasion of Grenada in 1983, Lewis hoped to rebuild a more reformist Caribbean left. By then, he considered the view that the proletariat is the leading revolutionary class to be "no longer tenable" (Lewis, 1993).

Lewis (1998) consequently saw in Rodney and the WPA an alternative to what he perceived as the "Leninism" of Caribbean parties as they favoured more democratic and flexible organising, closely aligned with the interests of the people. He stated in the biography:

> Rodney was not a Marxist-Leninist in the sense of Communist Party orthodoxy as was characteristic of the Marxist-Leninist left in Jamaica, Guyana and Grenada in the late 1970s. In political views and connection, he was independent of Moscow.… Nor was he keen on Leninist doctrines of vanguard party that had been the focus and practice of much of WPJ's theorising (Lewis, 1998, p. 224).

Rodney's Marxism differed from Caribbean Stalinist dogmatism as it emerged from a Pan-African Caribbean intellectual tradition shaped by figures like Henry Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, and C L R James. According to Lewis, these thinkers engaged directly with African liberation struggles while drawing lessons for the Caribbean (Lewis, 1998).

Lewis's biography carried a powerful argument in demonstrating how Rodney's Marxism remained independent when many intellectuals uncritically supported the Soviet Union and China. For him, Rodney owed some of this independence to a study group led by C L R James, a former Trotskyist and anti-Stalinist who promoted a Leninism that celebrated spontaneous struggle without the revolutionary party (Lewis, 1998). More crucially, Rodney's experiences in post-independence Africa, shaped by Tanzanian socialism and socialist guerrilla movements in Portuguese-speaking Africa, informed his praxis. Lewis explained how these influences shaped Rodney's Black Power activism in Jamaica in 1968, where he engaged with Rastafarians and unemployed youth. He argued that Rodney "brought to Jamaica his knowledge of African history and Marxism, but more importantly his experience of Tanzania as it began Nyerere's radical reforms" (Lewis, 1998, p. 43). He contends Rodney's politics are "a dissection of the domestic political elites that assumed political authority from the colonisers in Africa and the Caribbean as well as an analysis of the processes of recolonisation" (Lewis, 1998, p.xvii). As such, Rodney advanced an anti-imperialist agenda of the Caribbean tradition.

Alongside Lewis, members of Rodney's former political party, the WPA, have and continue to emphasise his unorthodox Marxism, distinguishing it from the undemocratic, pro-Soviet versions of Marxism promoted by Jagan's PPP and Burnham's PNC (Westmaas, 2004;

Hinds, 2015; Andaiye, 2020). As will be discussed later, Rodney's comrades often uphold Rodney's and the WPA's openness to broad democratic alliances, decentralised organisational structures and collective leadership, and ideological hybridity, inclusive of Black Nationalism, as exemplars of Marxist unorthodoxy (Westmaas, 2004; Hinds, 2015; Andaiye, 2020). This stance reflects the WPA's evolution; following the defeat of the Grenadian revolution in 1984, the party shifted from Leninism and revolutionary party-building to a reformist approach focused on electoral alliances (Roopnaraine, 2012a). This shift is encapsulated in Eusi Kwayana's words: "After Grenada, the WPA…declared itself a Rodneyite party" (Interview with Kwayana, 2024). During Rodney's era, however, the WPA defended its democratic interpretation of Marxist-Leninism against other parties claiming the same ideology. As Clive Thomas noted in a 1976 pamphlet: "Regrettably, an unfortunate attitude has grown (which is not supported by Marxist-Leninist theory), of counterposing socialism and political democracy" (Clive, 1976, p. 7). This sentence demonstrates how the concept of Marxist orthodoxy among Rodney's comrades has evolved since his death.

Rodney's transnational life and work in Africa and the Caribbean at the intersection of race and class has led some to position him within the Black Radical Tradition. This Black Nationalist discourse has gained renewed prominence in the debates on race ignited by the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013. It refers to both the intellectual effort to uncover histories of resistance by black people against racism and imperialism, and the acts of resistance themselves, which safeguard black humanity from dehumanisation (Johnson and Lubin, 2017; Al-Bulushi, 2022; Myers, 2021). However, in Cedric Robinson's foundational book, *Black Marxism*, Robinson characterises Marxist orthodoxy as a Eurocentric tradition: "Marxism is a Western construction" in its origins and "its analytical presumptions, its historical perspectives, its points of view" (Robinson, 2021, p. 2). The Eurocentric underpinning of Marxism, Robinson argues, limits its utility as a theoretical weapon and guide to action for black

liberation against imperialism. He illustrated his point by tracing the lifepaths of black Marxists, such as C L R James and W E B Du Bois.

For Robinson (2021), these thinkers engaged with Marxism before criticising its Eurocentric limitations and turned towards an appreciation of the localised traditions of African collective resistance, which represent the real negation of imperialism. Black Radical scholar Anthony Bogues charts a similar path for Rodney when painting him as a heretic. He portrayed the heretic as one who "mastered the protocols and conventions of the Western intellectual tradition and then critiqued the ways in which the writers and thinkers in the later tradition either made Afro-Caribbeans invisible or portrayed them as objects without human features and history" (Bogues, 2003, p.12). Bogues then argues that Rodney departed from Marxist orthodoxy "to create a revolutionary ideology and theory that would emerge from the historical specificities, the particular condition of the black world" (Bogues, 2003, p. 139). Yet, he identifies an unresolved tension between Rodney's consideration of Marxist methodology as a universal framework and the concrete realities driving him to develop new analytical categories. "What if the methodology did not allow one to see the new?" he asked (Bogues, 2003, p. 139).

Bogues (2023) makes an insightful point by illustrating how Rodney's Marxism did not simply impose Western class categories onto African and Caribbean contexts. However, it is unclear how focusing on the concrete alone serves as evidence of Marxist unorthodoxy. Lenin famously described "the concrete analysis of a concrete situation" as the very gist of Marxism. For example, Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, which Rodney admired, begins with a discussion of the peculiarities of pre-revolutionary Russian development as shaped by global capitalist forces (Trotsky, 2008; Rodney, 2018). Moreover, what seems to escape Bogues here is that the Marxist method embraces both the tension and unity between concrete reality and the universal, allowing one to perceive the new. For that matter, Lenin's quote reflects two

cornerstones of Marxist methodology: no concrete object can be fully understood in isolation from its universal context and interrelations; and although every concrete object is part of a larger whole, it retains its specific character (see Sheehan, 2017).

Several broader issues arise from the literature's idealised view of Rodney's Marxist unorthodoxy. First, this tendency assigns a monolithic dimension to his politics, obscuring the complexity of how Rodney's ideas evolved across time and space. The publication of his unfinished manuscript on the Russian Revolution in 2018 reveals a significant departure from James's anti-Stalinism. Editors Jesse Benjamin and Robin Kelley (2018) point out Rodney's ambivalence towards Stalinism in 1971—sometimes critical, yet occasionally approving—as he sought to draw lessons for the Tanzanian revolution. Additionally, a recent collection of Rodney's essays, *Decolonial Marxism*, also shows that he saw state-led socialism, like Mao's China, Castro's Cuba, and Tito's Yugoslavia, as genuine forms of socialism (Rodney, 2022b). The example underscores the need to recontextualise Rodney's ideas and trace the influences of his travels and encounters. On this point, Boukari-Yabara's biography (2018) reveals the broad range of Pan-African intellectual and geographical influences on Rodney's work, extending beyond the Anglophone Caribbean, including figures such as Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and Abdul Rahman Babu. Zeilig's (2022) biography uncovers Rodney's Marxism through his relationship with the proletariat and his tensions with African socialism in Tanzania, as it shall be shown in the next sections.

Second, by interpreting Marxism through the lens of its Stalinist distortion, Lewis (1998) and WPA members conflated Leninism with Stalinism when discussing Rodney's unorthodoxy. Paul Le Blanc (2016) and John Molyneux (2017) warned against academics who frequently discredit Marxism by portraying Leninism, particularly through the lens of the Leninist party, as inevitably leading to Stalinist authoritarianism. This conflation overlooks that Leninism championed working-class internationalism, the self-determination of oppressed

peoples, anti-racism, and women's emancipation while opposing bureaucratic elitism. Stalinism, in contrast, promoted "socialism in one country", Russian nationalism, antisemitism, traditional family values, and bureaucratic rule (Molyneux, 2017). To conflate Leninism with Stalinism is to forget that Stalinism represented a counter-revolution against Leninism, as evident in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s that eradicated the old Bolsheviks responsible for the 1917 Russian Revolution (Le Blanc, 2016; Molyneux, 2017).

Thirdly, a significant risk of describing Rodney as unorthodox is that it may suggest his political contributions exist outside the Marxist tradition. Many published articles on Rodney explore his Pan-Africanism, perhaps in light of the marginalisation of Marxist ideas in academia (Young, 2008; Boukari-Yabara, 2010b; Hill, 2015; Harisch, 2020, 2021). Moreover, many studies emphasise Rodney's activism without adequately referencing the Marxist method he employed. In his otherwise insightful study of the Caribbean, Arnold Gibbons (2011) questions whether Marx's method and his concept of the unity of the working class influenced Rodney's efforts to unify Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese workers, instead labelling Rodney as a humanist. In a detailed article filled with valuable insight for this thesis, scholar Hinds (2008) accounts for Rodney's activism in Guyana without explicitly linking it to his Marxism.

What then is the purpose of championing Rodney's activism if we fail to connect it to his method and ideology? Canonising Rodney poses the danger of presenting his innovations as unique and abstract, disconnected from their intellectual roots. Suppose these efforts aim to make Rodney palatable to a broader audience under the guise that socialist ideas have been discredited. In that case, the tragedy lies in stripping his politics of its cutting edge. Therefore, to push the analysis of Rodney in a new direction, it is necessary to provide an extensive definition of Marxism.

The two souls of Rodney's Marxism: the geography of socialism from-above versus socialism from-below

The previous discussion on the meaning of Marxism in scholarship on Rodney highlights the importance of clearly defining what constitutes Marxist orthodoxy or unorthodoxy to fully grasp Rodney's anti-imperialist contributions. Achieving this would also contribute to the discourse on global Marxism, where Rodney's name occasionally appears. Although this discourse honourably challenges the idea that Marxism is inherently Eurocentric, it treats all forms of Marxism as equally valid (Glaser and Walker, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021; Fadaee, 2024).

This stance is evident in the edited volume *Marxism and Decolonization in the 21st Century* by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Morgan Ndlovu (2021), where contributors from diverse backgrounds explore the connections between Marxism, postcolonial theory, and Black Radicalism. The editors celebrate Rodney as one of several key black Marxist figures whose "lives of struggle and ideological orientations reflect how they deployed, critiqued, and stretched Marxism practically in…national liberation histories and anti-colonial struggles"(Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021, p. 2) However, while praising Rodney, Ndlovu-Gatsheni critiques his 1975 article *Marxism and African Liberation* for criticising Nkrumah's ideological confusion, which blended Marxism and Christianity in *Consciencism*. Ndlovu-Gatsheni counters by suggesting that "Nkrumah can also be understood differently, as an African Marxist leader who embodied a consistent yet difficult synthesis of cultural nationalism, Pan-Africanism, decolonization, and Marxism" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021, p. 19).

Marxist geographer Raju Das critiqued this kind of unreflective acceptance of hybridity and unorthodoxy in some academic discourses on Marxism. He argued they do not "pause to consider what content is common to the different forms of Marxism they identify. It is as if

there is no need to differentiate between what is authentic and what is not" (Das, 2020, p. 969). This thesis concurs that Marxism cannot be defined solely in subjective terms, as doing so would obscure the qualitative differences between the forms of socialism Rodney engaged with throughout his political evolution. The ambiguity surrounding the definition of Marxism in Rodney scholarship, and beyond, calls for a new framework capable of defining the Marxist tradition and positioning Rodney's evolving politics within it.

One way to avoid a moral relativist definition of Marxism is to adopt Trotsky's view that scientific socialism is foremost a method of analysis of social relations, analysing and tracing changes in the social and natural world (Trotsky, 2010). This definition of Marxism will be explored further in the next chapter, particularly through an examination of dialectical materialism. However, the focus of this section is not so much on its scientific standing as on the historical foundation upon which the theory is built. As Molyneux explains, reducing the method to essential analyses and propositions fails to clarify "which analyses and propositions are primary, and which are secondary" (Molyneux, 1985, p. 9). Moreover, emphasising the method alone does not explain why a scholar using a Marxist approach might still reach reformist conclusions. Therefore, it is necessary to follow Molyneux's suggestion to define Marxism by "disclosing the 'social being' that constitutes its foundation" (Molyneux, 1985, p. 9). This can be achieved by analytically distinguishing between socialism from-below and socialism from-above within the global socialism that Rodney encountered.

In 1966, American Marxist Hal Draper published a seminal article titled *Two Souls of Socialism*, in which he established a rigorous historical framework for distinguishing authentic Marxism from other forms of socialism—many of which are erroneously claimed to adhere to Marxist principles. Draper identified the key dividing line in the history of the socialist movement as the distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below. Supporters of socialism from-above believed that enlightened leaders can deliver socialism to

passive, grateful masses without being held accountable by them. In contrast, advocates of socialism from-below regard the masses not as passive objects but as active subjects of history. As Draper (1966, p. 9) articulated, genuine Marxism understood that "socialism can be realized only through the self-emancipation of activized masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized 'from below' in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny". Draper (1966, p. 9) suggested that these struggles represented the only viable path to achieving socialism.

Draper's thesis countered the crisis of meaning that socialism faced during the Cold War era, when most people equated authentic socialism with the anti-worker regimes of the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. One of the central insights of Draper's framework was that, despite their political differences, Stalinists—supporters of the Soviet Union's political system between 1928 and 1991—and reformists shared a common disdain for the self-activity of the masses (Draper, 1966). Both Stalinists and electoral social democrats aligned with the principle of emancipation from-above, which Draper (1966, p. 5) described as a dominant trend in the socialism movement and the "all-pervading principle through centuries of class society and political oppression".

Socialism from-below

Draper's concept of socialism from-below distinguished itself from other versions of socialism through its distinct class basis. It is associated with the classical Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, which identified the proletariat—first emerging from the Industrial Revolution—as its foundational revolutionary agent. Draper identified the proletariat working class, as "a special class" (Draper, 1978, pp. 46 and pp. 33-50). Unlike any other class, the working class was deprived of the means of production and forced to sell its labour power to the bourgeoisie, who own the factories and workplaces. Yet it drew immense power from being the directly producing and exploited class, from whom the capitalist extracts

"unpaid surplus labour", as Marx described in *Das Kapital* (Marx, 1992, p. 791). Draper wrote: "The proletariat is the only class that has the social weight and power to carry through the abolition of the old order and to build a new society" (Draper, 1978, p. 46). Through this statement, Draper hinted at why Marx and Engels (2018) identified the proletariat as the only class capable of carrying out socialism from-below.

The working class holds greater objective power than other classes due to its central role in capitalist production. Draper located the authority of wage-labour over capital in "the strategic role of the indispensable services performed by the proletariat in keeping society going" (Draper, 1978, pp. 46–47). The strength of the working class arises from its interdependent relationship with the capitalist class, as it produces wealth for the latter while being exploited. This collective power can be articulated through strikes and workplace occupations, which halt production. The withdrawal of labour highlights another key feature of the working class: it is a collective class. The expansion of capitalism forces people to migrate to urban areas for work, concentrating them in workplaces where production is socialised. Although workers perform different tasks in offices and factories, they tend to develop a shared consciousness against exploitation. When mass strikes and protests escalate into revolutions, workers introduce democratic ways of reorganising society, such as establishing workers' councils or soviets (Choonara, 2017, pp. 20–21).

The working class, through its struggle against capital, can seize control of the means of production, dismantle the bourgeois state, and replace it with a workers' state as a necessary transition to the ultimate goal of a classless society. Marx called this transnational outcome of the class struggle the dictatorship of the proletariat relying on participation of the entire working masses (Draper, 2011). Rosa Luxemburg observed that "this dictatorship consists in the *manner of applying democracy,* not in its *elimination,* but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without

which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished" (Luxemburg, 1961, p. 78). For Marx and Engels (2018), this dictatorship requires the establishment of the proletariat as the ruling class on both a national and international scale, in line with the global expansion of capitalism, which has made the working class a universal class. The slogan "workers of all countries unite!" was not a moral one but a reflection of Marx's scientific approach to revolution based on the standpoint of the proletariat (Marx and Engels, 2018, p. 44).

Socialism from-below reached its climax during the Russian Revolution of October 1917, when the Bolshevik Party under Lenin's leadership led the first victorious proletarian revolution. In a recently edited volume, David Featherstone, Alan Rice, and Christian Høgsbjerg (2022) examined how the politics and internationalism of October 1917 influenced Black revolutionaries such as C L R James, George Padmore, Lamine Senghor, Claude McKay, Kwame Nkrumah, and Walter Rodney. They argue the Russian Revolution served as a symbol of hope for many black colonial subjects and African Americans. The events of October 1917 sparked a reconsideration of strategies and tactics for confronting racism and imperialism, inspired by the revolution's significant achievements in opposing these injustices (Featherstone, Høgsbjerg and Rice, 2022, p. 5)

Lenin's theory of imperialism offered Rodney a crucial point of departure for analysing the interconnected realities of colonial and post-colonial Africa (Rodney, 2012; Lenin, 2010). The theory identified a new stage of capitalism emerging in the late 19th century, in which the economic competition among monopoly firms evolved into a rivalry between their respective nation-states for colonial conquests. It exposed the uneven character of capitalist development, anticipating that shifts in the balance of power among imperialist states would inevitably lead to war while simultaneously creating opportunities for anti-colonial revolutions (Lenin, 2010). A strategic consequence of Lenin's theory was the Bolshevik's consistent support for the

national liberation of the oppressed peoples (Zeilig and Dwyer, 2018; Featherstone, Høgsbjerg and Rice, 2022).

Although he never was a Trotskyist, Rodney praised Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, originally published in 1930. While teaching in Tanzania in the early 1970s, Rodney devoted one of his lectures on the historiography of October 1917 to Trotsky's seminal work (Rodney, 2018). In his lecture, he emphasised the proletariat's pivotal role in the revolution: "For the first time in world history, the peasant was destined to find a leader in the person of the workers. This is the unique feature of the Russian Revolution" (Rodney, 2018, p. 77). Rodney demonstrates here his grasp of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which anticipated the unfolding of the Russian Revolution (Trotsky, 2008, 2010). While many Marxists believed that a proletarian revolution could only occur in industrialised nations with a significant working class, Trotsky argued that socialist revolutions could happen in the capitalist periphery, where the working class was often a minority compared to the peasantry (Trotsky, 2010). In this respect, Tsarist Russia shared striking similarities with countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

Trotsky's theory suggested that the fight for democratic rights in such contexts could develop into a struggle to expropriate capitalists and establish socialism, provided the working class led the revolution with the support of the oppressed peasantry. The idea of permanence in Trotsky's theory also underscored the need to extend revolutionary struggles beyond national borders, asserting that their survival depends on international working-class solidarity (Trotsky, 2010).

Third World socialisms from-above: changes in the class basis of Marxism

The most significant aspect of Marxism's expansion into the Global South was the transformation of its class foundation during the national liberation struggles of the 1940s to the 1970s, coinciding with Rodney's coming of age as a scholar-activist. The victorious

Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 exemplified this shift by proposing a model for achieving socialism that relied not on the urban working class but on the rural peasantry, while still professing loyalty to Marxist principles and the ideal of proletarian revolution. As a result of this new approach, guerrilla warfare in rural areas emerged as a crucial strategy for anti-colonial Marxist liberation movements throughout the Global South, including Zimbabwe, Algeria, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, and Vietnam. Yet they had revised Marxism from its emphasis on the proletariat.

Among the thinkers who influenced Rodney, Che Guevara viewed the working class in underdeveloped countries as a weak and ineffectual force, while Frantz Fanon saw the African proletariat as an impediment to national liberation, arguing that workers were beneficiaries of colonial rule (Fanon, 1963; Guevara 2003a; see Zeilig, 2021). Amílcar Cabral, the Guinean leader who led a highly successful guerrilla war against Portuguese colonial rule in Guinea-Bissau, initially tried to organise the small working class in Bissau. Following the massacre of 50 dockworkers by Portuguese forces in 1959, he shifted towards guerrilla warfare (Cabral, 2007). Despite his ideological revisions, Che Guevara continued to publicly support the concept of international proletarian revolution and maintained an affiliation with Marxism. He wrote: “The peasant class of Latin America, basing itself on the ideology of the working class whose great thinkers discovered the social laws governing us, will provide the great liberating army of the future” (Guevara, 2003b, p. 136). Fanon (1963) similarly identified peasants and the lumpenproletariat – landless peasants compelled to seek work in urban settings – as the driving force behind national liberation struggles. He asserted, “It is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain” (Fanon, 1963, p. 61).

Several authors have rightly pointed out that, despite their emphasis on the revolutionary peasantry, the actual class leadership of Third World Marxism often came from

a section of the urban intellectual petty bourgeoisie, also known as the intelligentsia. Marxist Tony Cliff (1963) argued that in situations where the working class lacked a strong political organisation—often due to the underdevelopment caused by imperialism—the leadership of the revolutionary movement typically fell to the intelligentsia. This intelligentsia, privileged over the working masses yet oppressed by imperialism, found itself in a position to mobilise the grievances of the masses against colonialism. Cliff describes the intelligentsia as prone to elitism: "great believers in efficiency, including efficiency in social engineering. They hope for reform from-above and would dearly love to hand the new world over to a grateful people, rather than see the liberating struggle of a self-conscious and freely associated people result in a new world for themselves" (Cliff, 1986).

For Cliff (1963), the failure of the working class to take a leading role was not only due to underdevelopment but also to the global leadership it faced, which had largely fallen under Stalinist influence. Along the same lines as Cliff, several scholars define Stalinism as a system of social power that extended beyond Stalin's personal rule, shaping the Soviet Union from 1928 to 1991 and influencing the politics of communist parties and regimes worldwide. Geographer Das remarked that "the hallmarks of Stalinism are authoritarianism, statism, and nationalism" (Das quoted in Mishler, 2018, p.558). The authoritarian nature of this new ruling class emerged due to the isolation of Russian society following the failure of European revolutions in the 1920s and the decimation of the working class after the Civil War. Stalinism's two-stage theory of revolution posits that a revolution unfolds in distinct phases, where an underdeveloped society must first undergo a period of capitalist development—marked by an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—before advancing towards socialism. Its nationalism is characterised by the doctrine of "socialism in one country", which contradicts the classic Marxist emphasis on internationalism.

Dwyer and Zeilig (2018) note that Third World Marxist or socialist regimes received financial assistance from the Soviet Union while also viewing the country as a model for rapid development: "After the Second World War, state capitalism and national projects of "socialist" construction became the principal ideological export from the Soviet Union" (Zeilig and Dwyer, 2018). Once in power, these regimes—such as Mao's China and Cuba—adopted Soviet-style bureaucratic methods, assuming state control over the economy and implementing central planning. They equated nationalisation and land reform with socialism, rather than viewing these measures as tools to achieve working-class control. Consequently, they often suppressed strikes and trade unions, seeing them as obstacles to their rapid industrialisation efforts, which relied on exploiting the working masses.

Stalinism influenced the development of versions of socialism shaping the ideologies and policies of leaders in newly independent African states in the 1960s, which Rodney encountered. African socialism became associated with leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, who sought a "third way" between capitalism and socialism grounded in African traditions. Tanzanian-Zanzibari Marxist Abdulrahman M. Babu argued:

> Some of the more inspired leaders even go so far as to say that an African is "socialist by nature" and therefore cannot be taught a socialism influenced by "alien" ideologies. We must have our own brand of socialism, one that suits our communal life which is now threatened by the intervention of European values (Babu, 1983, p. xv).

His statement applied to Nyerere's Ujamaa philosophy which embodied the utopia of African socialism. It contrasted traditional communal virtues with the "individualistic immorality" of capitalism, envisioning a society with equitable distribution of resources under hard work. As a policy of land reform, Ujamaa reassembled other Third World state-led socialism that attempted to build "socialism in one country" based on the peasantry. Hal Draper (1966, p. 29) referred to Nkrumah's regime as an "educational dictatorship" and a "benevolent despotism",

highlighting its suppression of trade unions and the independent labour movement to extract sufficient capital from the working masses for rapid industrialisation. Tanzanian Marxist scholars Abdul Rahman Babu and Issa Shivji applied a similar critique to Nyerere's regime, which banned independent trade unions in 1964 and, much like the Soviet Union, constructed a petty-bourgeois bureaucracy. They argued that African socialisms were united in their opposition to Marxism, particularly in their denial of class or class struggle (Shivji, 1976).

The contradiction of socialism: C L R James and Black Power

It is important to remember that Hal Draper's distinction, while pertinent, remains an analytical tool drawn from his generalisation of the socialist movement. A closer examination of how ideology manifests in individuals' lives as they move through time and space reveals a far more complex picture. On the canvas of life, the tussle between socialism from-above and from-below plays out within the consciousness of individuals. While this thesis will show how Rodney embodied this tension, it is also necessary to demonstrate that he was not alone in this, his experience fits into the much broader context of the Cold War.

Harman (1968) argued that Third Worldism significantly influenced large sections of the Western left, who saw Maoism or Guevararism as an alternative to the Soviet Union's bureaucratic rule, especially after events like the repression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968. Rodney's mentor, C L R James, for example, supported the Hungarian workers' uprising of 1956 against Soviet domination and advocated for a proletarian revolution in the advanced Western capitalist countries. However, as Matthew Quest (2008) has shown, by the mid-1960s, James's views on the Third World led him to adopt positions favourable of top-down socialisms, which contradicted his earlier adherence to classical Marxism. Although James initially identified Mao's China with Stalinism, he later revised his position, calling it "the only place where Marxism has had any success" (Quest, 2008, p. 151). He also viewed Cuba as a model for Third World revolution and compared

Kwame Nkrumah to Lenin (James, 1977). Regarding Nyerere's Ujamaa, James wrote, "It is sufficient to say that socialist thought has seen nothing like this since the death of Lenin in 1924" (James, 2012, p. 136).

The contradiction between the two souls of socialism suffused the most radical sections of the Black Power movement, as articulated by the Black Panthers under Huey P. Newton in the United States, Walter Rodney in Jamaica, and the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) in Trinidad and Tobago. In defining these left-wing and racially inclusive expressions of Caribbean Black Power, Kate Quinn (2014) argues that the movement drew inspiration from the Third World nationalism of Frantz Fanon, as well as the Black Nationalism of figures like Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, along with socialist ideas prevalent in the Global South. Quinn remarks that in this framework:

> Anti-imperialists and revolutionaries such as Mao Zedong, Ernesto Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh could be incorporated as "Black Power heroes", and, famously, Fidel Castro could be hailed as "the blackest man in the Americas" (Quinn, 2014, p. 29).

On one side, Black Power aligned with socialism from-above by positioning the primary revolutionary agent outside the traditional working class. The Black Panthers focused on organising the black lumpenproletariat in American cities while Rodney devoted much of his activities to engaging the marginalised Jamaican youth in Kingston's shantytowns in 1968 (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022). Among Rodney's comrades in the WPA, Andaiye (2020) raised concerns about his ongoing trust in "lumpen" elements during his activism in Guyana in the 1970s, despite their unreliable loyalties. This concern, she felt, was tragically illustrated by Rodney's relationship with Gregory Smith, his eventual assassin. Andaiye's perspective aligns with the critiques of Chris Booker, who argued that the Black Panthers' strategic focus on organising criminal elements of the lumpenproletariat "created a sociocultural milieu inimical to a stable political organization" often leading to fleeting loyalties and a tendency to be baited into confrontations with the police (Booker, 1998, p. 337). On the other hand, Black Power

also contained elements of democracy from-below. In both the United States and the Caribbean, it remained a grassroots movement, unconnected to state power (Bloom and Martin, 2013; Quinn, 2014). Rodney's vision of Black Power, as this thesis demonstrates in Chapter 4, was deeply rooted in democratic resistance from the black masses.

In sum, this theoretical discussion defined the socialist tradition to expose the contours, similarities, and differences of the various forms of socialism that Walter Rodney engaged with throughout his life-geography, thereby conferring a global dimension to Hal Draper's distinction between the "two souls" of socialism. It posited the orthodoxy of Marxism as embedded in the self-emancipation of the proletariat. Conversely, the unifying factor among the various forms of socialism from-above that prevailed in the Third World—whether influenced by Stalinism, Guevarism, Maoism, or African socialism—was their ignorance or disdain for this principle and their identification of the petty bourgeoisie as the revolutionary agent. This definition offers an analytical guideline to evaluate the patterns in the evolution of Rodney's politics across time and space, which, in reality, take the form of a complex negotiation between the categories of socialism presented. Next, this chapter looks at how a stronger knowledge of Marxism can enhance the interpretation of the major themes in Rodney's life.

Rodney and working-class self-emancipation

One theme that warrants further exploration in the scholarship on Rodney is the connection between his Marxism and the activity of the working class. This connection has not been a primary focus for scholars who have primarily concentrated on the unorthodox elements of his Marxist thought (Lewis, 1998; Boukari-Yabara, 2018). However, it was central to Rodney's close WPA comrade, Eusi Kwayana, in his brief eyewitness account of Rodney's last years in Guyana (1974-80), published only five years after Rodney's death in 1985. In 2022, Leo Zeilig's *A Revolutionary for Our Time: The Walter Rodney Story* was published, the

first biography since Kwayana's to focus on Rodney's vital connections with the working class throughout his life. This book serves as the second comprehensive Anglophone biography of Rodney, covering his life and work across Europe, Africa, and the Americas, following Lewis's earlier biography. The mission here is to outline how the established theoretical framework on Marxism allows this thesis to engage in dialogue with the key works of Kwayana and Zeilig (especially), building on their important discoveries.

In his compelling portrayal of Rodney's activism, Kwayana (1988) unveils central aspects of Rodney's Marxism that have been lost in subsequent accounts that emphasise his unorthodoxy. First, Kwayana (1998, p. 8) took his comrade on his own terms, recalling that shortly after his return to Guyana, Rodney stated in an interview, "I aspire to be a Marxist-Leninist". Kwayana argues that Rodney did not aim to conform to any prevailing forms of socialism through this label but viewed Marxism as a tool to analyse social relations from the viewpoint of the exploited class.

Secondly, he refers to Rodney as "the prophet of self-emancipation" for his role in uniting Afro-Guyanese mineworkers and Indian sugar workers against Burnham's PNC dictatorship (Kwayana, 1988, p. 2). Rodney's activism and speeches, as Kwayana (1988) argued, fostered among the working class a sense of their potential power through his support for strikes and leadership in the 1979 protest movement known as the civil rebellion. Moreover, he asserts Rodney's embrace of spontaneous struggles set him apart from other Marxist leaders in Guyana who often greeted such movements with apprehension.

Thirdly, Kwayana (1988) also argues that Rodney viewed the revolutionary party as essential for harnessing the spontaneity of the working class. He thereby aimed to embed the party within the working class to impart theory and raise awareness while simultaneously learning from the class's instincts and experiences. He wrote:

> Self-emancipation … does not mean the separation of theory from the masses of working people but the union of theory with the revolutionary instincts and experience of working people and with the revolutionary party so organised and so rooted that it is willing to take instructions from the working people's representatives (Kwayana, 1988, p. 50).

Kwayana's portrayal of Rodney's Marxism echoed Draper's concept of socialism from-below, accentuating his comrade's embrace of self-activity of strikes and protests, and his support for a revolutionary party.

Zeilig's biography stands out among the scholarship on Rodney by building on Kwayana's account, examining Rodney's contributions to Marxism throughout his life and his commitment to working-class self-emancipation (Zeilig, 2022). The book emerged during a distinct moment of capitalist crisis, presenting Rodney's politics to an audience shaped by the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which arose amidst the economic and health crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Zeilig, 2022). Unlike Lewis's first biography, this work examines Rodney's politics without being entangled in the collapse of the Stalinist left in the Caribbean and globally. The author's anti-Stalinist Marxist stance allows for a more unencumbered analysis of Rodney (Zeilig, 2022). By conceiving Rodney's politics as "constantly in a process of dialectical development", Zeilig (2022, p. 336) makes a unique discovery about Rodney's ability to revise his positions in response to changing circumstances. He identified crucial shifts in Rodney's political thought while listening to recordings of lectures on African development that the Afro-Guyanese historian delivered during his visit to Hamburg in 1978. These lectures are preserved in the Walter Rodney Papers in Atlanta (Rodney, 1978a).

In these lectures, Rodney reflects on his experiences with Tanzania's socialist experiment, which he observed during his stays between 1966-67 and 1969-74 (Zeilig, 2022). Rodney discussed the failures of Tanzanian socialism and his enthusiasm for the growing working-class movement of the 1970s, which involved a wave of wildcat strikes—initiated by the rank and file without the consent of their union—and occasional occupations in both private

and nationalised sectors threatening the rule of Tanzania's state bureaucracy. Zeilig (2022, pp. 284–285) wrote: "In these struggles from below, celebrated by Rodney, he saw a direct challenge to a state that had declared itself socialist, and the possibility of a new society based on that class challenge". This realisation, Zeilig argues, represented a change in Rodney's politics, where previously he saw the state as the driver of socialism in Tanzania through nationalisation and Ujamaa land reform policy. He explained: "The Hamburg lectures confirmed the shift in Rodney's work toward an emphasis on the self-activity of the working class…not as *one* of numerous players in the revolution, but as *the* central organizing force" (Zeilig, 2022, p. 297).

Before Zeilig's pioneering analysis of the lectures, previous biographers of Rodney's saw his time in Tanzania (1967-74) as crucial to the development of his critique of the postcolonial elite in Africa and the Caribbean, but they had not picked up on a tension between Rodney's views and the Tanzanian one-party state. The sole exception was Karim Hirji, a Tanzanian Marxist friend and comrade of Rodney's in Tanzania. Hirji notes that Rodney's enthusiasm for the Tanzanian revolution in his final year declines as he recognised that a pro-capitalist faction of Tanzanian bureaucracy has begun to exert influence of the state. Yet he asserts that Rodney retained "a modicum of hope" about the TANU's ability to lead the nation to socialism (Hirji, 2017). Zeilig correctly underscored the influence of Issa Shivji's monumental work, *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (1976), on Rodney's political development. This influence contributed to Rodney's pessimism regarding the realisation of Ujamaa socialism and, more significantly, to his growing appreciation for the potential of a new class capable of leading national liberation.

Zeilig (2022) frames Rodney's changing perspective on Tanzania largely as a reflection from near the end of his life in 1978, leaving readers wondering when and how his support for the Tanzanian revolution began to shift. He correctly argued that "Rodney's own experiences

since 1974—as one of the WPA's leading militants in Guyana—had drawn him closer than he had ever been to the politics of the working class" (Zeilig, 2022, p. 285). Yet there is more to be uncovered here. Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis will enrich Zeilig's discovery by demonstrating that Rodney's shift toward working-class socialism unfolded as a gradual process from the early 1970s, with his international travels playing a vital role in shaping this transformation. It considers his tensions with the increasingly authoritarian Tanzanian state, the growing focus on workers' struggles among radical students in Dar es Salaam, and Rodney's intellectual work in Guyana's class struggles after leaving Dar in 1974—all of which shaped his evolving critique of Tanzanian socialism, as seen in the Hamburg lectures.

Zeilig's book centres on Rodney's commitment to self-emancipation through an in-depth study of his transformation into a full-time organiser for the working class in the late 1970s. It focuses on Rodney's involvement in strikes and protests in Guyana and his efforts to turn the WPA into a revolutionary party. However, this thesis addresses two important aspects missing from Zeilig's account. First, as Guyanese journalist Freddie Kissoon (2022) noted, Zeilig's research lacks engagement with those who were Rodney's close revolutionary comrades in the WPA. In contrast, this thesis incorporates the voices of Rodney's comrades, including those from working-class backgrounds and other political parties, to better reconstruct this crucial period in his life and his relationships with workers. In addition, it makes use of Guyanese newspapers to reconstruct the environment and archival documents of the Guyanese activist, which previous biographers did not have access to. On this basis, this thesis will extend the analysis of Rodney's final years by examining his Marxism and activism through the lived experiences and voices of the Guyanese people who knew him. It will explore how Rodney's enthusiasm for spontaneous workers' militancy further shaped his anti-racist strategy, which emerged from his analysis of racism in Guyana and his efforts to build a revolutionary party.

These sources also will help address a major gap in Zeilig's analysis of Rodney's final year in Guyana: the lack of a thorough examination of the limitations of Rodney's commitment to self-emancipation. Although he briefly mentions the WPA's shift toward armed struggle, he provides little clarity on Rodney's actual stance beyond a broad statement: "Rodney, for his part, sought to unify the two elements of liberation—the mass movement and armed struggle—in order to achieve a critical transformation in consciousness". Given Rodney's death and the WPA's failure to effectively challenge the dictatorship, Chapter 8 of this research presents an evidence-based argument for why they proved unable to unite the armed struggle with the workers' movement.

Zeilig (2022) touches upon a key contradiction in the WPA's approach to forming an anti-dictatorial alliance: its support for an electoral government of national unity versus its stance on working-class power outside of government. He asks: what role could there be for the alliance in such a "government of national unity", which would presumably involve contesting elections? (Zeilig, 2022, p. 233). Rather than expanding on this contradiction, Zeilig directs readers to the author's brief introduction on Rodney's life, which offers only a short critique (Chukwudinma, 2022). Nevertheless, this introduction argued that the proposal for a government of national unity compromised workers' interests for the sake of an intra-class collaboration (Chukwudinma, 2022). This thesis will develop this point to explain the ambivalences in Rodney and WPA's stance for socialism from-below considering their failed efforts to build an anti-dictatorial alliance.

There is a period of Rodney's life that Zeilig and previous biographers have not fully uncovered, which this thesis will investigate. In a recent review of Zeilig's work, Austin expressed a desire for more focus on Rodney's six-month journey to Cuba in 1968-69, asking, "What exactly did Rodney do in Cuba? What kinds of conversations did he engage in, and with whom?" (Austin, 2024, p. 210). In defence of Zeilig, this thesis points out that tracing Rodney's

activities in Cuba has been extremely difficult, even for Cuban based scholars, due to the challenges of accessing state archives (Davis, 2021; Guerra, 2022b). Nevertheless, this thesis includes an analysis of Rodney's engagement with Black Power, drawing on two previously untapped documents from the Atlanta Archives, likely written while in Cuba, which shed light on his thinking about Jamaican and American Black Power, as well as the Cuban revolution in 1968-69. Additionally, it includes a small set of documents and oral testimonies from those familiar with his solo trip, providing a deeper understanding of Rodney's support for state-led socialism and the evolution of his political ideas.

Zeilig's study marks a turning point in the historiography on Rodney. Unlike previous works that often depict Rodney as an unwaveringly unorthodox Marxist dissident, it captures the evolution of Rodney's thought and his deep, classical Marxist commitment to the working class. This thesis seeks to build on his approach by employing dialectical materialism as a method to analyse Rodney's life. This approach enables a more systematic tracing of Rodney's political development compared to previous research. Like Zeilig (2022), this study will draw on the Atlanta Archives and oral testimonies from Tanzania, but it will also incorporate a broader range of archival sources from the locations discussed in the next chapter. The following section will examine thematic areas related to Rodney's engagement with the working class.

Race and class

A thorough understanding of the Marxist tradition helps clarify Rodney's evolving perspective on race and class, as his work and identity have provoked conflicting interpretations among scholars. These interpretations reveal a critical gap in understanding the nuanced and tense interplay between Marxist and Black Nationalist ideologies in his thought (Young, 2008). The tension arises from their diverging worldviews: socialism from-below identifies the primary divide in human society as one between bourgeois and proletarian classes

(Draper, 1966, 1978). In contrast, Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and other nationalisms of the oppressed, view the world as divided by racial or ethnic identities. Marxists understand racism as a product of capitalism and a class-based ideology that divides the working class, whereas Black Nationalists argue that racism operates independently of capitalist social relations (Boukari-Yabara, 2017; Adi, 2018). History provides examples of political thinkers, including George Padmore, C L R James, and Angela Davis, who have engaged with Marxist and Pan-Africanist politics across the Atlantic to shape struggles against racism and capitalist imperialism (Featherstone, Høgsbjerg and Rice, 2022; Okoth, 2023). This section explores how the literature on Rodney addresses the tensions and entanglements between these ideologies in his political journey.

In 2015, Rodney's WPA comrade, David Hinds, argued that his party under Rodney embodied a form of "Black nationalism grounded in working-class liberation", which he contrasted with "the orthodox Marxist formulation of the primacy of class over race" (Hinds, 2015, p. 218). This identification with Black Nationalism is a peculiar reinterpretation of the WPA's history, given the party's efforts to unite Africans and Indo-Guyanese against a PNC regime that weaponised black pride to discriminate against Indians. Moreover, Hinds made gross generalisations of Marxist positions, framing them as rigidly adhering to an either/or binary between race and class.

Nevertheless, he is not entirely wrong in doing so. Some Marxist scholars have controversially sought to portray Rodney's political development as a radical break with Black Nationalism to Marxism, whereby race and class stood in rigid antithesis to one another (Dupuy, 1996; Adeleke, 1997). In his 1996 article, the Marxist Haitian scholar Alex Dupuy painted Rodney's Black Power advocacy during his stint in Jamaica from January to October 1968 in quite harsh terms. He accused Rodney of practicing reverse racism by framing the

capital-labour relationship into one between black and white, where whites are essentialised as exploiters. Commenting on Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brother*s, Dupuy wrote:

> The ultimate consequence of this racialist discourse is that despite Rodney's claim that the Black Power movement did not aim to create a racially intolerant society, it could not but re-create exclusivist and hence fundamentally antidemocratic practices (Dupuy, 1996, p. 114).

Dupuy then argued that by the time Rodney returned to Guyana in 1974, he had abandoned Black Nationalism for a Marxist approach that framed racial divisions as the expression of class struggle. Dupuy identified this transition as a consequence of his growing animosity towards the oppressive politics of the post-independence ruling class in Africa he acquired during his time in Tanzania from 1969-74 (Dupuy, 1996). Following Dupuy, the Nigerian scholar Adeleke singled out Rodney's position at the Sixth Pan-African Congress as a key indicator of his transition to a class-based analysis. "At the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Tanzania, Rodney objected to the continued use of race as a rallying force and offered class as an alternative paradigm", he wrote (Adeleke, 2000, p. 51).

In contrast, a number of studies that focus on Rodney's Pan-Africanism as the central theme pay closer attention to the relationship between race and class (Campbell, 1987, 1991; Rodney, 1990; Lewis, 1998; Bogues, 2003; Young, 2008; Hill, 2015; Hinds, 2015; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Makalani, 2018; Harisch, 2020, 2021; Davis, 2021). However, some authors understate Rodney's Marxism when celebrating his hybridity as someone who drew from Marxist, Pan-African, and nationalist influences, without addressing the potential tensions that may have arisen from these intersecting ideologies. Kurt Young (2008), who claimed Rodney was primarily a Pan-Africanist committed to liberating black people from exploitation and underdevelopment, responded to Dupuy and Adeleke as follows:

> Rodney's mastery of the materialist tradition never resulted, as is too often the case, in a denial of racial identity and a role for nationalism in Pan-Africanism. He recognised Black or cultural nationalism as basic elements that stood at the core of African people's search for self-definition, self-determination, and human dignity (Young, 2008, p. 494).

This may be true, but one must then ask how Rodney grappled with the decline of Pan-Africanism and the divisions among Black Power activists in the mid-1970s, as raised by Abdul Alkalimat regarding the American context (Alkalimat, 2022). More importantly, how did Rodney reconcile his Pan-African nationalism within the Guyanese and Caribbean context, where Burnham's PNC used Black Power to justify offering little to Indo-Guyanese communities? (Quinn, 2014). By examining the evolution of Rodney's politics, this thesis precisely attempts to show how he bridged these complex ideological and social divides. If Rodney is to be considered a Pan-Africanist, then it must be made clear that his identification remained a function of his socialism, not the opposite. Rodney himself insisted that "Pan-Africanism must be a socialist weapon" (Rodney, 1976). Jamaican scholar Robert Hill specified in an insightful article on Rodney's Pan-Africanism that his socialist commitment to the exploited belonged at the centre of his politics. "It must be stressed that Pan-Africanism could not supplant that world view; it was only valid to the extent that it represented an aspect of its confirmation", he wrote (Hill, 2015, pp. 151–152).

Given that this thesis focuses on Rodney's Marxism, it is important to critically engage with the problematic interpretations offered by those who have written about his politics from a Marxist perspective. While the point that Rodney's politics shifted out of Black Power may be true, Dupuy and Adeleke's "class, not race" approach reflects a form of undialectical thinking. It overlooks the ways in which race and class intersect and how these concepts influenced Rodney's evolving consciousness over time.

First Rodney's formulation of Black Power differed from cultural Black Nationalism. Scholar Carole Boyce Davies (2019) asserted that Rodney offers a global, non-essentialist definition of blackness shaped by the anti-imperialist struggle. In 1968, Rodney wrote that "The black people of whom I speak, therefore, are non-whites—the hundreds of millions of people whose homelands are in Asia and Africa, with another few million in the Americas"

(Rodney, 2019). Building on scholars Lewis's and Obika Gray's earlier observations, Jesse Benjamin and Zeilig argue that Rodney synthesised the Marxist notion of class struggle against imperialism with Black Power resistance to white supremacy, concluding that he developed a "Marxism in which Black Power [was] central" (Zeilig, 2022, p. 77). Chapter 4 of this thesis will further explore how Rodney's Black Power discourse was inclusive, envisioning a revolution in the United States that united black and white workers, inspired by his perception of racial harmony in Cuba.

Secondly, the claim that Rodney broke completely with Black Nationalism in Africa overlooks the strong connections he maintained with Black Power figures during his travels between Tanzania, the United States, and the Caribbean in the mid 1970s. Notably, he built relationships with Vincent Harding, William Strickland, and his friend Robert Hill at the Institute of the Black World (IBW) in Atlanta (Rodney, 1990). African American scholar Derrick White documents Rodney's visit to the IBW in 1974, where he taught alongside Strickland on capitalism and race relations in America (White, 2011). This thesis will demonstrate that, although Rodney leaned more towards Marxism than Black Nationalism, he made a concerted effort to build a bridge between supporters of both ideologies, especially in response to the global decline of Pan-Africanism following the Sixth Pan-African Congress.

More importantly, presenting race and class as rigidly opposed in Rodney's politics, as Dupuy and Adeleke do, reinforces the critiques by those who claim that Marxism is guilty of class reductionism, as seen with Hinds. This argument echoes the position of left-wing American scholars Adolph Reed and Walter Michaels, who have made a similar case in their recent collection of essays. Michaels writes:

> The relation between fighting discrimination and fighting exploitation is asymmetrical: fighting exploitation is a way of fighting the effects of discrimination…but fighting discrimination is not a way of fighting exploitation... (Michaels and Reed, 2023, p. 82).

While fighting for material benefits such as housing and healthcare is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of the struggle against oppression, this perspective fails to recognise that exploitation cannot be effectively challenged by a working class that remains divided along racial lines, hence the necessity of an anti-racist strategy (Richardson, 2013).

Above all else, the great aporia of this debate connects back to a central problem in the discussion on what constitutes Marxist orthodoxy: neither side has engaged with how classical Marxism addresses race and class, nor critically positioned Rodney's intellectual contributions within this framework. This thesis fills this gap in Rodney's work in Guyana from 1974 to 1980 by aligning it with a Marxism from-below approach that recognises the interconnection between racism and capitalism, avoiding both class-reductionist and race-reductionist pitfalls.

To begin with, Marx (1870) himself did not ignore racial difference (Callinicos, 2011; Anderson, 2016). His extensive commentary on the Irish question in the 1870s shows his concern for the racial divisions between racialised Irish immigrants and British workers in England. To explain this division, which he termed "the secret of the impotence of the English working class". Marx laid the groundwork for a materialist analysis of racism's role in capitalist society:

> The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the standard of life. … The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of English rule in Ireland.
>
> This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. … It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this (Marx, 1870, p. 476).

Here, Marx shows how conditions of capitalist exploitation create fertile ground for racism. First, the passage reveals how racial hostility and prejudice arise from labour market competition in England, created through industrialisation and colonialism, which led to an influx of cheap Irish labour. Secondly, it shows how the capitalist class uses racism, via its ideological tools, to divide the working class and weaken labour's power against capital.

There is no evidence to suggest that Rodney was familiar with Marx's writings on racism, which were limited and sporadic. However, he did engage with the work of African American Marxist W E B Du Bois, reading and taking notes on his *Black Reconstruction* as early as 1968 (*Black Reconstruction*, no date). Rodney also taught the book as part of the Black People in the Americas course, which he established at the University of Dar es Salaam during the 1973/74 academic year (*Black People in the Americas*, no date). Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* offers a systematic use of historical materialism to explain the continuation of black oppression in American capitalism after the Civil War (1861-65). Du Bois (1935) emphasised the central role of enslaved blacks in fighting for emancipation and democratic rights, a perspective often neglected by earlier American historians. He highlighted how the capitalist class undermined solidarity between freed blacks and poor whites, thwarting efforts to build democracy in the Reconstruction governments of the South. Du Bois wrote:

> The theory of race was supplemented by a carefully planned and slowly evolved method, which drove such a wedge between the white and black workers that there probably are not today in the world two groups of workers with practically identical interests who hate and fear each other so deeply and persistently and who are kept so far apart that neither sees anything of common interest (Du Bois, 1935, p. 700).

Du Bois introduced the concept of "psychological wage" to explain how racist beliefs promoted by the ruling class resonated with white workers (Du Bois, 1935). Taylor equates the psychological wage to the Marxist notion of false consciousness, which "was to make the white worker feel superior because he was not black, even though he would have nothing material to show for it" (Taylor, 2008). There was a clear economic incentive for the capitalists to maintain a divided working class, as it meant that whites would more readily accept their exploitation.

Chapter 7 of this thesis shows how Rodney contributes to socialism from-below by applying historical materialism to analyse racial division in Guyana, particularly in his book *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Despite examining racial tensions between non-white groups, specifically Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese plantation

workers, Rodney reaches conclusions akin to those of Marx and Du Bois. Although Rodney (1981) does not directly reference these thinkers in his writings, he echoes their core idea that capitalism forms the economic basis of racism. He argues that the capitalist class manipulates racist ideology to give the exploited a false sense of comfort, effectively setting them against each other rather than uniting them in opposition to capital. This research does not compare these works directly. Instead, it shows how Rodney's use of Marx's method allows him to critique a trend in Guyanese and Caribbean historiography known as pluralist theory and the more progressive plantation model, which could not escape explaining society through the prism of race (Rodney, 1981b).

Moreover, Rodney's originality lies in his explicit proposal for combating racism through the class struggle, which is more pronounced than in Marx and Du Bois. He recognises that an increase in proletarian self-organisation and militancy enhances their ability to overcome racial differences (Rodney, 1981a). This thesis will demonstrate that the organisation he attempts to build in Guyana plays a vital role in fostering unity among the working class.

On the question of organisation-building and the conquest of state power

The theoretical distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below also provides a valuable framework for re-evaluating Rodney's approach to organising against dictatorship during his final year in Guyana. This raises the question: what type of organisation was his WPA, and what role did it assign itself in the struggle against the Guyanese state? Conflicting interpretations have emerged regarding Rodney's commitment to the Leninist concept of a vanguard party, highlighting the broader challenge of defining Marxism in scholarly discourse.

On the one hand, Rodney's biographer Lewis and WPA leaders like Andaiye and David Hinds depict Rodney as anti-vanguardist, favouring mass movement politics. Hinds wrote:

> Although Rodney accepted the Marxist methodology, he was less wedded to its dogmas. In this regard, he belonged to the tradition of C. L. R. James and Eusi Kwayana, both of whom rejected the Leninist vanguardist dogma. This non-dogmatic tendency was central to Rodney's praxis and was partly the source of his and the WPA's alliance approach (Hinds, 2015, p. 224).

Similarly, former WPA leader Andaiye (2020, p. 39) noted that "among regional Marxist–Leninists, more than anyone else in the WPA, Rodney was seen as irredeemably anti-vanguardist and 'adventurist'" partly because he advocated for free and fair elections and other democratic measures. On the other hand, Rupert Roopnaraine, another WPA leader, argued that "Rodney was fully in support of the cadre formation: highly motivated cadre, disciplined, with a vigorous division of labour, knowledge of revolutionary principles, round-the-clock availability" (Roopanaire, quoted in Lewis, 1998 p. 231)

For Lewis, Andaiye, and Hinds, "vanguardism" implied an elitist, anti-democratic party that distrusted the masses self-activity and centred around personality cults. In the Caribbean context, this critique applies to organisations such as Cheddi Jagan's PPP and Forbes Burnham's PNC, as well as other Marxist-Leninist parties like the Workers Party of Jamaica and the New Jewel Movement (NJM) of Grenada. Brian Meeks (2015) described the NJM as a small, secretive, hierarchical organisation led by intellectuals, characterised by conspiratorial actions. He supposed the NJM should have transformed itself into a mass political party to effectively mobilise the people. He stated: "This would naturally have to be accompanied by elections to posts in the party at all levels, conventions, and all the paraphernalia of democratic mass parties" (Meeks, 2015).

One significant reason for this negative view of vanguardism concerns the factional fights that weakened the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the New Jewel Movement, paving the way for the American invasion of Grenada in 1983. Historian Gordon Lewis stated, "The

real post-mortem had to deal with the fact that October 1983 was in large part a self-inflicted wound of the revolution itself " (Lewis, 1987, p. 161). A broader reason, as Paul Le Blanc and Lars Lih argue, is that Leninism has been reduced to a vile authoritarian caricature by liberal, conservative, and even some left-wing thinkers (Lih, 2008; Le Blanc, 2016).

The negative perspectives on the vanguard party held by these authors are understandable, given that the movements they describe practised the authoritarianism of socialism from-above. This thesis aligns with Lewis, Andaiye, and Hinds in arguing that Rodney and the WPA were more democratic and organisationally inclusive than the Marxist-Leninist parties of the Caribbean Left (Lewis, 1998; Hinds, 2015; Andaiye, 2020). However, this negative association with vanguardism does not explain why Rodney and the WPA aimed to build a Leninist organisation in the late 1970s rather than a mass reformist party. To address this, the thesis suggests moving beyond viewing the concept of the vanguard party solely through the lens of its Stalinist distortions. Instead, it is crucial to consider the concept within the tradition of classical Marxism. The vanguard party of the proletariat is closely associated with the practices of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, who led the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The vanguard, as described by Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács (2009, p. 26), referred to "the proletariat's most conscious element". He viewed a Leninist party as a disciplined organisation of the most militant workers to act as "an instrument of class struggle during a revolutionary period" (Lukács, 2009, p. 26). Following Lukacs, Harman argues that Lenin's conception of the party recognised that workers' consciousness did not develop uniformly; in the course of spontaneous struggle, some workers reached socialist consciousness faster than others (Harman, 1971). Organising the most advanced workers in an independent party could enable them to strategise their interventions in movements to better influence and win over their more reformist counterparts. Such a party exists to remedy the uneven and contradictory consciousness within the working class to achieve organisational coherence and

consistency when facing a centralised capitalist society where the prevailing ideas belong to the ruling class (Harman, 1971; Le Blanc, 2016; Molyneux, 2017).

The Bolshevik party contrasted with the mass socialist parties of the 1900s. Marxist scholar-activist Chris Harman (1971) explained that early 1900s socialists, like Karl Kautsky's Socialist Democratic Party in Germany, assumed that the development of workers' socialist consciousness was a smooth, inevitable process leading to a socialist revolution. This belief led to the idea that a mass political party merely had to represent the working class's consciousness to take over the state without fundamentally changing it. In contrast, the disciplined organisation of a vanguard party aimed to prepare the working class for the overthrow of the bourgeois state (Molyneux, 2017). Yet, this insistence on discipline did not mean a lack of democracy. Paul Le Blanc (2016) showed that the Bolshevik party proved itself democratic in how it decided upon a course of action. The revolutionary party adhered to the principle of democratic centralism, where decisions emerging from debates would be binding on the whole organisation, including the minority that disagreed (Le Blanc, 2016).

This thesis considers this original and positive understanding of the vanguard party as relevant to understanding Rodney's involvement in the WPA as it transformed from a pressure group into a political party between 1974-79. Chapter 7 will show that Rodney conceived the party as a vehicle to address issues of uneven consciousness among the Guyanese working class, including racial divisions. In this sense, the WPA's practice under Rodney often aligned with the political party as conceived by Lenin. It affiliated in that respect with an authentic Leninist notion of a party because it refused to conform to the Stalinist interpretation of vanguardism pushed by the PPP and PNC. For example, the WPA had a collective leadership as opposed to a maximum leader (Westmaas, 2004). However, it fell somewhere in between the Leninist, the Stalinist and the reformist organisation. Andaiye (2020, p. 45) conveyed that the WPA remained a broad church throughout its existence, as not all of its members were

Marxists, and it never succeeded in implementing a cadre party constitution. This thesis shares a similar view. Despite the aspirations of Rodney and some leaders in the late 1970s to establish the WPA as a vanguard party, the WPA ultimately left this endeavour unfinished.

The question of party-building is closely related to another major organisational issue: the WPA's and Rodney's approach to state power. The most significant controversy in the literature revolves around the debate sparked by C L R James's provocative article *Walter Rodney and the Question of Power,* which is the first political analysis of events leading to Rodney's death. James (1981) criticised the WPA and Rodney for attempting to challenge state power without the necessary conditions defined by Lenin's *Marxism and Insurrection*: (1) strong support from advanced working-class sectors, (2) a nationwide revolutionary upsurge, and (3) divisions within the enemy ranks. This debate continues to be a focal point in discussions on the WPA's strategies and their approach to revolutionary politics (Lenin, 1972; James, 1981).

Responses to James's critique have generally been disapproving (Lewis, 1998; Gibbons, 2011; Roopnaraine, 2012b; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Kelley, 2021; Zeilig, 2022). Some dismissed his analysis because he was not in Guyana, while others focused on his misunderstanding of Rodney's personality and willingness to sacrifice his privilege to lead by example. These points, whether valid or not, detract from more fundamental considerations of Rodney's and the WPA's tactics regarding state power. In contrast, Zeilig's recent criticism of James is notable because it directly addresses the central issue. He reproaches James for accusing Rodney and the WPA of not doing what they were already trying to accomplish. He quotes James's 1981 speech: "What you have to do is win over a section of the army, and you have arms. … A revolution is made with arms, but a revolution is made by the revolutionary spirit of the great mass of the population. And you have to wait for that …" (Zeilig, 2022, p. 322). Zeilig (2022) argues that the WPA acted in line with James's advice. He bases this claim

on a 2009 interview where WPA leader Rupert Roopnaraine suggests the WPA prepared for insurrection by stockpiling arms and fomenting divisions within the armed forces (see Chung, 2012).

However, Zeilig misinterprets James. When James's quote is viewed in the full context of his article, it becomes clear that his main point was not about how the WPA should accumulate weapons. Instead, he was insisting on the importance of waiting for a spontaneous mass movement to emerge, as such a movement could create divisions within the armed forces that the WPA could exploit. James chastised the WPA for failing to make a tactical retreat in the absence of such a movement. However, Roopnaraine's article *Walter Rodney and the Answer of Power*, elaborates further with a rebuttal to James's claims about the WPA's adventurism and its lack of Marxist theory. Roopnaraine (2012) attributes the failure of the civil rebellion and Rodney's death to the inability to consolidate a strong anti-dictatorial alliance and the unreliability of the workers' movement leaders, particularly with Jagan's PPP.

In Chapter 8, this thesis will intervene in the debate by positioning itself in relation to the arguments of Roopnaraine and C L R James. James's assertions have merit because they offer a reflection of the gulf that often occurs between the ambitions of revolutionaries and the mood of the masses during periods of decline in the struggle or sudden heightened activity. However, they require more substantiation and evidence. This chapter will offer some compensation in that regard through its analysis of the WPA's approach to armed struggle, based on oral testimony from WPA leaders. It also ventures into discussing unverified evidence, such as the military plan in Rodney's possessions found in the London archive (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). It will use WPA writings alongside oral testimony from the PPP to take issue with Roopnaraine's interpretation of the failed anti-dictatorial alliance, which absolves the WPA from any missteps.

This topic of seizing state power connects to the question of alliance, which is integral to the problem of organisation-building and the conquest of state power. Compared to James's article, the literature on Rodney has not raised any controversy with regard to Rodney and the WPA's approach to anti-dictatorial alliances. However, this thesis considers that the conception of a "National Patriotic Front" or "National Front", which influenced left-wing parties opposed to the Burnham PNC dictatorship, including the WPA, consisted of a Stalinist derivative of the popular front approach. The popular front was connected to the Soviet two-stage theory of revolution, which posited that a democratic revolution was necessary to raise the political maturity of the working class before progressing to socialism (Hallas, 2008; Mishler, 2018). The origins of the Popular Front policy trace back to the Communist International under Joseph Stalin (Hallas, 2008). In the 1930s, the Comintern advocated for alliances between Communist parties, social democratic parties, and the liberal bourgeoisie of France and Britain against fascism (Jenkins and Millington, 2016). This led to the formation of Popular Front governments in France and Spain between 1936 and 1938, which ultimately proved ineffective in halting the rise of fascism, as they suppressed proletarian strikes and protests (Jenkins and Millington, 2016).

The Popular Front possessed defining characteristics: first, it sought to unite the working class, reformist workers, and the bourgeoisie in a long-term electoral programme aimed at forming a bourgeois government (Hallas, 2008). Second, such alliances implied passive unity and compromise, requiring alignment with bourgeois party programmes, sacrificing ideological independence, and restricting the freedom to criticise allies. Third, it subordinated the working class's activities and programme to the interests and nationalism of the ruling class (Trotsky, 1986; Hallas, 2008). In Chapter 8, this thesis will examine the specific trajectory of the popular front policy in Guyana as an expression of socialism from-above,

highlighting how Rodney and his political allies at times diverged from their emphasis on working-class self-activity.

Conclusion

This discussion has introduced a new theoretical framework for examining the influence of Marxism on Rodney's life-geography in Africa and the Americas. By rigorously theorising the Marxist tradition, it has addressed the limitations of treating Rodney's Marxism as unorthodox. It unveiled both the similarities and differences among the socialisms Rodney encountered, particularly in terms of their class foundations, and provided a global dimension to Hal Draper's distinction between socialism from-above and socialism from-below. This chapter has demonstrated how this distinction can help rethink, expand, and open new avenues for studying Rodney's Marxism in relation to the self-emancipation of the working class, the intersections of race and class, and the question of political organisation. As such, it offers an interpretation of Rodney's engagement with the socialist tradition, enabling this thesis to trace and identify patterns of change in his politics while analysing his anti-imperialist contributions. Ultimately, it serves as a reminder to view Rodney's socialism not as static or monolithic, but as a dynamic process, constantly evolving through its own contradictions. The next chapter will discuss the methodology and methods that capture the real-life dynamism underpinning this framing of Rodney's Marxism.

Chapter 3: Towards a Marxist life-geography of Walter Rodney's praxis

Introduction

At the core of this thesis, which examines the influence of Marxism on Walter Rodney's evolution, lies the central question: how did Rodney's political thought and activism evolve through his travels across Africa and the Americas? From this overarching question flow several interconnected lines of inquiry that will be tackled in the empirical chapters of the thesis. First, this study examines what Rodney's political development reveals about the meaning of Marxism in the Global South. This endeavour includes looking at how his ideas engaged in dialogue with alternative political perspectives and movements, such as Black Power in Jamaica, African socialism in Tanzania, state-led socialism in Cuba, and the political struggles in Guyana. Second, it considers how Rodney's militant journey shaped his perspective on the relationship between Marxism, race, and class in the context of anti-imperialist struggles. Finally, the thesis addresses Rodney's contributions to organisation-building and the conquest of state power, analysing how his activism and intellectual work intersected.

This chapter justifies the methodological approach and methods employed to answer the main question and its related lines of inquiry. It proposes a new avenue for biographical writing in human geography grounded in materialist dialectics. As previously discussed, some scholars have assigned monolithic and reductive interpretations to Rodney by idealising his politics as unorthodox. This thesis, however, emphasises the dynamic character of Marxist praxis, which evolves through its interconnections and interactions with social processes. Therefore, analysing the evolution of Rodney's praxis poses the problem of structure and agency, incumbent upon biographical writing (Berghahn and Lässig, 2008; Caine, 2010). This challenge, which revolves around assessing the role of individuals in making history (and

geography), is an old one among Marxist thinkers (Plekhanov, 1940; Callinicos, 2004; Perry, 2021). Rodney's unpublished lecture notes on "Historiography of the Revolution" reveal the ideas that he grappled with between 1969 and 1972. Regarding the Bolshevik founder V. I. Lenin, whom he admired, he asked: "How far can the Russian revolution be explained in terms of its leadership and how far is its success attributable to one man, Lenin?" (Rodney, 1969d).

Rodney's notes did not give an exhaustive answer. They, however, unmistakably underline his disdain for biographies that assigned primacy to "great men" in shaping history while disregarding the social, economic, and cultural structures that shaped them (Rodney, 1969d). Rodney singled out the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle as an archetype of this "bourgeois perspective" (Rodney, 1969d; see Carlyle, 2010, 2017). Instead, he favoured Plekhanov's 1898 essay on *The Role of the Individual in History* for prioritising the social-economic factors upon which agency takes place. Rodney did not seem bothered that Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, displaced the individual from the analysis, claiming: "influential individuals can change the individual feature of events…but they cannot change their general trend" (Plekhanov, 1940, p. 48).

Such a deterministic materialist perspective often overshadowed the role of individuals in the face of economic development. It failed to recognise that individuals can decisively influence events, particularly during moments of acute crisis when the historical conflict between classes—whose objective interests pull in opposite directions—might reach a temporary equilibrium (Novack, 2002). While this thesis may diverge from Rodney's alignment with Plekhanov, it shares his ambition to transcend the "great man" narrative. It will do so by presenting a more dynamic relationship between structure and agency, using a dialectical materialist perspective supported by archival research and oral histories.

This chapter first explains the adoption of a dialectical materialist approach and how it contributes to biography in the field of geography, known as life-geographies (Daniels and

Nash, 2004). Secondly, it presents an overview of the extensive archival research supporting my reconstruction of Rodney's life-geography, utilising sources from the US, UK, Guyana, and Tanzania. My approach combined insights from the transnational turn in archival studies with a materialist orientation rooted in Marxist epistemology. From this, I build a case for viewing archives as sources rather than subjects (Stoler, 2002, 2009). This perspective is necessary because Rodney's dispersed archives require a connective approach to overcome challenges in finding evidence to uncover his past. Thirdly, this chapter justifies the 32 semi-structured interviews I conducted alongside my archival research. It discusses my process of approaching participants, demonstrating how their oral histories reflect my biographical methodology, which strives to humanise the objective social forces impacting individuals.

Why a dialectical materialist approach?

Dialectical materialism serves as the theoretical foundation of Marxism, representing the fusion of the dialectical method and materialist epistemology. Dialectics is a method of reasoning aimed at reflecting and understanding how change occurs in the social and natural world. It owes its existence to the recognition that observation alone is never sufficient to understand a world that presents itself as an incoherent mass of fragments. Society compartmentalises individual experience and knowledge through various means, including the division of labour, the disciplinary education system, and the mass media, among other things (Lukács, 2000; Rees, 2005). Dialectics challenge the notion that knowledge derives solely from human senses, criticising empiricism and positivism for accepting the facts of a situation at face value (Rees, 2005). Marx emphasised that dialectical reasoning involves distinguishing a thing's surface appearance from its underlying essence. He wrote:

> As in private life, one differentiates between what a man thinks and says of himself and what he really is and does, so in historical struggles one must still more distinguish the language and the imaginary aspirations of parties from their real organism and their real interests, their conception of themselves from their reality (Marx and Engels, 2010a, p128).

The reality of a thing lies in its nature as an interconnected totality: a system of processes in constant motion, sustained by its internal contradictions (Sheehan, 2017). For example, the British Labour Party views itself as a party "for the working people", though it is fundamentally a pro-capitalist party with working-class membership. As contradictory totality, it unites two classes with opposite objective interests—the capitalists who own the means of production and the proletariat, who are deprived of ownership and are forced to sell their labour-power to the capitalist in exchange for wages. Labour's internal contradictions result from the historical processes that produced the party, such as the growing importance of the welfare state to fractions of the bourgeoisie, which converged with the workers' rising demands for reforms (Royle, 2014).

Dialectics represent an alternative to the pitfalls of "Cartesian reductionism" that geographer David Harvey identified in *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Harvey, 1996). Cartesian logic stipulates that studying an object requires breaking it into its component parts and examining them in isolation from the whole. It supposes that the parts are fixed and independent properties of the object. By contrast, dialectic thinking, as Harvey argues, encourages thinking in terms of processes that produce transient objects (Harvey, 1996). Harvey alludes to the first premise of the dialectical method, that every phenomenon changes under the weight of its internal contradictions (Rees, 2005; Sheehan, 2017). The Marxist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya summarised the dialectic as "development through contradiction" (Dunayevskaya, 2000, p. 54). Her summary remains incomplete without the second premise of the method: a thing exists and becomes comprehensible only through its interdependent relationship with other entities, as interconnected parts of a totality (Sheehan, 2017).

Dialectics are associated with works of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the 19th century. Inspired by the French Revolution, Hegel developed a

dialectical account of history as a process in which the rational structure of history (*Geist*) reveals itself to human consciousness (Hegel, 2017). Where most philosophers saw history as a chaotic series of accidents, Hegel was the first to perceive it as containing a pattern of development.

He saw the conflicts between emerging ideas within the "spirit of the age" as the driving force of human history, propelling it from one state to another. These contradictions in the realm of thought resolved themselves in a greater synthesis, moving closer towards the self-realisation of *Absolute Geist*—an impersonal God that is both eternal and the "actual living soul" on earth (Engels, 1969). The Hegelian system nonetheless had a central flaw—its idealism. It perceived dialectical processes of history only as reflections of the self-development of mind. Thus, reality derived from thought.

Marx and Engels opposed Hegel's idealism in conceiving ideas and consciousness as deriving from the material world, as Engels explained:

> We again took a materialistic view of the thoughts in our heads, regarding them as real things instead of regarding real things as images of this or that stage of the absolute concept…. Thereby the dialectic of concepts itself became merely the conscious reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world and thus the dialectic of Hegel was turned over (Engels, 1969, pp. 38–39).

The above quote touches upon the epistemological and ontological foundation of dialectical materialism. It is a materialist (or realist) philosophy through its insistence on the primacy of matter over mind and its denial of separations between them (Molyneux, 2012). Although the objective world exists outside of the human mind, human consciousness can achieve an understanding of the external social and natural world.

These features transpired through Marx's application of materialist dialectic to history (also known as historical materialism). Marx proposed understanding the past from how humans cooperate to produce a living out of nature and satisfy their needs. It is from that

material basis that Marx sought to explain the whole web of social relations and various conflicting ideas that arose from it (Molyneux, 2012). In the preface to the critique, Marx wrote:

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which rises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite form of social consciousness (Marx and Engels, 2010b, p. 124).

The productive forces refer to the labour process in which human labour power, combined with tools, technologies, and raw materials (collectively known as the means of production), is socially organised and employed to create wealth (Marx, 1992; Callinicos, 2004, 2011). At a certain stage of development, the productive forces come into conflict with the existing ownership relations, which determine the form of exploitation. This conflict drives the dynamism of history and finds its most profound manifestation in the struggle between contending classes, such as workers and the bourgeoisie, under capitalism. Marx's discovery was that the driving force of history is not the contradiction between ideas, but rather that such superstructural factors are ultimately shaped by the conflict between material and social forces (Molyneux, 2012).

The ontology of the dialect made it more than a method of reasoning. A person's mind could strive to accurately reflect reality through dialectical thinking as the social and natural world functioned dialectically (Sheehan, 2017). Geographer Henri Lefebvre supported this perspective, noting that "the laws of human reality cannot be entirely different from the laws of nature" (Lefebvre, 2009, p. 95; Garrido, 2024). That human consciousness emerged out of nature made this connection feasible. The dialectical processes could manifest themselves within the human mind, thereby evolving into a totalising conception of the material world (Lefebvre, 2009; Sheehan, 2017). Yet, the transition from natural to human dialectics implies a pivotal distinction between both realms. Leaving aside that humans interfere with nature, its

processes unfold mechanically, whereas history develops through the conscious intervention of humans. Engels remarked, “In the history of society, the actors are all endowed with consciousness, are men acting with deliberation or passion, working towards definite goals” (Engels, 1969, p. 43).

Dialectical materialism and life-geographies

Having defined dialectical materialism, I now examine its application to life-geographies to understand Rodney’s political development through time and space. Over the past two decades, human geography has developed a framework for appraising an individual’s activities and consciousness (Daniels and Nash, 2004; Baigent, 2024). Nash and Daniels (2004) defined “life-geographies” as an approach departing from classical biography, which gives paramountcy to the ideas and actions of great men in shaping history. Life-geographies instead investigate how the formation of a person’s agency, consciousness, and identity relate to the networks that they build, “the places in which they dwell, and the spaces through which they move” (Lester, 2012, p. 1470). Using archives, interviews, and photographs, among empirical materials to account for the spatiality of an individual’s life, life-geographers situate their subjects within their wider global context (McGeachan, 2018). They have, consequently, a concern for uncovering the voices of the marginalised, telling the “small stories” of ordinary people and showing how these stories illuminate perspectives on broader transnational histories and geographies (Ogborn, 2008; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012; McGeachan, 2018; Johnson, 2023).

Dialectical materialism aligns with endeavours to overcome the “great men” approach of biography and historical geography (Harvey, 2000; Das, 2017). Rather than solely focusing on how spaces and networks shape lives, it incorporates these factors into a comprehensive formulation of the interplay between agency and structure. Geographer David Harvey (2000) exemplifies this understanding through his concept of the insurgent architect, illustrating how

individuals can act as agents of change within impersonal geographical and historical contexts. He writes, "We [insurgent architects] can always aspire to make our own historical-geography but never under historical-geographical conditions of our own choosing….The leap from the present into some future is always constrained*"* (Harvey, 2000, p. 254). Harvey's statement provides a geographical dimension to Marx's dictum: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves" (Marx and Engels, 2010a, p. 103). It underscores Marxism's view of individuals as products of definite historical conditions—encompassing their family, community, class relations and productive forces—located within regional and international spaces and connected to others.

It is important to add a caveat to this perspective, as historical and geographical circumstances not only limit individuals but also empower them. For instance, Rodney's Black Power activism in Jamaica in 1968 gained international significance because it was propelled by Jamaica's profound social crisis, occurring in tandem with other global revolts of that year (Lewis, 1994; see Chapter 4). Dialectical materialism also recognises that individuals, especially within movements, can exert influence and bring about changes to these historical-geographical conditions (Novack, 2002).

Life-geographies seldomly use dialectical materialism, rather they often employ a postmodernist lens (McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012). Social scientists have not achieved a consensus on the meaning of postmodernism beyond that it announces the succession of modernity (Perry, 2021). Postmodernism announces a present characterised by cultural trends and discourses engulfing the arts and humanities. In academia, these trends broadly amount to an appreciation of the representational, the uncertain, the elusive, the relative, the contingent and the fragmentary (Perry, 2021). The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard identified what unites all postmodern sympathisers when he defined postmodernism as "an incredulity

towards meta-narratives" (Lyotard, quoted in Malpas, 2003, p. 16). However, this scepticism towards totalising explanations that strive toward an objective understanding of the world—Enlightenment, positivism, and Marxism—creates impasses for biographical writing.

The first impasse is that many life-geographers have embraced the idea that the biographer's subject is bound to remain uncertain, forever escaping his or her grasp of understanding (McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012; McGeachan, 2018). Many postmodern life-geographers and historians disconnect the past from history—the past reality of someone's life might exist independently of our mind but the researcher can never know it because any historical reconstruction is only subjective discourse (see Rees, 2005). Some life-geographers conceive evidence—archival documents, oral testimony, and artifacts—only as representations or traces of a past that are never enough to write a full biography. Writing on family stories in Perth during the 1800s, geographer Terry-Ann White (2003, p. 520) shared her scepticism towards evidence when she writes about the shards she collected: "I don't know how authentic they are, does it even matter? For me, it doesn't matter. I am making anew, building something from the remains".

The idea of "making anew" suggests an alignment with Hayden White's narrativism fiction (White, 1973). Narrativism posits that historical writing consists of a non-neutral act of poetry, where historians unconsciously adopt modes of emplottment—romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire—to construct accounts of the past that are not determined by evidence. White championed the idea that histories should abandon the pursuit of a scientific reconstruction of the past, advocating instead for historical narratives that consciously embrace poetry and fiction (White, 1973). However, the danger of blurring the lines of historical-geographical research and fiction is that of moral relativism, whereby all interpretations of the subject become valid (Callinicos, 1995).

Marx's method, which belongs to the epistemological realm of materialism, safeguards against the relativist pitfall of seeing all interpretations of someone's life as equally valid. Materialism acknowledges that although past lives exist independently of the research mind, the biographer can strive to know and understand it through the collection and analysis of evidence. The biographer's material evidence serves as a real point of reference that connects human thought to the objective past rather than a representation of it (Molyneux, 1985; Callinicos, 1995, p. 200; Rees, 2005). Matt Perry (2021) pertinently explains that recognising the importance of evidence in research does not mean that researchers must abandon scepticism about evidence and hide behind the curtain of impartiality. Scepticism enables disciplines to advance unless it is used to undermine all the foundations of scientific knowledge. Given this, I aim to arrive at a closer approximation of Rodney's thoughts and lived realities by analysing and connecting evidence while provisionally confirming "research findings independently through agreed procedures (hence archives and footnotes)", as Perry (2021, p. 141) wrote.

The second impasse postmodern life-geographies cannot overcome is the idealism of classical biography. Life-geographies are often less about analysing the individual than describing their unique and multiple characteristics because the biographer assumes their subject is bound to uncertainty and partiality. In his biographical sketch of Charles Darwin, geographer David Livingstone (2003) showed how the different spaces in Darwin's life produced different Darwins: "Darwin the experimenter, Darwin the traveller, Darwin the invalid, Darwin the investor, Darwin the dupe of quack medicine" (Livingstone, 2003, p. 183, 2014). Taking a different approach, geographer Nicola Thomas (2004) also observed multiple facets of her subject, Lady Curzon, by placing her family and friendship networks across Britain and the empire. She intended to overcome the limits of classical biography, which essentialises the individual by revering the uniqueness of their personality rather than accounting for the wider social context that moulded them (Thomas, 2004). However, Thomas

and Livingstone only create their own essentialism by accepting that the "many Curzons" or the "many Darwins" are intrinsic qualities of their biographical subject.

Dialectical materialism, however, can overcome the idealistic essentialism of traditional biography. It does so by viewing the subject's identity in motion, continuously changing over time and space and reflecting processes in the material world (Marx and Engels, 1990; Rees, 2005). It looks at how the manifold aspects of an individual life interact with each other over time to form a coherent whole that makes up a person's identity. The dialectical materialist strives to analyse the individual by going beyond absolute uniqueness to uncover the hidden elements one shares with others—family, community, class, and more. Trotsky (2005) argued that individuals are unique because of the peculiar ways certain proportions of material, cultural, and social elements blend within them to express their individuality. It is "only through the common that the unique can be known", as he succinctly wrote (Trotsky, 2005, p. 34). Trotsky observation shows how biographers can find a balance between agency and structure by linking the personal to the impersonal historical forces. Applying dialectical materialism imposes on this thesis not to present Rodney's life-geography as a list of different identities and experiences but as a living reality produced by definite historical-geographical conditions and responding to them.

On the usage of dialectics

It has been noted that Engels borrowed from Hegel three laws of dialectics representing the dominant patterns in the natural and social world (Molyneux, 2012; Sheehan, 2017). The first law of the unity of opposites designates that change occurs in every phenomenon not linearly but through contradictions. The unity of the conflicting forces in a phenomenon is always a temporary occurrence because the opposite force subjects it to continuous change. The second dialectical principle of transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa flows logically from the previous unity of opposites. It acknowledges that every qualitative leap, or

transition, involves an accumulation of gradual or quantitative changes within an existing state. Finally, the negation of the negation expresses how a synthesis emerges out of the contradictory developments. This synthesis might retain some of the old aspect of the past, but it is never reduced to them as it represents a separate stage of development (Molyneux, 2012; Sheehan, 2017).

Kangal (2020) and Sheehan (2017) have observed that there has been a problematic tendency among Marxists to reify the three laws of dialectics that Engels borrowed from Hegel. More importantly, any reification of the laws may result in academic formalism imposing these laws on historical evidence rather than deducing them through meticulous research (Kangal, 2020). Trotsky warned in 1927:

> Dialectics cannot be imposed on the facts; it has to be deduced from facts, from their nature and development. Only painstaking work on a vast amount of material enabled Marx to advance the dialectical system of economics to the conception of value as social labour (Trotsky, 1998, p. 233).

One insight from Trotsky is that dialectical laws are not a substitute for empirical research such as interviewing and archival study. Instead, they provide a means to guide the analysis of empirical evidence. This life-geography uses dialectical materialism in various ways to account for Rodney's role as an individual in the making of history and geography. It thereby seeks to offer a balanced interaction between agency and structure, which in dialectical terms refers to the interconnection of parts and the whole.

In Chapter 4, I employ Harvey's concepts of the insurgent architect and dialectical utopianism to understand the development and significance of Rodney's Black Power activism (Harvey, 2000). The notion of the insurgent architect effectively captures the interconnection and tension between agency and structure by situating individual agency within the historical-geographical processes that delimit it. Accordingly, I examine Rodney's insurgent architecture by presenting his Black Power activism among the Jamaican people as a link in a chain of

transnational revolts in 1968 and as a product of the development and crisis of Jamaican society. The concept of dialectical utopianism allows the chapter to hone in on how the events of 1968 shaped Rodney's consciousness and motivations while he resettled in Cuba. It suggests that insurgent architects envision a better world based on a pragmatic understanding of the potential for societal transformation from-below within society. I use this to demonstrate how Rodney envisioned a Black Power revolution in Jamaica and the U.S., one that accounted for the class contradictions present in those societies.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the shifts in Rodney's Marxism in relation to the changing dynamics of the Tanzanian revolution in the 1970s. This trajectory aligns with the dialectical law of transformation from quantity to quality, as discussed earlier (Trotsky, 1998; Molyneux, 2012; Sheehan, 2017). In Chapter 5, I illuminate the tense relationship that developed between Rodney and the Tanzanian one-party state as he adopted a non-conformist stance towards the state's African Socialist experiment. These tensions grew, reflecting a gradual transformation in Rodney's Marxist consciousness. In Chapter 6, I underscore the significance of geography by showing, through Rodney's travels, that these tensions reached a boiling point, leading to a shift in aspects of Rodney's Marxism—from support for state-led socialism to an embrace of working-class struggle. However, it is important to note that Rodney's transformation was not absolute, as he retained some affinity with state-led socialism.

Chapter 7 takes up David Harvey's insistence on breaking with Cartesian reductionism to think in terms of process and interrelations to understand Rodney's transformation into a full-time organiser of the working people (Harvey, 1996). I explore the interconnection of various social processes that determined Rodney's Marxist praxis in Guyana. The first process I explain is the contradictory development of the racialised class struggle in Guyanese society before 1974. The second process, intersecting with the first, involves Rodney's leap out of Black Power after the Sixth Pan-African Congress in June 1974. This shift prepared him to

offer a materialist analysis of race and class, demonstrating his grasp of the dialectic in Guyanese history. The third process articulates Rodney's conscious intervention in Guyanese history as a WPA activist as it transitioned away from being a pressure group to better shape the class struggle in the late 1970s. It demonstrates how his theoretical insights on anti-racism translated into his practical recognition of the revolutionary party as the necessary form of organisation to unite workers against Burnham's dictatorship.

Chapter 8 deciphers Rodney's and the WPA's problematic approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial efforts by distinguishing the WPA's portrayal of its activities, as reflected in the testimonies of its leaders and documents, from their historical reality (Marx and Engels, 2010a). To establish that interconnection, this chapter seeks to connect pieces of fragmented evidence and apply the insights gained from them to uncover a fuller picture of the WPA's activism.

Archival research, materialism and the transnational turn

This thesis employs extensive archival research to support my dialectical materialist account of Rodney's life-geography. Influenced by the transnational turn in archival research, my fieldwork adopts strategies for locating and connecting Rodney's dispersed records, addressing geographical and institutional gaps to construct a comprehensive narrative of his life and influence (Stoler, 2009; Putnam, 2016; Hendrickson, 2017, 2022; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). This approach aligns with the thesis's aim to elucidate Rodney's Marxist political thought and activism, understanding them as developments through contradictions connected to changing historical-geographical contexts. It underlines the interconnection and totality of events in Rodney's past across various geographical scales—local, regional, and global. However, some of the transnational turn's insistence on focusing on the condition of production of the archive required a reconciliation with my Marxist epistemology. I begin by

defining the transnational turn in archival research, its theoretical strong points, and its weakness in relation to dialectical materialism. Then, I show how I adapted strategies from the turn when conducting and reflecting upon my own archival research.

This attention to the international archives reflects a broader transnational shift in historical studies, which appreciates the cross-connections and movement of people, ideas, cultures beyond nation-states. Historical geographers alike have positioned themselves at the forefront of this transnational approach, which foregrounds the motion of history through space as much as through time. Geographers Hodder, Heffernan, and Legg (2021, p. 2) contend that a transnational turn "calls not simply for a 'scaling-up' of the frame of analysis but a broader connective approach which is sensitive to multiple spatial and scalar lenses, and which traverse the histories of institutions, social groups and cultural practices". They focus on how an international archive, such as UNESCO, reveals examples of internationalism that link imperial and pan-national pasts. They consequently frame the site as a "scattered archipelago which includes better known and surveyed archival 'islands' alongside many smaller, previously unexplored collections" (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021, p. 1). Their connective approach entails a vigorous probing into the origins, location, and conditions of the archives to uncover perspectives that have become universalised or marginalised (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021).

The concept of the scattered archipelago aptly applies to the entirety of the Walter Rodney archives, which still remain dispersed among personal collections, university archives, and national repositories across different parts of the globe. Furthermore, proponents of the transnational approach emphasise the crucial importance of fostering dialogues between scattered archival sites to address the silences within them, outlining strategic methods to achieve this aim (Putnam, 2016; Hendrickson, 2017; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). For example, Hendrickson (2017) highlights the significance of personal archives and oral histories

in constructing a global history of 1968. By connecting events in France to student protests in Tunis and Senegal, this approach navigates the silences present in French national archives, which are often shaped by nationalist or imperialist agendas. Hendrickson (2017, p. 321) advocates for the creation of a "transnational and postimperial archive", liberating the narrative of May 1968 from its Eurocentric constraints and contributing to a broader understanding of decolonisation.

Meanwhile, Putnam (2016) draws attention to the fact that the transnational turn in archive research is simultaneously a digital one, which facilitates access to assemblages of online sources and information. Researchers increasingly rely on keyword searches from their desks to connect people and places within the archive, rather than on archivists, finding aids, or the expensive and time-consuming task of travelling to archival sites (Putnam, 2016). Partisans of the transnational and digital turn have nevertheless raised the concern that the international dimension of archival records risks being subsumed into national or imperial histories or becoming buried in family papers or websites, which they see as more insular or parochial (Stoler, 2009; Putnam, 2016; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). David Scott, however, offers a solution to this problem from his experience in the Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers Project at the University of California, Los Angeles:

> I gradually came to realise that embedded in the seemingly quotidian construction of this archive of the mass movement founded and led by Marcus Garvey…there was an activity of thinking and imagination that opened out vast possibilities not just of memory but of counter-memory: the moral idiom and semiotic registers of remembering against the grain of the history of New World black deracination, subjection, and exclusion (Scott, 2008, p. vi).

In these archives on Garvey and his black nationalist organisation, Scott (2008) sees avenues for building a creative counter-memory. That discovery challenges and offers alternatives to the dominant historical narratives about the experiences of black people in the New World. Scott (2008) insists that to understand archival documents, researchers must do

more than explore the text; they must understand the structure and essence of the archive. For Scott, the archive can stimulate thinking "against the grain" because it is more than a passive repository. He understands archives as "a generative discursive system that governs and regulates the production and appearance of statements—what can and cannot be said" (Scott, 2008, p. vii).

Scott's view aligns with Achille Mbembe's (2002) claim that the architecture of the archive imposes both meaning and power on its sources. This perspective resonates with the new orientation advocated by proponents of the transnational turn, exemplified by Ann Stoler's (2002, p. 87) call for scholars to shift "from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject". This shift denotes a desire to fundamentally alter the very purpose of historical inquiry. The objective is no longer about how accurately historians and geographers can represent the past using the archive but about examining the nature and role of the archives themselves. Transnational historians conceive colonial archives as a system of knowledge production steeped in power relations that sustain the exercise of colonial practices and the consolidation of state authority (Stoler, 2009; Hendrickson, 2017; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). They are more focused on the fragmented multiplicity of irrational discourses governing the archive's constitution than the broader historical context of unequal social relations and class struggle that underlies its creation. Transnational historian Antoinette Burton (2005, p. 20) claims histories: "embed as many secrets and distortions as archives themselves; their telling encodes selective disclosures, half-truths, and partial pasts". She furthermore dismisses "the fantasy that history is or can be a delivery system for absolute truth" (Burton, 2005, p. 20).

Materialism and truth: exploiting archive as subject for archives as sources

Before addressing the pitfalls of the transnational turn, it is important to note that both the transnational turn and dialectical approaches share a common interest in how capitalist society mystifies and dislocates the truth through practices such as archiving. Probing into the

conditions and arrangements of archival collections is relevant for this reason. However, the two philosophies diverge in their epistemological standpoints and goals. Many partisans of the transnational turn, like postmodern life-geographers, too often emphasise the partial and subjective character of all interpretations and scientific evidence. They tend to justify abandoning attempts to understand the past through observation on the fragmented nature of the archival. They overlook the truthfulness of historical content, reducing historical writing to act of representation and abstractions (Mbembe, 2002; Burton, 2005; Stoler, 2009; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012; Hodder, 2017; Dhúill, 2020). By contrast, dialectical materialism identifies science as a search for the truth, which exists independently of mind, as mentioned earlier (Harvey, 1996; Callinicos, 2004; Rees, 2005; Lefebvre, 2009; Molyneux, 2012; Das, 2017).

Marx's method therefore subscribes to the correspondence theory of truth, which stipulates that a statement is true insofar as it accurately represents the past and present of the real world (Blackledge, 2006). For example, scholarly disagreements over historical interpretation are resolvable because statements that are held true can be refuted by evidence. Karl Popper spoke of idea truth as regulative idea in the recognition of an objective relationship existing between archival documents and the independent material world. He writes:

> It is only the idea of truth which allows us to speak sensibly of mistakes and of rational criticism, and which makes rational discussion possible – that is to say, critical discussion in search of mistakes with the serious purpose of eliminating as many of these mistakes as we can, in order to get nearer to the truth. Thus, the very idea of error – and of fallibility – involves the idea of an objective truth as the standard of which we may fall short. (It is in this sense that the idea of truth is a *regulative* idea.) (Popper, 2014, p. 314).

In this passage, Popper (2014) invokes an idea that is present within many Marxist thinkers, that the scientific truth is discoverable through a series of approximations that test the limits of knowledge, not in an accumulation of absolute truth. For instance, Lenin notes in his philosophical notebook that "cognition is the eternal, endless approximation of thought to the

object" before adding that "human knowledge is not…a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral" (Lenin, 1964, p. 54). Lenin's point is that the iterative process of scientific discovery shows how human thought must seek to dynamically reflect the ever-changing natural and social world, progressing through constant contradictions and their resolutions.

Imre Lakatos presents a sophisticated case for determining how scientific theories can be measured by their abilities to approximate the truth. He argues that an objective criterion for distinguishing science from pseudoscience must consider two properties of research programmes: their problem-solving mechanisms (heuristics) and, more crucially, their ability to predict novel facts (Lakatos, 1978). Lakatos developed this argument against Popper's view that a theory is scientific if its hypotheses can be falsified through observation or experiment. Focusing solely on hypotheses overlooks the tenacity of theories when faced with contradictory facts (Lakatos, 1978). In such cases, scientists might adjust the hypothesis, accept the anomalies, or ignore them altogether. Lakatos (1978) replaces the hypothesis with the more expansive unit of the research programme, which includes "hard core" laws protected by supplementary hypotheses and heuristics for methodically dealing with new evidence. In truly scientific research programmes, theories evolve to predict unknown facts, whereas in pseudo-scientific ones, theories make systematically falsified predication or are adjusted to fit already known facts (Lakatos, 1978).

This thesis strives to approximate a more accurate understanding of the influence of Marxism on Rodney's political development in line with the above understanding of the existence of an objective truth. It does so by considering the archive-as-source. Yet this consideration is not a barrier to recognising that fragmentation, partiality, and constructed natures present challenges that need to be addressed. Even if it is admitted that the archive serves as a referent to the past, it must be acknowledged that historical geographers require

creative techniques to overcome issues related to the nature and condition of the archives, which seldom connect the researcher to the past in a straightforward manner. The task, therefore, is to realign the transnational turn in a materialist direction. In other words, insights from those who examine the archives-as-subject should support my consideration of the archives-as-sources, which aim to account for Rodney's life and work across three continents. In the next section, I list several ways in which this realignment has been achieved in my archival practice.

Practicing the archive: insight from Rodney's transnational archives

From October 2022 to August 2023, I visited a range of archival sites regarding Rodney's life and work in the United States, the United Kingdom, Tanzania, and Guyana. I spent seven weeks at the Walter Rodney Papers and Collection at the Woodruff Library, part of Atlanta Clark University in the United States during the autumn of 2022. This archive, managed by the family-run Walter Rodney Foundation, is the principal repository for the study of Walter Rodney's life and work from 1960 to 1980. The collection consists of 32 container boxes, housing a range of Rodney's correspondence, his CV, employment offers, teaching materials, notes, photographs, drafts of his published and unpublished writings, and pamphlets. It also includes documents related to the movements and organisations he was involved with, most notably the WPA in Guyana (Boukari-Yabara, 2010a). Additionally, the archive contains digitised recordings of many of his speeches, though some recordings available on YouTube have not yet been incorporated into the collection.

Before and after my travels to Atlanta, I consulted the Huntley Collection at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). Jessica and Eric Huntley were Afro-Guyanese community activists in London who established Britain's first black bookshop and the publishing house Bogle-L'Ouverture. Their publishing activities began with the publication of Walter Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brothers* in 1969. In addition to the manuscripts of this work, the

archives contain correspondence and newspaper articles related to Rodney's activism in Guyana in the late 1970s. The Huntleys were actively involved in the Committee Against Repression in Guyana (CARIG), which opposed the Burnham regime and supported Rodney's WPA. The collection includes a range of flyers, brochures, and pamphlets from the WPA Support Group in London, illustrating the international support Rodney's organisation received.

The strategies, challenges, and opportunities

The geographical separation between the Atlanta Archives and the smaller Huntley Collection in London confirms that Rodney's personal papers still form a "scattered archipelago" (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021, p. 1). Embracing the transnational turn, I aimed to create a dialogue between these archives, using one to fill the gaps and silences of the other. I found the dispersal of archives presents a tension, concealing both challenges and significant opportunities to unlock new perspectives on the subject.

Researching the Walter Rodney Papers in Atlanta Woodruff Library presented challenges, given the Rodney family's cautious curation to protect his image and legacy. Notable gaps included a scarcity of personal correspondence revealing his emotional depth and limited material on his activism in Guyana in the 1970s. Restrictions and costs of photographing and photocopying most documents added to these difficulties. Unsurprisingly, there is no information relating to the WPA's approach to armed struggle in the family-run archive.

Historically, the Rodney Foundation has taken steps to distance itself from certain narratives, such as issuing a disclaimer against Clairmont Chung's 2010 documentary *W.A.R. Stories,* where WPA leaders spoke about their involvement in armed resistance against Burnham's dictatorship (*W.A.R. Stories*, 2010; Chung, 2012). This approach appeared to be driven by a concern that such revelations could have potentially disrupted the campaign for

justice, which led to the establishment of the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry (WARCOI) into his assassination in 2014 (WARCOI, 2016). However, more than a decade later, recent biographies of Rodney, reviewed by Patricia Rodney, have openly mentioned the WPA's involvement in armed struggle without eliciting any adverse reactions (Chukwudinma, 2022; Zeilig, 2022). This shift might be influenced by significant strides made in the quest for justice for Walter Rodney, particularly the 2016 Commission's Report, which implicated the Guyanese government, including its military and police forces, in Rodney's assassination (WARCOI, 2016). As I pursue my own research ambitions, which aim to uncover the more controversial aspects of Rodney's activism, I am aware that this could sometimes diverge from the Rodney family's efforts to preserve his legacy. Recognising this, I have not engaged in discussions with the Rodney family regarding this matter.

Nevertheless, I sought to overcome the silences in the Atlanta Archives by looking into the Huntley Collections at the LMA in London. This archive contained items that would have not seen the light of day in the family-run archive, including a previously undiscussed military plan found in Rodney's possession for the toppling of the Burnham government, underscoring the value of dispersed archival resources (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). By creating a dialogue between these two archival sites and reporting advancements in the campaign for Walter Rodney's justice, I uncovered more information on one of the more obscure aspects of Rodney's life. This approach allowed me to fill in the gaps left by each archive, creating a more comprehensive understanding of Rodney's life-geography.

Following Hendrickson's insistence on spotlighting personal archives as a means to unlock silenced voices from imperial, national, or official repositories, I adopted a strategy that proved invaluable for this thesis (Hendrickson, 2017). Unable to access the National Archives in Guyana due to ongoing construction, I turned to archives of Guyanese activists I knew or contacted. Nigel Westmaas, a former WPA leader and the organisation's unofficial archivist,

shared with me copies of the WPA newssheet, *Dayclean*, from 1978-80 (Westmaas, 2022). These copies proved to be more extensive than any listed in the official collections. In addition, I consulted documents on the struggle in Guyana in the late 1970s at the home of Anne Braithwaite, a member of the WPA support group, who hosted Walter Rodney several times at her home in Balham, London.

Moreover, my efforts to build a chronology of Rodney's last years in Guyana were supported by the *Catholic Standard* newspaper, headquartered in Georgetown, Guyana. One morning, I rang the doorbell of this religious publication, which had shifted to a left-wing stance under the leadership of Father Morrison in the second half of the 1970s (*Catholic Standard*, 2022). To my delight, I discovered it possessed a wealth of detailed information on pro-democracy meetings, rallies, and state repression. This approach, using personal and informal archives, uncovered a more complete account of class struggle in Guyana outside of the WPA's perspective and the secondary literature.

Beyond personal archives, I developed strategies for managing larger collections. David Scott's (2008) concept of the counter-memory of black history, which encourages "remembering against the grain", is particularly useful for analysing how Walter Rodney's international history has been absorbed by digital archives, specifically those of the U.S. State Department. These archives consist of declassified and released electronic telegrams exchanged by the Department of State, U.S. diplomatic and consular posts overseas, as well as U.S. missions (USNA, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Released Telegrams). In these records, I found reports and quotes from Rodney's meetings with the American Ambassador of Guyana between 1979 and 1980 (American Embassy Georgetown 1979d, 1980a, 1980c). Inspired by Michael West's work on Walter Rodney's surveillance by the Special Branch of the Jamaican Security Services in 1968, I explored U.S. official documents revealing the Jamaican state's paranoia towards Rodney

(*Internal Security Review*, 1968a, 1968b, 1968c; West, 2005, 2008). Activating a counter-memory involves challenging the negative American portrayal of Rodney's thoughts, activities, and interests, which often seeks to justify their actions (Scott, 2008, 2014). It equally meant never losing sight of the reality of American imperial domination over the Caribbean, as evidenced by their suspicions and open disdain towards Rodney and the WPA, similar to their attitude towards any genuine left-wing organisation.

Whenever necessary, I triangulated these sometimes dubious and exaggerated intelligence reports with eyewitness accounts from literature and other documents found in the Atlanta Archives (Scott, 2008, 2014). This approach offered a fresh perspective on Rodney's actions, moving beyond the narrative shaped by his adversaries, highlighting the crucial role of counter-memory in historical analysis. More crucially, counter-memory requires thinking about the significance of these meetings from Rodney's perspective, in relation to other documents from the archives such as correspondence and the WPA's *Dayclean* newssheet (Stoler, 2009; Hendrickson, 2017; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). It became clear that Rodney and the WPA were concerned about how the Americans would react in the event of the Burnham government's downfall in Guyana (American Embassy Georgetown 1979d, 1980a, 1980c).

Imperial paradoxes of transnational archives

A connective approach to the archives can have uncomfortable results. From February to April 2023, I researched the East Africana Collection at the University of Dar es Salaam, which houses the Tanzanian newspapers *The Nationalist* and *The Standard*, and student magazines *Cheche* and *Maji Maji*, to which Rodney contributed. In the 1970s, this rich collection attracted many international researchers, but funding cuts driven by Western neoliberal austerity have since degraded its content, security, and cataloguing (Hirji, 2019; Melchiorre, 2020; Shivji, 2023a). To my dismay, someone had cut-out Rodney's articles from

the newspapers. While my reading on transnational archives often problematised the silencing of subaltern voices in colonial or imperial archives, I found that Rodney had also disappeared from Tanzanian archives (Hendrickson, 2017; Hodder, Heffernan and Legg, 2021). Aware of the unevenness in knowledge production shaped by historical oppressive relationships rooted in colonialism, I reluctantly turned to an imperial archive: the British Library (Burton, 2007). All Tanzanian newspapers were available there, digitally accessible through microfilms (Tanzanian Newspapers, British Library). After weeks of challenging fieldwork in Tanzania, involving dusty manuscripts and unhelpful receptionists, I completed my fieldwork just 45 minutes from my home in London.

This decision aligned with my research findings but troubled my conscience, revealing the imperialist realities of archive production (Burton, 2007; Hendrickson, 2017). The accessibility of Tanzania's archive on Rodney solely through its former coloniser underscores my uneasy confrontation with an absurd yet logical situation. Burton's (2007, p. 292) insight resonates here: "Laying bare the condition of production allows us to better grasp the logics of archival spaces, alongside their irrationalities...foreseeing certain absences and the unexpected presences that often emerge". What, then, is the purpose of appreciating the logics and absurdities of archival sites? I believe it lies in seeking the objective truth. This strategic discussion so far has highlighted my willingness to face these uncomfortable conditions of the international archive to produce more truthful research on Rodney's life of praxis that will inspire my readers to challenge the pervasive inequalities of exploitation and knowledge production in our society.

On data analysis

Organising and analysing the data from my archival research and interviews requires me to elaborate on data analysis techniques to ensure connections and the verifiability of my findings. I drew inspiration from Maxwell and Miller's distinction between similarity and

continuity as two distinct modes of qualitative data analysis (Maxwell and Miller, 2010, see Maxwell, 2013). Similarity refers to an analytical approach that aims to identify resemblances and common features within the data, often through categorisation and comparison (Maxwell and Miller, 2010). Long before I read Maxwell and Miller on similarity, I had managed this by transcribing and categorising my interviews in NVivo 12. I also coded my archival documents and interview notes in Obsidian, which enabled the creation of backlinks and clusters to map information. However, an issue arose — my information had become too fragmented and isolated from its relationship with other data.

As a result, I shifted my thinking towards contiguity-based relations, which, unlike similarity, involve juxtaposition in time and space, the influence of one thing upon another, or relations among parts of a text; their identification involves perceiving actual connections between things (Maxwell and Miller, 2010). This approach aligned quite well with my dialectical materialist approach, which emphasises the interconnectivity of things existing within larger totalities (Molyneux, 2012; Sheehan, 2017). I opted to write small case studies of events, sometimes in the form of blog posts, and to analyse particular documents at length in order to connect statements, facts, and documents into a larger, coherent whole.

Oral history for Rodney's life-geography: beyond a history from-below

This thesis uses oral history as a data collection method to capture the dynamism and broader meaning of Rodney's political trajectory. Oral history adds a personal dimension to the archival and secondary data, capturing the lived experiences and personal reflections of those who knew Rodney, thus enriching the telling of his life-geography with firsthand accounts. This method is associated with "histories from-below" or small stories which are popular among life-geographers (Blackledge, 2006; Ogborn, 2008; McGeachan, Forsyth and Hasty, 2012). This historiography traces back to the historians of the British Communist Party

in the 1930s before gaining popularity among historians in the 1960s and beyond (Hobsbawm, 1997). It is concerned with unearthing marginalised stories and salvaging the agency of those E P Thompson described as condemned to the "condescension of posterity" (Thompson, 1966, p. 12; Blackledge, 2006). Thompson wrote about the British working class of the Industrial Revolution:

> Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties (Thompson, 1966, p. 12).

Thompson's words apply not only to people among the masses but also to individuals like Walter Rodney. As a figure of the global revolts of 1968 and the turbulent decade following independence in Africa and the Caribbean, Rodney lived through a unique period of social upheaval that might seem unfamiliar today (Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Zeilig, 2022). This thesis examines the development of Rodney's Marxist thought and activism to understand his motivations, reasoning, decision-making, contradictions, and doubts, thereby making sense of these distant times. However, it is no mere commemoration of his efforts. Just as Thompson (1966) linked defeated proletarian struggles to present issues, this life-geography of an Afro-Guyanese revolutionary offers insight into the problems of capitalist imperialism today by covering the themes of working-class power, race and class, and the meaning of socialism.

Oral history can construct a dialectical materialist biography that transcends history from-below. A criticism of histories from-below is their tendency to isolate events, focusing excessively on the downtrodden while neglecting broader interconnections with more comprehensive events, processes, and actions of the exploiting classes (Harman, 2005; Blackledge, 2006). In presenting this biography of Rodney as a history from-below, this thesis would risk abstracting from his class position and a complete account of his interactions. Although Rodney supported the exploited and oppressed, he belonged to the middle class that

came to power in formerly colonised nations in Africa and the Caribbean. Despite being an outspoken critic of this class's elitism, he sometimes could not distance himself from it (Rodney, 1971c; Zeilig, 2022). For instance, the fifth chapter examines Rodney's life within the "ivory tower" of the University of Dar es Salaam, isolated from the Tanzanian masses. Consequently, it focuses on the dynamics within the higher echelons of Tanzanian society, where Rodney was positioned, including the manoeuvres of the one-party state and the activities of student activists.

More suitable approaches for retrieving aspects of Rodney's Marxism from historical neglect are found in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (2008), detailing the world's first successful proletarian revolution, and C L R James's *Black Jacobins* (2001), chronicling the Haitian slave revolution. Although these works have foreshadowed histories from-below, they are of interest because they overhaul them by integrating the agency of the working masses with history from-above. Blackledge (2006, p. 71) pertinently argues that Trotsky's work "combines an insightful examination of the trajectory of Russian workers and peasants with narrative accounts of political machinations at various levels". The machinations encompassed the various regimes preceding October 1971, the army, and the bourgeois and workers' parties (Trotsky, 2008). Blackledge's observation equally applies to James's *Black Jacobins*, in which a chapter is devoted to a crisis within the planter class of Haiti (James, 2001).

Trotsky and James used little oral testimony compared to many histories from-below. Nevertheless, this thesis intends to follow their example by offering an integrated historical-geographical account using semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2016). Here, oral history does not merely aim to rescue the voices of the oppressed but integrates them into a comprehensive reconstruction of Rodney's life.

Interviews and participant selection

The above theoretical consideration of the potential of oral history emerged from my shifting approach to interviewing during my fieldwork. While conducting my archival research in Atlanta, Georgetown, Dar es Salaam, and London between October 2022 and July 2023, I conducted 32 in-person and online interviews (Figure 2. Interview table). I began by following the approach of previous biographers, Lewis and Zeilig, interviewing Rodney's wife in Atlanta and close friends who knew him at various times (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022). In Dar es Salaam, I conducted seven interviews with his former colleagues and students at the university. However, I was motivated to record the voices and stories of people who remained absent from the secondary literature. For instance, I interviewed two people who were Black Power activists in the 1970s, and who met Rodney during his visits to the United States between 1972 and 1975, to learn more about his connections to Pan-African circles in the diaspora. I also conducted an online interview with two retired academics and a member of the WPA support group in Hamburg, Germany, to enquire about Rodney travelling there in May 1980, a month before his demise, which I discuss in the eighth chapter.

More importantly, I was determined to hear from those who were politically active alongside him in Guyana between 1974 and 1980. These voices are largely missing from previous biographies and studies. Clairmont Chung's collection of oral testimony in *Walter Rodney, a Promise of Revolution* remains an exception to this rule as it gathers interviews from several former WPA leaders (Chung, 2012). Chung's work inspired me to extend the number of interviews to learn about the contours of Rodney's praxis as a WPA leading organiser and the organisation itself. This preoccupation explains why, among the 32 interviews I conducted in the context of this thesis, 17 of them were conducted with a range of activists, political actors, and people who were connected to Rodney's life in Guyana (Figure 2. Interview table). It encompasses several sets of people: (1) current and former activists in the WPA leadership close to Rodney; (2) activists who were in the rank-and-file or affiliated with the WPA with

some relationship to Walter Rodney; (3) activists who later became leaders of the WPA; (4) two former high officials in the PNC-run Guyanese state who were close to Forbes Burnham; (5) two members of the opposition, the PPP, run by Cheddi Jagan; and (6) one trade union leader who was not affiliated with the WPA (see Figure 2. Interview table).

The fact that I have six different categories of people I interviewed reflects my changing approach to participant selection. Before travelling to Guyana in October 2022, I concluded that I would not limit myself to interviewing the leaders of the WPA after online conversations with several of them. Although I learned a great deal from these conversations, I sometimes felt some of the answers of these intellectuals and academics were carefully crafted, cagey, or cryptic on topics such as Rodney's activities, the WPA underground organisation, and the armed struggle (see Interview with Thomas, 2022).

I decided to draw inspiration from E P Thompson's idea of rescuing unheard voices from "the condescension of posterity", taking it to its logical conclusion. Unearthing the history of Rodney's socialist organisation meant acknowledging that the WPA, to some degree, embodied the class division operating in Guyanese society. It possessed a largely middle-class intellectual leadership, while the rank-and-file members tended to be working people. Through my conversation with Ali Majeed (2022) and Stanley Humphrey (2022), both workers and trade unionists involved in the Guyana Mineworkers' Union, I learned about Rodney's educational classes among the mineworkers and how he and the WPA supported the mineworkers' struggle. Yet, hearing about Rodney's activism alongside these mineworkers' struggles convinced me that I needed to understand the machinations of those who repressed these struggles and those outside the WPA.

"You must interview everyone", many participants insisted when I contacted them during my first few days in Guyana (Interview with Anonymous, 2022). They encouraged me to take advantage of the fact that "everybody knows everyone" in Guyana, which has only

800,000 inhabitants (Statista Research Department, 2024). I was shocked to learn that some of my WPA contacts had the number of their political enemies in the PNC who during the 1970s were plotting to assassinate them and might have had a hand in assassinating Walter Rodney. Contrary to my initial expectations, I gained access to two former leading members of the PNC in the 1970s, Hamilton Green (2022) and Norman McLean (2022). Their account gave me a more rounded understanding of the operation of the Burnham regime, its views on Rodney and the WPA, and its attitude toward popular struggle from-below (Interview with Hamilton, 2022; Interview with McLean, 2022). My interviews with WPA members prompted me to explore why the anti-dictatorial alliance between the WPA and PPP failed. I wanted to integrate perspectives from the largest political party in opposition to the PNC. Therefore, I arranged an interview with Gail Teixeira (2022), then Cheddi Jagan's secretary and now the PPP's Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance of Guyana under Irfan Ali's presidency (Interview with Teixeira, 2022).

Advantages and pitfalls of the semi-structured interview

I gained valuable theoretical insights by conducting semi-structured interviews to capture the contours of Rodney's life. First, interviews personalise the social forces that shape history (Keegan, 1988; Seidman, 2013). Categories such as the working class, the state, and activists can often seem abstract until the people involved are asked about their activities. These interviews help elucidate the actions, motivations, and aspirations of individuals involved in significant events of Rodney's life, such as Tanzania's socialist experiment or Guyana's anti-dictatorial struggle of the 1970s. Secondly, semi-structured interviews balance flexibility and structure, enabling interviewees and researchers to delve into topics of mutual interest. This adaptable format accommodates various questioning styles, from open-ended prompts, which encourage expansive narratives, to precise, factual inquiries (Galletta, 2016). Such adaptability

proved vital for enriching the investigation, allowing me to clarify uncertainties and the revelation of nuanced perspectives.

Thirdly, interviews account for the interlinkage between the individual and the social. Trotsky (2005) argues that individual uniqueness is shaped by common conditions. This idea is echoed in Tim Keegan's (1998, p. 159) reflections about his oral history of black South Africans: "Each individual life embodies something of the common experience of larger social groups; each life reveals aspects of the experience of a class, of a racial and ethnic group, of a community, of a geographical region". At the same time, the interview places the individuals at the forefront of the narrative. Listening to stories and anecdotes helps illustrate that individuals inherit social conditions, but they are in all circumstances determined by them. They can strive, usually with others, to contribute to changing the world that shaped them (Trotsky, 2005; Seidman, 2013; Cramer, 2024). The final advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are indispensable sources for supplementing the absence and silence of textual sources (Frisch, 2012). Furthermore, they strengthen the historical geographers' written evidence and oral history, which mutually strengthen each other, shining new light on hitherto obscure texts and unravelling mysteries within each other.

However, these interviews present several difficulties because oral history can seldom offer a standalone account of the past. Bloom and Martin (2013, p. 10) argued that "retrospective accounts decades after the fact—with memories shaped by intervening events, interests, and hearsay—are highly contradictory". Memories are prone to misconceptions, mistakes, exaggerations, and even fabrications (Keegan, 1988; Frisch, 2012). I encountered a contradiction between memory and present consciousness when interviewing political activists in Guyana. They would often deliberately or unconsciously offer a reading of the past in light of the necessities of the present. Some WPA participants had shifted from their earlier multiracial politics to embrace Black Nationalist or pro-Indian positions when discussing the

past. Chapter 8 examines a WPA leader's testimony on Rodney and his organisation's approach to armed struggle that contradicts evidence. This perhaps reflects the WPA's desire to glorify its past as it still views itself as a relevant political force today.

There are theoretical and practical solutions to these aporias of memory. On a theoretical level, dialectical materialism is a method of analysis that prides itself on examining the disparity between ideological claims, stated motives, and representations of political organisation and an individual and their material interest (Harvey, 1996; Rees, 2005; Lefebvre, 2009; Marx and Engels, 2010a; Molyneux, 2012; Sheehan, 2017; Perry, 2021; Garrido, 2024). This is because it sees all conflicts in politics, religion, and ideology as distorted expressions of a historical and geographical struggle between contending classes, which are conditioned and determined by a given mode of production. This viewpoint underscores the importance of examining the underlying economic and social forces that influence individual and collective behaviour and recollection. On a practical level, this standpoint pushes the historical geographer to never take memories at face value. It encourages them to speculate and verify them against the archival or other oral evidence available without falling into a postmodern scepticism of the inability to uncover the past.

Conclusion

The concluding remarks of this chapter are perhaps best enunciated by Rodney's lecture notes on the Russian Revolution. A Marxist biography, he suggests, should "consider the relationship between a single man and the course of history" (Rodney, 1969d). The above discussion expressed a commitment to this vision, which aligns with a desire to overcome the history and geography of great men. The chapter highlighted methodological concerns regarding the evolution of Rodney's Marxist praxis, tying it to the problems of agency and structure inherent in life-geographies. It proposes that dialectical materialism can articulate a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between individual agents and historical-

geographical conditions than postmodern life-geographies and histories from-below. By delving into the essence of Rodney's political evolution, it views this evolution as a process of development through contradictions interconnected with broader processes in the world around him.

When reconciled with Marxist epistemology, the transnational turn in archival research supports this goal, offering powerful strategies for locating and connecting Rodney's dispersed records and reflecting upon them. Meanwhile, oral history and semi-structured interviews personalise the workings of history, illustrating how Rodney's life embodied the experiences of those around him and related to the machinations at various levels of society. The following chapters have relied on these methods to produce an original trajectory of the patterns of transformation in Rodney's Marxism, further elucidating the dynamic interplay between individual agency, history and geographic contexts.

Chapter 4: The insurgent architect of 1968: Walter Rodney, Caribbean Black Power, and the vision of possible alternatives from Cuba

If the Afro-Guyanese historian Walter Rodney anticipated his expulsion by the Jamaican state on 15 October 1968, he could not have foreseen the indignation it provoked. The following morning, 900 students marched from the University of the West Indies (UWI) to Kingston calling for his reinstatement. They were teargassed and beaten into retreat by the police. When the students regrouped in front of the Ministry of Home Affairs, they were joined by unemployed youths and Rastafarians who brought with them grievances far more profound than Rodney's expulsion. By the afternoon, the crowd, now several thousand strong, rallied at National Heroes Park, chanting "Black Power". By the evening, the student protest had been overhauled by a grassroots uprising, where urban youths burned buses and buildings, looted property, vandalised foreign businesses, and clashed with police (Gonsalves, 1979).

The so-called "Rodney riots" belonged to a year characterised by cross-border activism, transnational ideas, international alliances, and global revolts (Watts, 2001). 1968 encompassed student and worker revolts in France and Mexico, the Prague Spring resisting the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the Tet Offensive aiming to liberate Vietnam from American imperialism (Draper, 2018; Harman, 2018; MacAdams and Monta, 2021; Hendrickson, 2022). It witnessed the emergence of Black Power in the United States and the Caribbean, where Jamaican riots represented a watershed moment for post-independence politics (Quinn, 2014; Bloom and Martin, 2013). As Rodney's friend Robert Hill explained: "October 1968 constitutes a political divide in the modern history of the Caribbean because it not only developed a protest movement in Jamaica but throughout the Caribbean, Trinidad, Guyana, Grenada, Antigua.…That's how important Walter was" (Hill, 2012, p. 66).

This chapter is concerned with examining the importance of Rodney's activism and political thought in 1968 and how the year of global revolt shaped him. To accomplish this task, this chapter mobilises an untapped CIA intelligence report detailing Rodney's activities, along with two unpublished drafts from his sojourn in Cuba in 1969, to enrich the secondary literature. It also introduces new framings of Rodney's activism and politics through the theoretical lens of Harvey's concept of the insurgent architect and dialectical utopianism. It thereby illustrates the interplay between the transnational and local dimensions of 1968, seen as the merger of global social forces and local influences across Rodney's experiences in Jamaica and Cuba.

Rodney's agency unfolded in a historical moment when people's power challenged the capitalist system that still shapes the world today, instilling in many the belief that a world without racism, oppression, and imperialism was possible (Harman, 2018; Hendrickson, 2018). In the process, this chapter offers new insights into Rodney's early emergence as a revolutionary by focusing on the development of his activism and the theorisation of his socialist Black Power ideology in 1968 in Jamaica and 1969 in Cuba. It finds a balanced synthesis between Rodney's personal influence and the broader socio-political Jamaican context that made the "Rodney riots" an event of regional significance. In doing so, this chapter positions the Global South as a key site for insurgency and radical utopias in 1968.

It is divided into two interconnected parts. The first examines the significance of Rodney's Black Power praxis throughout his nine months in Jamaica from October to January. It argues that understanding his place in history requires considering Rodney's activism among Jamaican people as a link in a chain of global revolts that characterised 1968. In that year, the 26-year-old historian arrived to teach at the University of the West Indies (UWI), after spending a year and a half in Tanzania. His stay in Kingston represents the convergence of his political development with the rising class and racial consciousness in post-independence Jamaica and

the Caribbean. This period also denotes formulation his Black Power praxis in dialogue with anti-imperialist ideas and actors that shaped the transnational landscape of 1968. This section applies geographer David Harvey's concept of the insurgent architect, an embodied agent of social change occupying a singular space within a lifespan, to express a dynamic interaction between agency and structure when examining Rodney's historical role (Harvey, 2000, pp. 233–257). This concept recognises that Rodney's ability to shape the world is constantly limited by the historiographical-geographical structures beyond his control.

The second delves into how the class struggles of 1968 impacted Rodney's perspectives and politics during his third visit to Cuba from November 1968 to June 1969. This analysis draws on two previously unexamined drafts from the *Walter Rodney Papers in Atlanta*, written by Rodney in Cuba. It posits that Rodney envisioned the rise of a socialist society through Black Power guerrilla revolutions in Jamaica and the United States (Rodney, no date a, no date b). This pragmatic vision, informed by his revolutionary design, echoed the concept of dialectical utopianism, which Harvey presented as follows:

> The task is then to define an alternative, not in terms of some static spatial form or even some perfected emancipatory process. The task is to pull together a spatiotemporal utopianism – a dialectical utopianism – that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories… (Harvey, 2000, p. 198).

Rodney's geographical imagination was dialectical, rooted in his concrete experiences of activism in Jamaica. It was not based on an idealised revolutionary struggle but grappled with the class contradictions in the postcolonial Caribbean. He carefully analysed and compared Black Power struggles in Jamaica and the United States, considering their specific conditions over time and space while connecting them to the global events of 1968. Within this context, he presented Cuban socialism as a utopian model for black people (Rodney, no date a).

Walter Rodney as the insurgent architect of 1968

In his *Space of Hopes*, Harvey invokes the metaphor of the insurgent architect as an individual or collective agent of social change, endowed with the capacity to imagine, create, and act (Harvey, 2000). Although the architect's qualities stem from their embodiment in the social and material world, their embeddedness in this highly structured, objective, and prevailing spatial-temporal order, such as capitalism, constrains their freedom to think and act. Harvey writes: "We [insurgent architects] can always aspire to make our own historical-geography but never under historical-geographical conditions of our own choosing.…The leap from the present into some future is always constrained" (Harvey, 2000, p. 254). These structural conditions, however, are not static; they represent the contradictions within society expressed by class struggles between the exploiter and the exploited, the oppressor and the oppressed (Callinicos, 2004). Harvey's words gave geographical expression to Marx's renowned dictum in the 18th Brumaire to emphasise the importance of space, place, and scale in the historical process, which agents of social change can shape (Marx and Engels, 2010a). This article, which assesses the place of Walter Rodney in the historical geography of 1968 by looking at activism in Jamaica and Cuba, has much to contribute to Harvey's metaphor. Framing Rodney as an insurgent architect builds on Lewis's seminal works during Rodney's nine months in Jamaica. Lewis, as Rodney's first biographer, brought attention to Rodney's close political ties with marginalised communities in Jamaica, which cemented his credentials as a radical scholar-activist (Lewis, 1994, 1998). From his evidence, scholars Jesse Benjamin and Zeilig astutely concluded that Rodney developed a "Marxism in which Black Power [was] central" (Zeilig, 2022, p. 77).

I intend to expand on Lewis's work by covering Rodney's activism on campus and his attempt to raise the question of armed struggle in Jamaica. Furthermore, I delve into Rodney's understudied third visit to Cuba in late 1968 and its significance for his political growth (Lewis,

1994, 1998). By such means, I contribute to widening the understanding of Rodney's broader political trajectory and his ideas at the intersection of Black Power and Cuban socialism and its impact on revolutionary movements in the Caribbean. Hendrickson (2022) and Kamola (2019) expressed frustration with the Eurocentric bias in most dominant accounts of May 1968. Prevailing narratives of the global 1968 tend to treat anti-imperialist movements in the Global South as distinct from the student and worker revolts in Paris and Prague (Kamola, 2019). A biographical account of Rodney in the Caribbean not only reveals that the regional events of 1968 were part of a broader global insurrection but also clarifies the motivations and visions of the lesser-known activists involved in the movement (Watts, 2001).

The first section of this chapter will shed light on Rodney's activism in Jamaica by incorporating an untapped CIA Monthly Intelligence Report into the narrative (*Monthly Intelligence Report,* 1968). This report is part of the papers of Russell Holmes, CIA specialist who also served as an archivist for the agency's records related to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the murders of John F. Kennedy and Dr Martin Luther King Jr. The document in question references an unauthorised demonstration in Lluidas Vale, Jamaica, on 9 April, following King's assassination, and may have attracted the attention of American investigators, hence its presence in those papers (*Monthly Intelligence Report,* 1968).

I also employ U.S. official documents detailing the surveillance of Rodney by Jamaican intelligence in 1968, which scholar Michael O. West has previously explored (*Internal Security Review*,1968a, 1968b, 1968c; West, 2005, 2008). West used these documents to uncover the motivations and tactics employed by the Jamaican state in expelling Rodney in October 1968. His seminal analysis revealed that Jamaican intelligence had been building a case against Rodney since he first came to their attention while travelling to Cuba during his undergraduate years in the early 1960s (West, 2005). Although these documents reflect the Jamaican state's exaggerated paranoia, cross-referencing them with additional accounts provides insight into

the Black Power activist network Rodney established in Jamaica (Girvan, 1968; Gonsalves, 1979; Gray, 1991; Lewis, 1994). In the second section, I reconstruct Rodney's journey to Cuba with interviews and archival documents. I analyse two unexplored drafts from Walter Rodney's Papers in Atlanta which Rodney penned in Cuba between November 1968 and June 1969 detailing his radical perspective on the Cuban revolution and Jamaican and American Black Power movements (Rodney, no date a, no date b).

Although Lewis portrayed Rodney as a political figure operating in a larger picture of rising black consciousness against the repressive Jamaican state, he did not dwell on the importance of his influence on the "Rodney riots". This issue is important as most interpretations of the upheaval subordinated Rodney's activism to the objective factors behind the crisis (Gonsalves, 1979; Payne, 1983, 1988; Gray, 1991). Scholar Anthony Payne reduced Rodney to the level of an "inspiration" when arguing the uprising was caused by "the poverty, unemployment, low education, poor housing, and general material and social dispossession" in Jamaica (Payne, 1988, p. 172). While the metaphor of the insurgent architect asserts that no person irrespective of their will, skill or position can change the course of events, it asserts that an individual or collective agent embodies the conscious component in history and thus can contribute to shaping its outcome (Harvey, 2000). Similarly, historian George Novack remarked, the effectiveness of a person's contribution in making history is contingent on the how and when uneven historical conditions and social forces come together (Novack, 2002).

In my reading of Rodney's role in the political events of 1968, I take up the concept of the "insurgent architect" to show that his Black Power activism significantly accelerated the social crisis in Jamaica, illustrating that an insurgent architect can tip the scales of history when the balance between contending social classes has reached a momentary equilibrium. The riots of October 1968 express this feature of Rodney's personal influence on a noteworthy scale. They place his actions at the tip of the global revolt of 1968, which interconnects with a

profound crisis of social relations in Jamaica and the Caribbean. The importance of Rodney's Black Power activism in the Jamaican revolt is best appreciated when seen as part of a chain local and global developments that manifest themselves at various geographical scales.

Campus radicalism, Black Power, and Rodney

Rodney's arrival at UWI Mona campus in Kingston, Jamaica, in January 1968 coincided with the transformation of the university into a site interlinking local and international scales of activism. One feature of 1968 was that campuses both in the Global North and South turned into spaces for radical debates and activism challenging notions of capitalism, imperialism, and democracy (Zeilig, 2009; Harman, 2018; Hendrickson, 2022). Hendrickson (2022) observed that student protests and occupations rocked the campuses of Tunis and Dakar weeks before the Parisian students rose against De Gaulle's government. The UWI Campus too showed signs of a student radicalism before the "Rodney riots" in October of that year. In February 1968, students began to express solidarity with the American Black Power movement. When examining UWI student newspaper *Scope*, Obika Gray observed that the Guild of Undergraduates donated to the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) "to assist in its struggle in against US racism" (Gray, 1991, p. 256). By April S*cope* reported that a Black Power movement had been formed on campus (Gray, 1991, p. 156).

In 1968, UWI also experienced a surge in left-wing radicalism, reflected in the election of Ralph Gonsalves, a "pro-communist student from St. Vincent", as head of the Guild of undergraduates (*Monthly Intelligence Report,* 1968). According to Norman Girvan, a young lecturer at the time, the students wanted to follow the example set by series of student protests elsewhere, such as in France and Mexico (Girvan, 1968). By the autumn of 1968, under the leadership of Gonsalves, the students prepared for a "confrontation with the University Administration on the question of student power", writes Girvan (1968). The impeding

confrontation, which was overhauled by the Rodney riots, unveiled the contradictions at heart of education in postcolonial society.

Jamaican students, like those in France, experienced a sense of alienation. They endured tough examinations which played into their insecurities about the future; they lacked any decision-making power about their curriculum and lived isolated from society (Girvan, 1968; Harman, 2018). Yet, unlike Western students, much of their alienation stemmed from their condition as products of imperial postcolonialism. Founded in 1948 under the British Empire, the UWI operated as a subordinate affiliate of the University of London, aimed at educating colonial administrators. As independence approached, the Jamaican elite saw the university a as a means to expand its ranks, preparing a new generation of professionals and politicians (Gray, 1991; Lewis, 1998; Boukari-Yabara, 2018; Zeilig, 2022). However, many students felt disconnected from their postcolonial education, which continued to embrace colonial ties and promoted assimilation into the Westernised and elitist values of the Jamaican middle class (Lewis, 1994, 1998). Lewis (1994, p. 9) characterised these values as "the striving for status, the distancing from one's social background, the imitation of an English accent, the marrying of an English wife or…a light-skinned woman".

In addition, the Jamaican state, following U.S. anti-communism, restricted academic freedoms. In the late 1960s, it confiscated the passport of Dr George Beckford, a co-founder of the leftist *New World Quarterly* journal, and banned Dr Jay Mandle, who was also associated with the publication (Girvan, 1968). If the students initially showed little indignation at these injustices, by 1968, six years after independence, they increasingly transformed the campus into a site of contestation. They engaged in debates on democracy, identity, and decolonisation, drawing inspiration from global student revolts and the U.S. Black Power movement. This burgeoning radicalism coincided with the arrival of a 26-year-old Afro-Guyanese lecturer in January 1968.

Rodney left an impression on his students and peers for both the enduring traits he shared with them and the distinct qualities that set him apart. Rodney distinguished himself from his colleagues who returned from London with dandy shirts and improvised British accents. He chose to wear dashikis, a West African form of dress, accompanied by an Afro haircut and spoke English with a distinctive Guyanese twang. Rodney defied the norm by choosing to live in West Kingston's suburbs rather than on the UWI campus (Lewis, 1994). His choice demonstrated a commitment to the oppressed, reflecting his belief that a radical intellectual should actively support the struggles of the working masses.

Rodney quickly associated himself with the Black Power radicalism at UWI. The CIA reports he "convened a meeting of UWI students on campus to discuss revolutionary activities" on 13 February (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968). Rodney increased his activism as the Black Power movement's call for empowerment, self-defence, and revolution, championed by the Black Panther Party, found resonance in the Caribbean (Bloom and Martin, 2013). In the wake of the unrest in American cities following Dr King's murder in April 1968, Rodney reportedly spoke at a gathering on "Civil Liberties in the Caribbean" hosted by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies and the Political Academy on 26 April (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968). Echoing the principles of Black Power, the Afro-Guyanese historian stressed that "citizens of Jamaica should be armed" against police brutality (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968). He urged black people to resist white oppression while proclaiming that only force would allow the people in the Caribbean to liberate themselves as the Cubans had done in 1959 (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968).

By May 1968, Rodney was a central figure of the campus Black Power movement, gaining respect for his speeches. These speeches formed the basis of the second and third chapters of his Black Power manifesto, *Grounding with My Brothers*, published after his expulsion from the island (Lewis, 1994; Boukari-Yabara, 2010b; Zeilig, 2022). The

intelligence files not only specify the date of these speeches but also note on 13 May 1968, that Rodney was the main speaker at a Black Power meeting organised by 300 students at the student's union (*Internal Security Review*, 1968a). Three days later, a follow-up meeting with 140 attendees included Dennis Chin, a former bookseller inspired by Rodney's speech. Chin repeated Rodney's "call for violent revolution and advocated that UWI students should spread BP doctrines among high schools and colleges" (*Internal Security Review*, 1968a). According to the same files, Rodney tasked Chin with founding a Black Power group in Kingston (*Internal Security Review*, 1968a).

Rodney's advocacy translated politics across various geographical scales, demonstrating an emphasis on the intricate relationship between the particular and the universal. This relationship figured as one of the central, albeit challenging, theatres that Harvey identified for insurgent politics to engage with (Harvey, 2000). Harvey did so by adopting the concept of militant particularism from Raymond Williams, which stipulated that political movements and struggles derive their significance from their embeddedness in specific times and places (Harvey, 1996, 2000). However, this specificity can also dampen their capacity to formulate their ambitions on a global scale. Harvey suggests that "means must therefore be found whereby we insurgent architects can reach out across space and time to shape a more integrated process of historical-geographical change beyond the limits typically defined by some community of common interest" (Harvey, 2000, p. 240).

Black Power represented that means for Rodney, as he perceived it as an international call for self-determination and liberation. He defined it as both an ideology and a movement challenging oppression faced by people of colour under capitalist imperialism, yet he believed it could be adapted to fit local demands (Rodney, 2019). In the United States, Black Power addressed the plight of African Americans facing discrimination in employment, housing, and police brutality, perpetrated by white officers. Stokely Carmichael, a key proponent of Black

Power, later known as Kwame Ture, urged African Americans to assert political and economic control within their communities against the police and the state (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967, pp. 33–56; Rodney, 2019). Unlike the United States, in most nations in the Caribbean, African descendants formed the majority population in most islands and endured oppression from fellow black people (Lowenthal, 1972; Lux, 1972; Thomas, 1992; Quinn, 2014). Accordingly, Rodney gave Caribbean Black Power more ambitious and revolutionary objectives than its American counterpart:

> (1) The break with imperialism, which is historically white racist; (2) the assumption of power by the black masses in the islands; (3) the cultural reconstruction of society in the image of blacks (Rodney, 2019, p. 24).

Rodney's Black Power fused socialist notions of anti-imperialism and class struggle between the rich and poor with a Black Radicalism against white supremacy. Inspired by Frantz Fanon's critique of the colonial and postcolonial bourgeoisie, Rodney criticised the Caribbean rulers for serving a "white imperialist system" that allowed Western multinationals to exploit the region while impoverishing the people (Fanon, 1963; Rodney, 2019, p. 24). In Jamaica, he denounced the multiracial ruling class for promoting the illusion of a harmonious, multiracial society through the national motto, "Out of Many, One People". He argued that this motto obscured the class reality of a small multiracial elite controlling the African majority.

Rodney's Black Power found common ground with Carmichael and the Black Panthers when forging solidary and alliances with anti-imperialist liberation movement in the Global South (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967; Cleaver, 1970; Bloom and Martin, 2013; Rodney, 2019). It emerged as a variant of Third Worldism, which divided the world between advanced Western capitalist nations and countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It held the Third World as the foyer of revolution, where nations like Mao Zedong's China and Fidel Castro's Cuba provided alternatives to the Cold War superpower rivalry (Nash, 2003; Birchall, 2014). Through this political alignment, Rodney asserting the relevance of Black Power to both

Indians and Africans, particularly in regions like Guyana, where Indians outnumbered Africans, and Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, Rodney's Black Power message resonated with the multicultural UWI campus, which attracted students from across the Caribbean. By October 1968, Rodney's insurgent architecture had merged with growing radicalisation around black pride, socialism, and student democracy on campus. Yet this radicalism still needed to connect with the insurgent mood developing in society.

Groundings with the Jamaican people

Rodney's arrival in January 1968 coincided with the streets of Kingston emerging as the site of rising black and class consciousness among deprived Jamaicans. Jamaica's contemporary political and socioeconomic landscape was shaped by the 1938 labour unrest, situated within the anti-colonial strikes and protests sweeping the British West Indies in response to the Great Depression (Lewis, 1939; Ambursley, 1981; Gray, 1991, p. 32; Paton and Smith, 2021). Despite its defeat, the revolt compelled the British to involve educated Jamaicans in the colonial administration and take steps towards self-governance. By independence in 1962, Jamaican national politics had been characterised by the rivalry between the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP), with their respective trade unions functioning as electoral machines (Gray, 1991). Through the 1950s, both parties, taking turns in power, pursued an open-door policy to attract foreign investment from Western companies, offering tax breaks and cheap labour. This policy, symbolic of the JLP's alliance with the 21 ruling families, solidified Jamaica's dependence on the U.S. (Ambursley, 1981). The Jamaican oligarchy initially thrived from capital invested in the bauxite industry. However, the bauxite boom ended in the early years of post-independence under a JLP government (Ambursley, 1981; Gray, 1991).

Since independence, the anti-colonial struggle had given way to a struggle between Jamaicans where race, while taking on different dynamics than before, continued to be a marker

of social class. On the one hand stood the postcolonial elite including individuals of diverse ethnicities, primarily mixed-race, but also white, Lebanese, Syrian, and Chinese. In a nation where over 91 per cent of Jamaicans were of African descent, they had comparatively few black people within their ranks (Payne, 1983; Rodney, 2019). On the other hand, stood the black masses, descendants of the thousands of African slaves kidnapped and exploited on British plantations. Freedom from Britain had brought few tangible benefits for most Jamaicans. By 1968, the persisting issues of rural poverty as well as unemployment on deteriorating foreign-owned sugar estates and bauxite mines compelled many to migrate to Kingston, where they often joined the ranks of approximately 150,000 slum dwellers (Payne, 1983, p. 160).

During the 1950s and 1960s, black consciousness expressed the anger of the Jamaican lumpenproletariat towards the elite and multinationals. Thousands of youths embraced a new Black Nationalist Judeo-Christianity known as Rastafarianism (Lewis, 1994). Founded in the 1930s in response to colonialism, Rastafarianism drew inspiration from the Judeo-Christian Old Testament's exodus narrative, seeing black victims of slavery and colonialism as captives in Babylon—a corrupt and oppressive system upheld by Western civilization, supported by the Jamaican elite (Chevannes, 1994, p. 134). They believed the only salvation for black people lay in the physical or mental repatriation to Africa, referred to as Zion—the promised land (Chevannes, 1994). The Rastafaris posed a challenge to Jamaica's elite as it critiqued their extravagant Western lifestyles and racial diversity. Its adherents embraced a countercultural lifestyle of ganja-smoking, dreadlock-growing, and small-scale farming and squatting, which made them susceptible to evictions and police violence (Lewis, 1994).

In 1963, six Rastafarians attacked a petrol station on the Coral Gardens property, resulting in the deaths of nine individuals, including two policemen. This act was fuelled by a desire for retribution against landlords and the government's attempts to forcibly remove

squatters for tourism development. Consequently, 150 Rastafarians were arrested (Lewis, 1994, p. 16). Occasionally, the elite tried to accommodate black consciousness to control it. In 1966, the JLP invited Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, revered by Rastafarians as the Messiah of black people and the incarnation of God. Rastafarians esteemed Ethiopia because it had never been colonised by Europe, symbolizing a free and independent Africa. They also saw the ancient Ethiopian Coptic Church as the protector of an authentic Christianity free from Western influences. Upon learning of the emperor's visit, crowds rushed to the airport, breaching security barriers to welcome Selassie. Failing to control Black Nationalism, the JLP reverted to its intolerance, banning all Black Nationalist literature from the United States in 1968 (Lewis, 1994).

Rodney's insurgent architecture came to embody the possibility of an alliance between black-conscious masses and the left-leaning radical intellectuals at the UWI—a prospect that haunted the Jamaican elite. His Black Power praxis aligned with Third Worldism, echoing Fanon's view of the revolutionary potential of the lumpenproletariat (Fanon, 1963). He actively sought connections with Jamaica's marginalised groups, including Rastafarians, unemployed youth, and urban gangs in Kingston's slums and shantytowns. His Black Power emerged as praxis, implicitly connecting academia to the streets. It outlined a responsibility for the black intellectual to betray his class allegiances and engage with the ordinary working masses. In its association with Third Worldism, it identified Fanon's lumpenproletariat as the most radical section of society in virtue of its suffering (Nash, 2003).

Rodney sought to connect with the Jamaican lumpen elements: the Rastafarians, unemployed youth, and so-called gangs in the slums and shantytown of Kingston (Lewis, 1998; Rodney, 2019; Zeilig, 2022). He achieved this primarily by establishing connections with young Rastafarians and radicals on campus, maintaining contacts from his undergraduate years between 1960 and 1963. During that time, he already earned a reputation for associating with

the downtrodden. One of the young Rastafarians that Rodney met on campus, Jerry Small, had turned his back on his middle-class upbringing to live among the poor (Lewis, 1994). He invited Rodney to the groundings—the unadvertised spiritual gathering that Rastafarians organised in the shantytowns of Kingston. Rodney's friend Robert Hill explained.

> There were never flyers. There was nothing ever announced. Rastafarians evolved this ritual practice that Walter adapted to. It basically consists of Rastas sitting around a campfire, lighting a pipe, singing praises to his majesty, and reciting prayers, but the thing that keeps fuelling it and driving it are reasonings. A topic will emerge, and different individuals will approach it and start to debate it (Hill, 2012, p. 65).

Relating to the Rastafarians required Rodney to humbly listen to them at the groundings. However, Rodney's specialism as an African historian, coupled with his year and a half spent in the Tanzanian revolution, empowered him to effectively engage the Rastafarians, for whom "anything about Africa [had] an instant appeal" (Hill, 2012, p. 65). On Sunday mornings, he found himself speaking on African history in front of audiences of 200 to 300 people, earning the moniker "African doctor" because of his knowledge (Lewis, 1994, p. 21). Rodney thereby sought to dismantle the inferiority complex imposed by centuries of racial oppression, which depicted Africa as primitive and uncivilised. He wrote: "A knowledge of African achievements in art, education, religion, politics, agriculture, and the mining of metals can help us gain the necessary confidence which has been removed by slavery and colonialism" (Rodney, 2019, p. 39).

Rodney gave detailed lectures on empires like Ethiopia, Kush, and Benin, which reinforced Rastafarians' belief about the grandeur of ancient African civilisations (Rodney, 2019). As noted by scholar Horace Campbell, he sought to elevate Rastafarian understanding of African society beyond mythical portrayals, utilising Marx's historical materialism to offer a more truthful account, highlighting that "there was an Africa of the villages, and that only a small minority lived in Kingdoms" (Nash, 2003). Rodney was convinced of Rastafari's potential to mobilise the working masses against Jamaican elites and imperialism, despite their

customary scepticism towards politics. His beliefs likely stemmed from his close ties to the Afro-centric Reverend Claudius Henry and his organisation, the New Creation Peacemakers Tabernacle (NCPT), through the spring and summer of 1968 (*Monthly Intelligence Report,* 1968; Lewis, 1994).

Jamaican scholar Chevannes described Henry as both a major player and an exception in the Rastafarian movement. While the Rastafarian communities were acephalous, Henry's New African reformed church had "an acknowledged head and devoted following" (Chevannes, 1976, p. 264). More importantly, Henry was perceived as an enemy of the state. In 1960, Henry and his son Ronald planned an armed conspiracy against Jamaica, writing a letter to Fidel Castro for support after the Cuban Revolution. The plot was thwarted when police raided their headquarters. After spending six years in prison, Reverend Henry rebranded his old African Reformed Church as NCPT in 1966. This reform signalled the abandonment of his Back-to-Africa line for his newfound commitment to build an African homeland in Jamaica (Chevannes, 1976, pp. 275–280). On Kemps Hill in the Parish of Clarendon, Henry built two-bedroom homes for his followers and erected a grand church, which boasted Rastafari drums, an organ, and seating for 300 people. He added a water tank and bakery to the less than half-acre property, serving the community (Lewis, 2014).

When Rodney visited the headquarters in 1968, he left mesmerised by its achievements: "In Kemp's Hill, in the middle of a most depressed area, which is the Prime Minister's constituency, Rev Henry has gathered together a number of black brothers and sisters, and they have turned themselves into an independent black economic community" (Lewis, 1994, p. 25). This passage underscores Rodney's endorsement of the endeavours of ordinary working people to take control of their own affairs in the absence of state support. However, Rodney went beyond appreciating their ability to build a community; he appreciated Henry's efforts to translate black consciousness into organised action and perhaps consider

revolutionary violence. Henry, as outlined in the CIA report, depicted himself as an ally of Castro. He purportedly declared that "Jamaica would very shortly embrace communism" and affirmed his intention to "take over" the Jamaican government by 1972 (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968).

According to Rodney's intelligence files, Rodney visited Kemp's Hill with his wife and son Shaka for a three-day celebration and baptism on 31 March. Among those baptised was Rupert Ahwee, a Jamaican socialist of Chinese heritage who allegedly introduced Rodney to Henry (*Internal Security Review*, 1968a; *Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968; West, 2005, p. 16) The spymasters wrote about a meeting between Rodney, Ahwee, Claudius Henry, his wife Edna, and Kenneth Morgan as if a revolution was in the making. Rodney allegedly argued the power of the upcoming rebellion in Jamaica would "be determined by the effective organisation of groups such as the NCPT" building an organisation meant to recruit and train young men in revolutionary methods (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968). In turn, Morgan suggested that NCPT members "should be enlisted in the army and the police force as they would obtain worthwhile training and valuable information" (*Monthly Intelligence Report*, 1968). He also reportedly discussed obtaining literature for the NCPT from a source at the Cuban Consulate (*Monthly Intelligence Report,* 1968). The Jamaican intelligence, as Lewis noted, would use Rodney's attendance at Henry's church as evidence to frame him as a subversive agent (Lewis, 2014, p. 60).

Jamaican intelligence, alarmed by Rodney's close association with the lumpenproletariat, concocted a fanciful narrative suggesting he tried to establish himself as a leader among the Rastafarians (*Internal Security Review*, 1968b). However, as West clarified, "Rodney's approach was alien to them" (West, 2005, p. 12). Their understanding of politics prevented them from recognising that an intellectual could engage with the masses on an equal footing. Rodney's approach involved fostering a dialogue with the people, not leading them.

This explains why the spymasters accused Rodney of brokering a meeting between Henry and the Vikings, "a gang of violent robbers" (*Internal Security Review*, 1968b). By September, they alleged he incited Rastafarians in Montego Bay "to attack tourists". Jamaican intelligence also claimed he supplied Black Nationalist publications to the Dunkirk gang while establishing subversive groups in the shantytowns (*Internal Security Review*, 1968b). Nevertheless, these reports reveal the extent of Rodney's interactions with the unemployed youth.

From his experience among Jamaica's masses, Rodney drew optimistic conclusions about the possibility of insurgency on the island. In October 1968, he stated: "Throughout the country, black youth are becoming aware of the possibilities of unleashing armed struggle in their own interest. For those who have eyes to see, there is already evidence of the beginning of resistance to the violence of our oppressors" (Rodney, 2019, p. 7). Those passionate remarks came from Rodney's speech at the Montreal Black Writers Congress, which hosted Black Power activists from North America, the Caribbean, and Europe (Austin, 2018). Upon his return on 15 October, Rodney was barred entry into the country by Jamaican authorities. By the next evening, the streets of Kingston were up in flames. Rodney was not the author of the popular uprising that carried his name. Nevertheless, his insurgent architecture in Jamaica hastened the impending confrontation between the masses and the state, granting his individuality disproportionate influence over events. As the Bolshevik Leon Trotsky once said, "individual greatness is a social function" (Trotsky, 2016, p. 607).

Rodney's dialectical utopianism from Cuba[2]

The insurgent architect is not merely an agent of social change. They are also realistic dreamers or pragmatic visionaries. This quality of Rodney's became evident during his third

[2] During the period of this thesis, I published parts of this section in a blog post. Chukwudinma, C. (2023a) 'Forgotten drafts of Walter Rodney's third visit to Cuba', *Review of African Political Economy*, June. Available at: https://roape.net/2023/06/08/forgotten-drafts-of-walter-rodneys-third-visit-to-cuba/.

visit to Cuba from November 1968 to June 1969. There, he formulated a utopianism grounded in the realities of his time, corresponding to David Harvey's "dialectical utopianism". The notion of dialectics expresses the idea that social change develops through the contradictions that lie at the heart of a socially divided society. Harvey's dialectical utopianism proposes that insurgent architects recognise the contradictory character of reality and find within it the means to imagine the realisation of a better future (Harvey, 2000). Harvey thereby distanced himself from two traditional modes of utopia: "utopias of spatial form" and the "utopias of process" (Harvey, 2000, pp. 174 and 184).

Harvey invokes More's *Utopia*, which takes place on an island, to show that spatial utopias are societies free from conflictual property relations and imagined organised material space. However, these spatial utopias abstract from the complexities of historical change and collide with temporal processes, such as the emergence of class inequalities under capitalism, rendering their realisation impossible (Harvey, 2000). Utopias of the process such as Adam Smith's utopian vision of the invisible hand, where individual self-interest leads to a perfected market benefiting society, lack spatial consideration. Smith overlooks the imperfections stemming from a world divided among competing nation-states (Harvey, 2000, p. 174). Processual utopias thus express a romanticism of endlessly open projects without reaching a point of closure within space and place (Harvey, 2000, p. 174). As traditional utopianism severs time and space, Harvey's dialectical utopianism integrates temporality and spatiality into the ways the insurgent architect thinks of radical solutions to our present condition. Dialectical utopianism does not offer an idealist escape from the problems of the present, rather it envisions an overthrow of capitalism rooted in present alternatives.

For Harvey, envisioning a spatial-temporal utopianism requires an understanding of capitalism as a system of uneven geographical development that produces geographic differences and distinct spatial scales—the local, regional, and international (Harvey, 2000;

Castree and Gregory, 2006). Yet, transposing Harvey's theory of neoliberal capitalism of the 2000s onto Rodney's activism in 1968 would be historically inaccurate. Instead, this section examines how Rodney, during his six-month stay in Cuba, developed a radical approach to emancipation shaped by his analysis of the inequities and social conflicts that characterised the capitalist imperialism of his era. It argues that Rodney wrote two unpublished drafts expressing the full breadth of his dialectical utopianism. In these documents, he presents a powerful development of his case for a Black Power guerrilla revolution in Jamaica and the United States in the year of global revolt (Rodney, no date a, no date b). In so doing, Rodney presents a unique local-global articulation of 1968, expanding his Marxist perspective anchored in Black Power and Third Worldism.

From insurgency to utopian reflection: Rodney's third journey to Cuba in 1968

Rodney's third visit to Cuba represents how his dialectical utopianism arose out of his insurgent architecture. His expulsion from Kingston, Jamaica, to Montreal, Canada, had triggered a desire within him to overcome a problem facing the insurgent architect: his embeddedness in the historical-geographical structure of Jamaica imposed limits on what he could see and where he could see it from (Harvey, 2000). The frantic schedule of his activism had left Rodney with little time to reflect or develop a long-term perspective of revolution. To remedy this, he realised the importance of altering his own positionality—a term Harvey (2000, p. 235) uses to describe the perspective from which a person views and engages with the world. In Harvey's words, "I as a political person, can change my politics by changing my positionality and shifting my spatiotemporal horizon. I can also change my politics in response to changes in the world out there" (Harvey, 2000, p. 238). Therefore, Rodney's decision to move to Cuba reflected a desire to expand his political horizons and reflect upon the tumultuous events of 1968.

The choice was fraught with sacrifice, notably his decision to leave his wife and young son behind. The events of October 1968, dubbed the “Rodney riots” and the “Rodney affair” by the media propelled Rodney’s international reputation. At the same time, Rodney’s insurgent credentials would cast a shadow of notoriety over him in the eyes of governments in the Caribbean (Interivew with P. Rodney, 2022). Yet, the events of 1968 had left Rodney fatigued and even plunged him into a personal crisis. Reflecting upon her husband’s banning from Jamaica, his wife Patricia (2022) recalled: “He wanted a break and to do some writing”. She added, “He was unsure whether he wanted to go back into academia” (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). Rodney’s experience in Jamaica had conjured within him a deep sense of resentment toward elitism in academia. He was committed to learning and teaching to assist the masses in their struggle against oppression (Zeilig, 2022). Doubting whether academia could help fulfil that commitment, he embarked on a journey to Cuba to find himself.

The Walter Rodney Papers at the Atlanta Archives hold little information concerning the details of Rodney’s third visit to Cuba. One correspondence to Rodney from the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) dated 4 July 1969 was sent to Pinar del Rio, the capital city of the most western province of Cuba, where lies the heartlands of Cuba’s tobacco fields. Its author thanked Rodney for his mail on 10 May, in which he applied for a “lectureship in African history” (University of Dar es Salaam, 1969). This letter from UDSM indicates that Rodney might have spent some time travelling across the island he admired since his youth.

The recollections of Horace Campbell, a Jamaican scholar-activist and close friend of Rodney, provide supplementary insight into his stay. Campbell informed Samuel Fure Davis, a Cuban scholar, that Rodney’s main contact in Cuba was Dr Armando Entralgo (Davis, 2021). During the late 1960s, Dr Entralgo was emerging as Cuba’s leading authority on African affairs, history, and culture (Peters, 2010, p. 254). He actively contributed to the development of a specialised module in African and Asian history within the University of Havana’s School

of History (Peters, 2010, p. 336). In his efforts to deepen the research on African history at the university, Dr Entralgo invited Rodney to Cuba to write something on African history and its ties to Europe. Campbell recalled, "Walter told me the Cubans inspired him to write *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*" (Communication with Campbell, 2023). According to Campbell, Cubans had asked Rodney to recommend a good book on African history, but he was unable to suggest a title worthy of being read (Communication with Campbell, 2023). Apart from Dr Entralgo, Rodney developed a friendship with Osvaldo Cardenas, a young Afro-Cuban sociologist who later became the ambassador to Jamaica. Several years ago, Cardenas told Afro-Cuban scholar Zuleica Romay via email that "Walter Rodney studied Spanish, did research, and read a lot" (Guerra, 2022, p. 31).

According to his childhood friend Ewart Thomas, Walter began reading about Castro's Cuba during his senior year in high school when news of the overthrow of the pro-American dictator, Flugencio Batista, reached Guyana (Ewart, 2022). As an undergraduate at UWI, Rodney first visited Cuba a year after the revolution of 1959 and again in early 1962. He returned from these journeys with literature, including Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare (*Zeilig, 2022). A decade later, Rodney fondly recalled his travels, stating, "Because I was with Cuban students, I got some insight at an early period into the tremendous excitement of the Cuban Revolution. One must live with a revolution to get its full impact, but the next best thing is to get there and see a people attempting to grapple with real problems of development" (Rodney, 1990, p. 18).

When Rodney arrived in late 1968 to live with the revolution, Castro's regime had taken a dramatic turn, having launched the Revolutionary Offensive to tackle the issue of underdevelopment (Kapcia, 2008; Farber, 2011, 2018). Inspired by the economic ideas of Che Guevara, this new campaign aimed to end Cuba's decade of economic crisis, rendered worse by the American embargo and failed attempts to invest mechanisation of agriculture. It came

to epitomise the state idea of voluntarism, which conveyed that mass mobilisation of volunteers could compensate for the shortages of labour and experts. To gain control over the workforce and production, Castro's state initiated an aggressive campaign of nationalisation, taking over 55,600 small to medium enterprises (Kapcia, 2008, p. 56). The campaign's ideology, influenced by Che Guevara's "New Man" concept, advocated for total commitment and sacrifice to defend the revolution under siege (Kapcia, 2008, p. 107). In January 1969, the Offensive further led to the mobilisation of labour to harvest 10 million tons of sugar for export (Kapcia, 2008; Farber, 2011, 2018).

Patricia remembers Rodney's enthusiasm about Cuba's progress, an optimism that remained untarnished as he left before witnessing the Offensive's downturn. "He was very excited about the Cuban revolution", she recalled citing Rodney's letters to her (Rodney, 2022). "Given my profession as a nurse, Walter shared his admiration for the reorganisation of Cuban's health care system", she said. "Walter was doing a lot of writing and reflecting", Patricia revealed (Rodney, 2022). She also hinted at Walter's struggle with stationery shortages and broader material scarcities due to the American embargo on Cuba: "He wrote in whatever paper he had in his hands, mainly on napkins", she specified to Cuban scholar Zuleica Romay (Guerra, 2022, p. 31). The result of this diligent labour was a manuscript that no one can find today. "We're still looking for the manuscript. It's called Black Struggles…somehow it got misplaced". Patricia said, "Lots of things got lost along the way" (Interview with P.Rodney, 2022).

Africans abroad in Jamaica

While the manuscript indeed appears to be lost, the Atlanta Archives hosts two unanalysed draft chapters of a manuscript Rodney wrote from Cuba. The drafts titled *Africans Abroad in Jamaica* and *Africans Abroad in the USA* articulate Rodney's dialectical utopianism by advocating for Black Power guerrilla revolutions in Jamaica and the United States. The first chapter reads like a sequel to Rodney's *The Groundings with My Brothers* (2019). Rodney

delivers a more vivid depiction of the contradictions of post-independence Jamaica than in his previous work. In poetic prose, he explains how the collusion between the local elite and Western companies through foreign investment and development programmes has intensified wealth inequalities:

> Black people in the Kingston slums can glance up and see the private mansions which the local capitalists are building on the hillsides, each at the cost of thousands of immoral pounds, luxury hotels are never very far from the shacks of the local population in the tourist resort areas; American cars of the latest model pass by as workers in the hot sun and the hot tar are waiting on the inefficient capitalist bus (Rodney, no date a).

Rodney's class anger permeates in both *Africans Abroad* and *Groundings*, yet his unpublished manuscript signals a shift in his political focus. In *Groundings*, he discussed African history, critiqued Jamaica's elite, and advocated for black empowerment. Conversely, in *Africans Abroad*, Rodney slightly relegates the theme of Black Power to focus on the class struggle, issues of (under)development, and the question of revolutionary violence (Rodney, no date a). That he was addressing a Cuban audience unfamiliar with Black Power might partly explain his shift in emphasis.

Moreover, Rodney's new emphasis stemmed from his witnessing of the 1968 Revolutionary Offensive in Cuba. It conveyed that he implicitly perceived Cuba as what Harvey called the "utopia of the spatial form", akin to Thomas More's Island utopia (Harvey, 2000, pp. 160–174). This unique perspective allowed Rodney to refer to Cuba as a model through which he could critique the contradiction of Jamaican society and envision the possibility of an emancipated future. Harvey writes: "Utopian schemas of spatial form typically open up the construction of the political person to critique. They do so by imagining entirely different systems of property rights, living and working arrangements all manifest as entirely different spatial forms and temporal rhythms" (Harvey, 2000, p. 235).

Rodney saw in Cuba an entirely different system at work: a "living symbol of how a country can progress in the direction opposite to the decadence of imperialism" (Rodney, no

date a). He claimed that Cuba's industrialisation empowered farmers and workers, enabling them to "control their own destinies" by improving living standards (Rodney, no date a). Accordingly, he argued that Jamaica should chart a course out of underdevelopment by emulating Cuba's example, which meant "breaking away from imperialist domination", addressing national wealth inequalities, modernising society through technological innovation, and educating the masses (Rodney, no date a). Rodney (no date a) offers extensive contrasts of Cuba's social achievements with the degradation in Jamaican capitalism. He praised Cuba for attaining high literacy rates, providing free education and healthcare, and prohibiting prostitution and gambling. Meanwhile, he criticised neo-colonial Jamaica for its low literacy rates, inadequate healthcare, the proliferation of sex tourism, and widespread corruption (Rodney, no date a).

Acknowledging that Cubans achieved their social benefits through guerrilla struggle, Rodney suggests that Jamaicans could follow a similar path. Rodney's utopianisms envision violent revolution as a means to resolve the social conflicts in Jamaica. Throughout the draft, Rodney (no date a) argues that violence, rooted in historical resistance and contemporary class struggles, is intrinsic to Jamaican society. He supports his argument by providing examples, ranging from the peasant Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 to the Caribbean labour unrest of 1938, which brought the colonial system to a standstill. In analysing the events of 1968, Rodney (no date a) perceives the October riots as a crucial stride towards the development of revolutionary consciousness among Jamaicans. He even offered a personal reflection on the significance of his own Black Power activism in that process of radicalisation, explaining why the government banned him:

> It turned out that Rodney was regarded by the government as a threat because he put himself at the service of a black power movement both within the university and outside, and because he was prepared to discuss the question of revolutionary violence as a means of ending injustice (Rodney, no date a).

Rodney wrote about himself in the third person, indicating that he was engaged in writing historical research, not a personal memoir. This approach highlights his dedication to documenting the events leading to the "Rodney riots" of 1968 and his importance therein in putting the question of armed struggle before Jamaicans.

He further argues that the uprising and its brutal suppression played a pivotal role in prompting students and academics to reassess their passive commitment to non-violence, compelling them to explore alternative possibilities. Rodney especially lauds black lumpenproletariat youth for leading this transformation, commending their adeptness in progressing from mere theoretical discussions about violence to its practical application. He writes: "For some hours on October 16, the city of Kingston was in the hands of black youth who exhibited a high degree of creativity and organisational ability. Those brothers took a step forward from theory to practice" (Rodney, no date a). According to Rodney, this spontaneous riot represents the culmination of theoretical and practical advocacy of armed struggle resistance advanced by some groups he knew in Jamaica. He singles out the "the resolute brothers of Montego Bay" who in late 1968 "set three separate fires" causing the disappearance of centres of large-scale commence (Rodney, no date a; see *Internal Security Review*, 1968b).

Rodney also assigned to the Jamaican workers an important role to play in the upcoming upheaval. He enthusiastically celebrates the emergence of independent trade unions beyond the control of elite-led organisations, hailing these grassroots initiatives as "the most remarkable advancement in the labour movement since 1938" (Rodney, no date a). In his eyes, these new unions acted as a counterweight to the divisive competition between the major unions, Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and National Workers Union, and their affiliated political parties, the JLP and the PNP, which diverted workers from their collective struggle against the elite (Gray, 1991). Rodney commends these independent unions for seeking to unify workers through the establishment of educational classes and newspapers, suggesting that they

could potentially become “the kind of organization upon which worker power will be based” (Rodney, no date a).

Rodney, however, barely discusses the potential significance of strike action for paralysing the Jamaican economy and toppling the state. He viewed the struggles of the working class as secondary to the strategy of guerrilla warfare. Since his days in Jamaica, Rodney became increasingly convinced about the virtue of this insurgent method. Back in October 1968, two weeks before his banning, he had written a letter to his friend Gordon Rohler. Rodney shared his doubts on whether the Jamaica “situation is explosive” and what was the “appropriate revolutionary line within a Jamaican context” (Lewis, 1994, pp. 43–44). Furthermore, he articulated scepticism about the pertinence of Che Guevara’s teaching on guerrilla warfare in the Jamaican context. Although Rodney revered Guevara as the ideal revolutionary man, he acknowledges that guerrilla insurgency could be “irrelevant to many objective situations (as Che knew)” (Lewis, 1994, pp. 43–44). Yet, after observing the concrete eruption of class violence during the October riots, Rodney turned to theorising about how a guerrilla war might unfold in Jamaica in *Africans Abroad.*

In contemplating this prospect, Rodney’s dialectical utopianism articulates the place and meaning of guerrilla warfare in Jamaica with reference to political movements in the Global South. He anticipates that Jamaica’s armed struggle will draw inspiration from the Cuban revolution and the ongoing Vietnamese resistance against the American army. However, he expects a modification of strategies and tactics to align with the specific local circumstances in Jamaica (Rodney, no date a). Accordingly, Rodney wrote, “The island is not big and mountainous enough to accommodate long-term guerrilla camps. Consequently, the confrontation will have to be both urban and rural at the same time” (Rodney, no date a). This statement showcases Rodney’s independence as a thinker when contemplating guerrilla insurgency. He emphasises the importance of accounting for Jamaica’s unique geographical

and historical peculiarities, as well as establishing connections with urban workers, to achieve victory.

Africans abroad in the USA

In *Africans Abroad*, Rodney's dialectical utopianism extends beyond merely presenting his vision of a prolonged revolution arising from Jamaican societal contradictions (Rodney, no date a, no date b). He embeds this idea within a broader framework of an ongoing Black Power guerrilla revolution on the global stage. With this context, the spring of 1968 uprisings in major American cities, which propelled Black Power into a mass movement among African Americans, played a pivotal role in Rodney's utopian vision (Bloom and Martin, 2013; Rodney, no date b). These events provide the context for Rodney's *Africans Abroad in the USA*, which outlines strategies for successful guerrilla warfare within the United States.

First, Rodney called for the formation of an autonomous black political organisation and the establishment of a black united front. He emphasises the need for a dedicated space where black individuals can convene without external disruptions, pointing out instances where white Americans have historically steered black initiatives towards reformist agendas (Rodney, no date b). Rodney draws upon his participation in the Black Montreal Congress in October 1968 to illustrate this dynamic: "Many black delegates retired from the main conference hall to hold a special session. While gathered in another room, they had to defend the doors against a mob of whites who wanted to come inside", he writes (Rodney, no date b). Rodney did not oppose interracial alliances; however, he expressed frustration with white activists who struggled to recognise the importance of stepping aside at times (Rodney, no date b). His arguments underscored the motivations behind the Black Panther Party and various Black Nationalist organisations rejecting white Americans for membership (Bloom and Martin, 2013).

Secondly, he proposed that the foundation for organising armed resistance should involve forming partnerships with other oppressed groups within the United States, such as

Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, and fostering solidarity with anti-imperialist movements in the Global South (Rodney, no date b). Rodney then presents the third crucial requirement for a successful armed struggle: the development of a political strategy aimed at forging connections with white progressives in the United States and Western countries: "Most fundamental of all the black revolution will have to define a political perspective in relation to white workers", he writes (Rodney, no date b).

His sentiments were quite different when he addressed the Montreal Congress back in October 1968. Contrary to his later views, he advocated for black people to prioritise themselves instead of developing a strategy to convince or "impress" whites (Rodney, 2019, p. 53). This argument was based on his assumption that white workers in metropolitan capitalist countries were complicit in the oppression of black people alongside their ruling class (Rodney, 2001, pp. 67–68). Rodney's pessimism towards interracial alliances remains evident, particularly in his observations of *Africans Abroad*. He noted the absence of conditions for racial solidarity in the USA, highlighting that no white workers had joined the anti-racist and class struggle (Rodney, no date b). However, these ideas are contradicted by passages where Rodney considers the possibility of white workers joining the struggle against racism and capitalism to defend their class interests:

> When white workers join the movement against racism in the USA, they will do so not out of love of blacks but because of their own awareness that their best interest as workers can be served by taking over the means of production in the state, which means an end to capitalism and racism (Rodney, no date b).

In Montreal, Rodney (2001) initially alluded to the possibility of white Americans joining black Americans in the struggle against racism for profound anti-racist reasons. However, the quoted passage reveals that he later clarified these profound reasons as being grounded in objective class interests. Rodney's optimistic statement, made in Cuba in 1969, is

not coincidental. In this setting, he encountered a vivid representation of what a multiracial socialist society should entail:

> The whole of Cuba is reaching out to grasp its total cultural heritage, including that which derived from Africa, but the African descendants are no longer just "African abroad" they are black Cubans who can afford to walk proud because they have their "thing", which they utilised to make the revolution, and which they keep defending the revolution alongside their fellow Cuban citizens (Rodney, no date b).

Cuba solidified Rodney's conviction that a cohesive armed resistance could pave the way for an inclusive society, providing black individuals with a profound sense of pride and inclusion. In the earlier sections of his work, he posits that Cuban society successfully liberated itself from the shackles of slavery and racism, a feat that eluded the United States, where racial inequalities persisted. Rodney suggests that imperialistic oppression played a unifying role in bringing together black and white Cubans, fostering a collective interest that transcended racial divides during the Cuban War of Independence and the 1959 revolution.

Rodney's uncritical utopian support for Castro's state-led socialism overlooked the sinister realities of the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968. The campaign, aimed at revitalising concepts of labour discipline and unwavering dedication to the revolution, concurrently fostered an atmosphere of intolerance towards anything perceived as diverging from the state's ideals. Castro's state sent homosexuals to labour camps. It repressed those who practised Afro-Cuban religions, joined anti-racist discussions, or advocated for Cuban Black Power (Kapcia, 2008; Farber, 2018). The acts of state oppression left Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver, whose exile in Cuba throughout 1969 overlapped with Rodney's visit, disillusioned with the Cuban experiment. In contrast to Rodney, Cleaver challenged the official assertions that Cuba had successfully eradicated racism. Instead, he observed that Cuban officials perceived any mention of lingering racial inequalities on the island as an attempt to undermine the cause of socialism (Gates and Cleaver, 1975, pp. 32–44).

The romantic narrative portraying Cubans overcoming racism through a multiracial struggle served as a source of inspiration for Rodney's political vision. It allowed him to conceive a plausible scenario where capitalist oppression in the United States could eventually unite American workers (Rodney, no date b). Moreover, Rodney's developing theory of revolution, which drew similar conclusions to the theory of Intercommunalism of Black Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton, provides another explanation for his optimism (Newton, 2011, pp. 180–192; Narayan, 2019). The theory relied on the idea that the black community constitutes a revolutionary vanguard, serving as "the only serious threat to the powerful capitalist structure [within the USA]". He argued that the black struggle would destabilise capitalism and create the conditions for winning over other workers to the revolution (Newton, 2011; Rodney, no date b). In his scenario, black revolutionaries play the leading role, yet the success of the revolution depends ultimately on racial solidarity. Rodney even criticises Black Nationalists who think that organising the black minority is an end itself:

> There are black militants who believe that blacks will carry through a "minority revolution" from start to finish because they do not expect to win the support of white workers [within the USA]. However, this view underestimates the kinds of changes, which are possible once a revolutionary situation comes into existence, and it also gives very little weight to trends of revolutionary interracial alliance (Rodney, no date b).

Rodney interpreted the Vietnamese resistance against the U.S. invasion and the multiracial American anti-war movement as evidence supporting his optimistic theory. The Vietnamese struggle galvanised solidarity among the oppressed and spurred white Western workers to denounce the war's destruction and cost. To support his argument, Rodney references a dialogue between two conscious white workers. "'The blacks got the real resistance going against the machine'", Rodney quotes, "'if we want to help ourselves, it's time we helped them by getting our lily-white ass into their fight, the most meaningful anti-war struggle in this country'" (Rodney, no date b). With this example, Rodney argues that black and white workers can build an alliance through the anti-war campaign. Yet, his central

contention is black people should emulate the example set by Vietnamese fighters by sparking a definite struggle that will awaken the passive white American workers.

While Rodney did not conclude the second chapter of *Africans Abroad,* a clear hierarchy of geographical scales of resistance emerged through his dialectical utopianism. In his realistic vision of liberation, he foresaw that the guerrilla struggle of Vietnamese peasants against American imperialism could have seismic consequences, deepening the class contradiction with the United States and opening the possibility of a multiracial revolution led by Black Power activists. In turn, the urban guerrilla uprising in the United States would feed into the Jamaican context, inspiring a definite violent struggle waged by the black masses against the elite. This, in turn, would set the Caribbean on the emancipatory path to building Cuban state-led socialism (Rodney, no date b, no date a). In line with the perspectives of Harvey and Williams, Rodney understood that achieving socialist universalism involved addressing a variety of location-specific demands and issues (Harvey, 2000). He once wrote, "International solidarity grows out of struggles in different localities" (Rodney, 1971b, p. 6). Through this statement, he elucidated Che Guevara's call to create "two, three – many Vietnams" in geographical terms (Rodney, 1971b, p. 6).

The aftermath of 1968

This chapter reveals the profound interconnectedness of local and global struggles of 1968 encapsulated through the lens of Rodney's role as an insurgent architect of Black Power, a dialectical utopian thinker. Rodney's intervention in Jamaica after several years of absence could not simply be cast as coincidence; it was the logical consequence of the development of Jamaican and Caribbean society. His Black Power praxis accelerated the unfolding of a conflict between the Jamaican people and the pro-imperialist elite. The "Rodney riots" not only reflected the global movements that emerged in 1968 but also announced an era of insurgency in the Caribbean. His dialectical utopianism from Cuba actualised the possibility of a guerrilla

revolution led by Black Power activists in Jamaica and the United States. Drawing from contradiction of imperialism in the Third World, specifically in Jamaica and Cuba, Rodney grounded his radical vision in the realities of his time.

His vision, however, did not match reality. In Jamaica, the Rodney riots, which ended with the deaths of three people and over 100 arrests, had mixed results. Although they symbolised a moment of unity between radical middle-class students, the unemployed, and working-class youths, they did not result in an enduring mass movement in Jamaica. The decentralised character of Black Power in Jamaica showed that the lumpenproletariat lacked the organisational coherence and discipline to direct a political movement in their own interest. The lumpenproletariat's condition of existence as slum dwellers on the margins of society was synonymous with their isolation from the collective process of production that gave the working class its organised power to disrupt the system. While the riots discredited the rule of Hugh Shearer's JLP, they left a political vacuum allowing Michael Manley's PNP to channel Black Power into mass support for its electoral victory in 1972 (Lewis, 2014).

Caribbean Black Power nevertheless peaked with the Trinidadian Black Power revolution. Between February and April 1970, the Trinidadian revolution unfolded, beginning with mass demonstrations and strikes against state repression and culminating in an army mutiny that almost overthrew dictator Eric Williams. The Walter Rodney Papers reveal that Rodney's writing and activism in Jamaica influenced the National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), the student Black Power organisation that led the movement. On 31 March, NJAC secretary Mankal Daaga (formerly Ralston Granger) wrote to Rodney expressing his sincere appreciation for Rodney's praxis:

> Our organisation has recognised the tremendous amount of work that you have done during your stay in Jamaica and your awakening of the Black People's consciousness to the Oppressive and Neo-colonial Regimes before your expulsion from Jamaica. We would like you to know

> that your book *Grounding with my brothers* is one that we highly recommend to our brothers (Daaga, 1970).

Years later, in 1972, Rodney admitted that events in Trinidad and Tobago took him by surprise. In a speech, he said, "Just recently after I had left the Caribbean [in June 1969], back in Africa, I kept saying to myself Jamaica first, the forces are ready....Trinidad and Guyana, we have to wait. But the people of Trinidad did not wait. They moved….I did not see they would go that far so fast" (Rodney, 1972, p. 6). The sudden eruption and defeat of the Jamaican and Trinidad uprisings led Rodney to identify the question of organisation as the burning issue facing the insurgent architects in the Third World. "If only there was some other organisational structure to take power", he said about the Trinidadian revolution (Rodney, 1972, p. 12). This preoccupation would become increasingly prominent upon his return to Tanzania in June 1969, and particularly during his activism in Guyana in the late 1970s.

Nevertheless, in light of the contemporary existence of racism, wealth inequalities, and imperialism, Rodney's radical vision in 1968 serves as a call to reimagine the possibilities for struggle on various geographical scales, and to actively engage in the fight against oppression. In many respects, it is not necessary to look far for examples. Radical scholar Okoth (2023) has recently discussed the global resonance of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement, sparked by the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The movement's far-reaching impact shaped similar uprisings, such as the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria against police brutality. Similar to what Harvey (1996, 2000) observed in his consideration of Raymond Williams's concept of militant particularism, Okoth sees that both movements, while carrying global aims, developed their own distinct languages, shaped by the particularities of their local contexts. He writes:

> The political vocabulary of activists in the United States was sometimes useful, but #EndSARS activists had a different object of discontent. While the George Floyd rebellion directed its demands at an imperialist and systemically racist state, #EndSARS confronted a neo-colonial

> state, whose politicians, judiciary, military, and police were mostly Black too (Okoth, 2023, p. 51).

Rodney's articulation of Black Power in the Caribbean provided a localised expression of the global revolts of 1968, which penetrated Jamaican society. The events of that year, especially through the lens of Rodney's activism, demonstrate how an individual's political development is shaped by the interaction between local and global insurgencies. Rodney's dialectical utopianism, influenced by Cuba's political vision, could evolve into a more radical framework for insurrections. Though not without flaws and imperfections, it remains a significant example of how leaps in political consciousness can emerge during periods of global revolt.

Chapter 5: A Third World Marxist in the mecca of African liberation

For a moment, Walter Rodney thought he was going to be expelled from Tanzania, remembered his wife, Patricia (Interview with P.Rodney, 2022). On 13 December 1969, he read a scathing tirade against him in the government newspaper, *The Nationalist*, written by President Julius Nyerere himself (*The Nationalist*, 1969c). He did not anticipate such a reaction to the speech he delivered three days earlier at the Second Seminar of East and Central African Youth, published in the same paper the day before. Speaking on the *Ideology of the African Revolution*, Rodney (1969c) called for the violent overthrow of African governments run by the petty-bourgeois class, which colluded with imperialism and betrayed the national liberation struggle. He stated, "The task of the revolutionary is to oppose counter-revolutionary violence [of petty-bourgeois governments] with revolutionary violence" (Rodney, 1969c). Nyerere, however, deemed this criticism of independent nations "completely unacceptable" (*The Nationalist*, 1969c). He responded to Rodney with a warning, writing that those who insist on advocating violence "will suffer the consequences of their indulgence" (*The Nationalist*, 1969b).

According to Patricia Rodney (2022), Benjamin Mkapa, the editor of *The Nationalist* and a friend of Walter's, had first informed them of Nyerere's response. He later reassured them that there was no threat of expulsion, alleviating their worries. Despite Rodney being chastised by the president for overstepping his boundaries as a guest, Rodney continued as a lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) for the next five years, where he wrote his famous *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, published in 1972. Nevertheless, this controversial episode exemplifies the tension inherent to the mission Rodney assigned himself. His task went beyond a mere call for violence; he aimed to convince Africans to engage with Marxism (scientific socialism) as a powerful guide for their national liberation against

imperialism. As Rodney (1969) stated: “Once we accept that Africa is part of the capitalist system, then an ideology which arises out of capitalism is relevant - scientific socialism…shows the weakness and contradiction of capitalism. And it points the way towards the building of a just socialist society”. In this chapter, I analyse the ideological and practical friction between Rodney’s revolutionary aspirations and the evolving politics of Tanzanian socialism.

I thereby look at how Rodney strove to promote Marxism in dialogue with Tanzanian national liberation during his first and second visits from 1966 to 1967 and 1969 to 1972. I first argue that Rodney perceived the Tanzanian one-party state as a genuine driver for socialism and anti-imperialism. During that period, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), led by the nation’s first president, Julius Nyerere, seemed committed to implementing popular reforms, hosting African liberation movements, and forging ties with anti-imperialists in the Global South. Through his participation in efforts to build socialism at the university, Rodney aligned his politics with those contained in TANU’s Arusha Declaration. However, he gradually developed non-conformist support for TANU’s rule as he perceived the student-professional intellectual class that inherited the colonial state as ideologically divided. One faction, led by progressives supporting Nyerere, aimed to align with the masses by severing ties with metropolitan powers, while moderates sought to slow down the building of socialism in Tanzania (Rodney, 1967b, 1971c). For Rodney (1971c), building socialism rested first and foremost upon winning the battle of ideas.

My second contention is that Rodney and the radical students on campus found themselves locked in a tug-of-war with the one-party state as a result of their non-conformist support. As they attempted to pull the Tanzanian state to the left on matters of foreign and national policy, they encountered stubborn resistance from Nyerere and his party, which pulled in the opposite direction. The pressures from Cold War rivalries and the African liberation

struggle fostered an inconsistent attitude within the one-party state towards left-wing Tanzanians and guests. By virtue of its position as a hub for revolutionary movements and individuals, the one-party state sometimes allowed the creation of radical spaces for anti-imperialist expression, only shutting them down when criticism intruded on the interests of the TANU state. These inconsistencies revealed the contradictions within TANU's anti-colonial nation-building during the Cold War, gradually influencing Rodney's own political evolution.

Drawing on Tanzanian newspapers, interviews, and archival documents, this chapter examines Rodney's role in Tanzania's postcolonial national liberation. As in the previous chapter, this analysis focuses on the relationship between the individual and the movement of society. However, it refrains from making explicit claims about the dialectical method. This choice reflects my effort to avoid a deterministic application of the dialectic as a ready-made formula imposed on historical facts. Instead, I direct readers' attention to the gradual build-up of tensions between Rodney and Tanzania's one-party state. This approach sets the stage for the next chapter, where the dialectical principle reflecting the patterns of change in Rodney's politics will be revealed and discussed in depth. By presenting the material in this manner, I aim to remain faithful to the research process itself, which involved deducing the dialectic from the evidence gathered, connected, and analysed across various sources.

The first section, covering July 1966 to November 1967, examines Rodney's decision to settle in Tanzania and his engagement with the Arusha Declaration at the University of Dar es Salaam. The second section, spanning from June 1969 to late 1971, explores how Rodney's responses to changes in Tanzania were influenced by his travels to Jamaica and Cuba. I also show how his activism with radical students involved bold attempts to influence Tanzania's national and foreign policy, which tested the limits of TANU's project.

Rodney and the anti-imperialist politics of the Arusha Declaration

On 12 July 1966, Rodney settled for the first time in Tanzania with his wife Patricia and newborn son Shaka to teach history at the University College of Dar es Salaam (Boukari-Yabara, 2018). In making this decision, he inserted himself into a chain of objective historical-geographical forces—both preceding and exceeding him—expressed by the uneven postcolonial developments in Tanzania and recently independent African nations. While in Dar es Salaam, he would sharpen his political praxis through the relations he developed with individuals connected to social movements and classes seeking to make their own historical geography. Rodney landed in Tanzania mere months after earning his PhD in African history from SOAS, University of London, with a desire to learn about African independence and draw lessons for Guyana and the Caribbean, where he planned to settle (Rodney, 1990). Like many African American and Caribbean intellectuals before him, such as Marcus Garvey, W E B Du Bois, C L R James and George Padmore, he saw the liberation of Africa as the backbone to the success of anti-imperialism and anti-racist struggle in the Americas (Lewis, 1998; Adi, 2018; Boukari-Yabara, 2017).

Rodney's arrival in Dar es Salaam marked the convergence between his own motivations and the uncertain future of African independence, which most nations had won in the early 1960s. Earlier that year, on 24 February 1966, he had observed the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana and a key organiser of the Pan-African movement. Reflecting upon his decision to live in Tanzania, Rodney wrote, "The fall of Nkrumah created a vacuum, we [black people] immediately sought another model–another point of attraction on the continent" (Rodney, 1974a, p. 38). Nkrumah, who had envisioned the United States of Africa, was popular abroad but increasingly regarded as a dictator at home for his repressive measures. He was compelled into exile by a faction of the Ghanaian elite supported by the CIA (Biney, 2011). This group aimed to serve as a local representative for

Western capital rather than pursuing economic independence (James, 1977). Nkrumah's demise reflects a wave of successful military coups throughout 1966 that engulfed the newly independent nations of Nigeria, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) and the Central African Republic. Even governments committed to Pan-Africanism and socialism, such as Algeria under Ben Bella, were ousted by coups (McGowan and Johnson, 1984). Thus, African independence was being negated from the start.

Nyerere's Tanzania offered some continued hope for intellectuals and activists like Rodney, who were committed to self-determination. In the years leading to independence in 1961, Nyerere and his party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), had earned a progressive image abroad by pursuing a foreign policy based on non-alignment and Pan-Africanism (Bjerk, 2011, 2015). Non-alignment expressed a recognition that African independence must assert itself in a world characterised by the superpower, imperialist rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Pan-Africanism translated into Nyerere and TANU's initiative for regional unity, as well as diplomatic and militant support for African liberation movements fighting colonialism. On 17 September 1958, they founded the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECA), which mobilised for the boycott of Apartheid South African goods. Five years later, the Organization of African Unity's (OAU) Liberation Committee erected its headquarters in Dar es Salaam (Bjerk, 2011).

Nyerere also turned his country into a rear base for liberation movements in Southern and Central Africa as the headquarters of several guerrilla movements sprang up on Nkrumah Street. In 1962, Nyerere supervised the founding of Mozambique's FRELIMO. Tanzania welcomed the exiled hero of the struggle against South African Apartheid, Olivier Tambo, who established training camps for the paramilitary wing of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1958. FRELIMO and the ANC had their offices next to Zimbabwe's rival guerrilla organisations, ZANU-PF and ZAPU, as well as SWAPO of Namibia. By the time Rodney

settled in Dar es Salaam, freedom fighters had gained prominence in the public life of the nation, crowding in bars and cafés of luxury hotels, giving press conferences, hosting political meetings at UDSM, and sometimes working in the TANU administration (Roberts, 2022). Dar es Salaam, therefore, emerged as a capital of African liberation, which also came with its own risk.

Six months into his first stay in Tanzania, Rodney witnessed Nyerere announce a new path to national development. On 5 February 1967, the president delivered a fiery speech introducing the Arusha Declaration, in which he explained TANU's commitment to the policy of socialism and self-reliance. In his tone of indignation against imperialism, he called for "a revolution which brings to an end our weakness so that we are never again exploited, oppressed, or humiliated" (Nyerere, 1968a, p. 231). The declaration announced a break with imperialism, the end of the Five-Year Plan (1964-69), which had pushed for a development strategy reliant on foreign investment and aid (Nyerere, 1968a). The declaration prepared the ground for the swift nationalisation of the economy. One day after its announcement, TANU nationalised the foreign bank. Weeks later, the party nationalised or seized substantial shares in six import-export companies, seven affiliates of multinationals and eight flour milling businesses (Coulson, 2013, p. 217). The Arusha Declaration was more than a political manoeuvre; it responded to a long class struggle unfolding against the backdrop of economic stagnation.

After negotiating Tanzania's independence in 1961, President Nyerere pursued a pro-Western development path based on the advice of American advisor Arthur D. Little and the World Bank (Wilson, 2013, p. 71). His government's 1964 Five-Year Plan aimed to attract foreign investment and boost exports for industrialisation, but it failed to secure significant investments (Coulson, 2013). Nyerere concurrently faced resistance from civil servants, trade union leaders, and army officers who advocated for a faster Africanisation of the bureaucracy and the economy to rectify colonial injustices. TANU, therefore, increased the number of

Africans in mid to high-level civil-service positions from a quarter to about three-quarters by 1967 (Roberts, 2022). These reforms, however, were timid. Economic and military affairs remained untouched by Africanisation due to a lack of skilled manpower. While TANU remained hesitant, the cause for Africanisation became enmeshed with workers' demands for higher wages and working conditions, as trade union leaders organised powerful strikes to pressure the government.

Nyerere and TANU responded by banning strikes and multipartyism in 1963; they even felt confident enough to announce the end of Africanisation on 7 January 1964 (Shivji, 1976, 2020, pp. 16–18). However, two weeks later, soldiers from the Tanganyika Rifles staged a two-week revolt due to TANU's failure to replace European officers with Africans and address the poor working conditions in the army. Fearing his demise, Nyerere implored the British Marines to suppress the mutiny (Kamata et al., 2020). To consolidate power in his one-party state, he disbanded the King African Rifles and suppressed dissent through the arrest of 200 trade union leaders and 500 civilians. Independent trade unions were banned, and their functions were absorbed into the state-controlled National Union of Tanzania Workers (Shivji et al., 2020). The mutiny that posed a threat to Nyerere's rule was inspired by the 1964 Zanzibar revolution, which had occurred just weeks earlier, causing concern among American Cold War interests in East Africa. Fuelled by urban unemployed youth and socialist Umma Party fighters, the Zanzibari upheaval ousted the British-backed Omani Sultanate (Wilson, 2007, 2013). Under pressure from the British and Americans, who feared the emergence of a "Cuba of Africa", Nyerere merged Tanganyika with Zanzibar in 1964 to stifle the revolution, giving rise to Tanzania (Babu, 2002, p. xvi; Wilson, 2013).

In between the mutiny, the Zanzibar merger, and the coups in Africa in 1966, Nyerere restructured the Tanzanian army and planned to implement compulsory National Service for university graduates. Formed with Israeli assistance, the National Service aimed to enhance

national unity to prevent coups and insurgency. It became a prerequisite for securing high-ranking official positions, consolidating the one-party state's control over job allocations in both the army and bureaucracy (Shivji et al., 2020). During their 18 months of service, Tanzanians spent five months labouring in the countryside for 20 shillings a month before returning to work on reduced salaries (Yahya-Othman et al., 2020; interview with Sheriff, 2023). The harsh terms in the official proposal for National Service sparked the largest student protest against the state.

On 20 October 1966, 412 students, protesting the government's proposal, marched ten kilometres from the university to the State House. The protesters, representing over two-thirds of Tanzanian students and some sympathetic East African comrades, carried placards and banners, chanting slogans expressing anger and deception. When they reached the State House, they were met by riot police, the press corps, and President Nyerere. The president's unexpectedly harsh response led to the expulsion of 393 students. Nyerere and TANU eventually pardoned most of the students in July 1967 (Ivaska, 2005, 2011). Nyerere's biographer, Saida Yahya-Othman, argued that the demonstration pushed the president to finalise the Arusha Declaration and tour the country to present the document (Yahya-Othman et al., 2020). A few weeks after Arusha, Nyerere published "Education for Self-Reliance", presenting his policy to turn schools and universities into bastions for socialism and national unity (Nyerere, 1968b). Tanzania's national liberation struggles shaped Rodney's socialism and the mission he assigned to himself when he settled on campus.

Rodney and radical initiatives on the Hill

The student protest and the Arusha Declaration raised a national debate regarding education and socialist development. What is the role of the university in an underdeveloped country? What is the meaning of socialist ideology and development? As historian Ivaska notes, this debate represented a "moment heralding the end of a stridently elitist university, one

that was failing in its role to produce servants of the nation, and the beginning of a radical campus, a people's university" (Ivaska, 2005, p. 86). In this context, Rodney threw himself behind Nyerere and TANU's endeavour to decolonise the university and mobilise students towards the imperative of socialist transformation. Yet, Rodney was aware and cautious of the limitation imposed on his participation in Tanzanian politics as a guest in Tanzania, and one who did not speak the language of the people. He wrote: "My political role in that situation was fairly well-defined: to stay within the university walls, first and foremost, to develop and struggle at the level of ideas, to relate to the student population" (Rodney, 1990, p. 39).

Being a Marxist and an African historian, Rodney was prepared to challenge pro-capitalist and colonial ideas on campus. He recognised that the University of Dar es Salaam had much in common with his alma mater the University of the West Indies as they both mimic Western and British elitist models of higher education (Lewis, 1998, p. 134). In an essay, Rodney showed his full awareness of the challenges concerning transforming the university by the spring of 1967. He wrote:

> The new University College of Dar es Salaam epitomised capitalist aspirations and distinctions within Tanzania. The university staff, like so many of the other teachers above primary school level, were Europeans or Americans. This was decisive in ensuring that the schools would not produce challenges to the international capitalist system and to the burgeoning political class which was a reflection of neo-colonialism (Rodney, 1968a, p. 75).

The university was nicknamed "the Hill" or "Mlimani" (mountain in Swahili) because it stood on a rise overlooking Dar es Salaam. Tanzanian students, mostly hailing from humble peasant backgrounds, found themselves suddenly immersed in relative luxury, living away from the bustling and poorer neighbourhoods of Dar es Salaam (Ivaska, 2005). The university provided them with individual homes, along with hired personnel for cleaning and laundry services. Additionally, the students enjoyed breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the cafeteria (Interview with Mbilinyi, 2023; Interview with Sheriff, 2023). Majorie Mbilinyi (2023), a feminist white American academic and acquaintance of the Rodneys, recalled that the lecturing

staff enjoyed an even more comfortable lifestyle in family housing tucked behind one of the side streets off the main road. Walter employed a helper to care for Shaka, while Patricia worked at Muhimbili Hospital in town (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). Such was life on campus, where expatriates accounted for 219 people out of a total of 333 academic staff in 1971 (excluding research and teaching assistants) (University of Dar es Salaam, 1972). As Rodney (1968a) mentioned, there was an overwhelming number of Europeans and North Americans among the staff, most of whom were curious about Tanzania's socialist experiment but not committed to it.

Excited to transform UDSM, Rodney engaged in several initiatives to ensure the university supported Tanzania's socialist experiment. First, Rodney joined a group of nine expatriate scholars of Marxist persuasion to draft a proposal for a common course in preparation for the *Conference on the Role of the University College in a Socialist Tanzania,* which Nyerere opened as the keynote speaker followed by a speech from TANU ministers (University of Dar es Salaam, 1967). Among the "Group of Nine", was the Italian Giovanni Arrighi, soon to become one of the founders of world-systems theory in the late 1970s. The Canadian Marxist John Saul was becoming a trusted affiliate of FRELIMO and would later strive to mobilise international support for the Mozambican movement (de Bragança and Depelchin, 1988). Together with Rodney, they wanted to build on the range of ideas designed to connect students to the nation-building imperative of Tanzania to build Nyerere's (1968) education for self-reliance.

Their proposal advocated the end of the fragmentation of the academic disciplines encouraged in Western universities, echoing Lewis Gordon's concept of disciplinary decadence (Gordon, 2006). Without this reform, the university could only produce elitist technocrats with a partial understanding of society, whereas an interdisciplinary approach could bring about the "development of an integral and coherent vision of man and society"

(Saul, 1968, p. 100, see 2009). In so doing, the proposal, implicitly stood for the application of the Marxist dialectic to address the fact that bourgeois social science offers a superficial presentation of the social world as a random assortment of fragments. Understanding of the world thus entailed going beneath the appearance of isolated things to grasp their reality. In addition, it involved recognising that reality is an interconnected whole, not a mere aggregate of things. The group conceived a radical curriculum that would impart students with an understanding of capitalism as a totalising economic, social, and cultural system (Saul, 1968).

Two years later, in 1969, the Common Course began as a series of informal lectures in the student union hall. “It was more like a political rally”, recalled Shivji (2023a), “you had people from the government attend”. Concurrently, the Faculty of Law initiated a more vigorous course titled Social Economic Problems of East Africa led by the British scholar Sol Picciotto. In this program, Shivji and fellow students delved into readings by Nkrumah, Fanon, and Marx. Additionally, guest speakers from various departments within the university, including Rodney, contributed to the lectures (Interview with Shivji, 2023a). These courses were precursor to the formation of the Development Studies Department in 1973, which emphasised teaching and researching on Tanzanian and East African development, adhering to TANU socialist policies, and building interdisciplinary partnerships with people and organisations outside the university (Harisch, 2018).

In addition, Rodney became popular among students for his lecture on the Russian Revolution, which introduced many Tanzanian students to the notion of class and class struggle for the first time (Interview with Kaijage, 2023).While taking his students through the main events and actors of the revolution as C L R James had done with him in London, Rodney encouraged his students to draw lessons from the Russian Revolution for Tanzania in the aftermath of the Arusha Declaration. “What is the relevance to all of this [the Russian Revolution] to us in Tanzania in 1967?” he asked his students (Rodney, 1967c). He admired

the October Revolution for representing the first-ever defeat of capitalism and transforming the Soviet Union from an agrarian nation into an industrial powerhouse. He saw in Nyerere's Tanzania the possibility of achieving a similar economic success by cutting ties with Western imperialist powers (Rodney, 2012).

According to Kaijage, Rodney had a considerable influence among history students. He remembers: "We had a party at Professor [Terence] Ranger's house after examinations, I remember him saying with a hint of jealousy: "It's absolutely amazing how much influence Rodney has had on his students". We [the students] began to talk about class struggle in our African history course" (Interview with Kaijage, 2023). And yet, Rodney aspired to more than teaching students. Walter Bgoya remembers that "he wanted them to challenge their conservative white professors" and the elitism on campus (Interview with Bgoya, 2023). Thus, Rodney rejoiced at the emergence of left-wing student organisations associated with the mobilisation and reforms of Nyerere's one-party state.

A critical defence of Tanzanian socialism on student platforms

Rodney often made his most powerful speeches in defence of Tanzania's socialism on platforms organised by the burgeoning student left on campus. He saw that the Arusha Declaration incited left-wing students to create their own initiatives in support of the new anti-imperialist direction. In the summer of 1967, they formed the Socialism Club to defend the declaration against the lecturers who opposed it and spread radical ideas among a largely apathetic student body. One of the leaders of the organisation, Yoweri Museveni, the current longstanding dictator of Uganda, lamented over the status of the Hill. "Apathy towards, and ignorance of many vital questions regarding the interests of the African people were the rule of the day!" notes Museveni (1970, p. 13). He had looked to the Nyerere regime as a beacon of socialism, and anti-imperialism, and expressed here his disappointment at the grim reality he encountered when arriving on campus in July 1967 (Museveni, 1970).

The Tanzanians in the Socialist Club assumed leadership of the recently established Hill-branch TANU Youth League (TYL), which hitherto was perceived as an unpopular and opportunistic organisation aimed at producing an obedient cadre. The incoming radical TYL leadership resonated with students because it refused to be a government mouthpiece. An example of their critical support was organising a teach-in on the Arusha Declaration, where Rodney addressed issues with its implementation. Rodney's speech represented his early preoccupation with the battle of ideas within TANU and his non-conformist support for the party. He lamented that TANU had not done much to turn the tremendous Arusha Declaration into a "programme of action" six months after Nyerere introduced the document (Rodney, 1967b, p. 4). This passivity, as Rodney identified, stemmed from the ideological shortcomings and lack of discipline within TANU's leadership. He, for instance, singled out the hypocrisy of some ministers who pledged support to the declaration while using parliamentary sessions to question why the document prevented them from owning two houses and investing to enrich themselves. "The declaration is poorly perceived and even sometimes attacked under general acclamation", he states (Rodney, 1967b).

What further transpired from his speech, which was republished in *The Nationalist*, was that he had much clearer ideas about how to carry out state socialism than the Tanzanian regime had for itself. In his speech, Rodney proposed that Tanzania embark on "socialist planification" in the way of Cuba, the Soviets, and China (Rodney, 1967b). He suggested that TANU devise regional and local programmes to mobilise the people into cooperative farms in rural areas. Rodney was making his case for increasing agricultural production through the collectivisation of agriculture, at least one year before Nyerere implemented the village settlement policy Ujamaa in the countryside. He even supposed the policy would need to consider the specific problem of each region while reiterating Nyerere's feminist argument that men should work as hard as women (Rodney, 1967b). Rodney's arguments identified the problems and

shortcomings of the Tanzanian state while offering pathways to their resolution. They resonated with students who wanted to actively shape Tanzanian liberation by embracing Marxist ideas rather than the idealism of the Arusha Declaration, which denied the existence of a class struggle.

Under Museveni's leadership, the club transformed itself into the United Student African Revolutionary Front (USARF) in November (Museveni, 1970; Zeilig, 2022). The shift specified a common aspiration among USARF members to be more than a debating society. They aspired to translate ideas into concrete activism on campus and build links with the African liberation movement stationed in Africa. USARF members from Tanzania and East and Southern Africa collaborated with radical expatriate teaching staff to organise events. From 1967 to 1970, the group hosted speakers like Guyanese communist Cheddi Jagan, Trinidadian Marxist C L R James, and Black Power spokesperson Stokely Carmichael. Although formal membership was limited to students, Rodney was invited to become an honorary member (Interview with Shivji, 2023a).

On 18 November 1967, USARF organised a two-day teach-in seminar on the African freedom struggle, its inaugural activity. It thereby aimed to raise awareness on campus of the status of African liberation by inviting representative African liberation movements stationed in Dar es Salaam to present their achievements and struggles, for the first time, to the public (*The Nationalist*, 1967b; *The Nationalist*, 1967a). However, only representatives of the Pan-African Congress of South Africa and the Pan-African Union mustered the courage to speak at the event. The absence of most liberation movements publicly illustrated the tensions and rivalries within and between liberation movements stationed in Dar es Salaam. Days before the event, *The Nationalist* reported that the university carefully split the seminar into two groups to avoid a potential conflict between ZANU and ZAPU, the ANC and PAC (*The Nationalist*, 1967a).

Rodney again stood out as one of the main speakers. His speech called for the integration of the study of socialism and revolution into the academic curriculum as he had previously done. A front-page report of his speech in *The Nationalist* revealed his stance in favour of TANU's compulsory national service proposal: "Dr Rodney proposed that all youth of the nation should be armed and kept in readiness to take their position on the front in defence of the sovereignty of the country and the liberation of Africa" (*The Nationalist*, 1967b). Rodney framed the national service issue as a matter of life and death for all Tanzanians. He expressed the idea that compulsory service afforded young people the opportunity to emulate the military discipline and rigour of the African guerrilla movement in anticipation of imperialist threats.

Rodney played a noteworthy role in aligning the university with Nyerere's Arusha Declaration during his first visit to Tanzania from July 1966 until his departure to the Caribbean in late 1967. Together with student activists and left-wing colleagues, he carried out an ideological battle against the remnants of colonial ideology and the omnipresence of bourgeois thought on campus and within TANU. He would return to Dar es Salaam in June 1969 with a reinvigorated eagerness to learn and contribute to socialism in Tanzania on his own terms.

Rodney reloads the African revolution with guerrilla Marxism

Rodney's allegiance to Tanzanian socialism underwent a noteworthy transformation between his initial visit and his return a year and a half later. On 11 December 1969, only six months into his second visit, Rodney and the USARF found themselves in an ideological tug-of-war with the Tanzanian state. His speech, *The Ideology of the African Revolution*, presented a socialist anti-imperialist stance contrasting with Nyerere's ideas and interests. The Afro-Guyanese historian declared: "The next leap forward in our ideological development will be the realisation that what is true of Portuguese colonialism and white racism is also true of neo-colonialist government in all of Africa – they will only be swept from the face of this continent by the use of revolutionary violence" (Rodney, 1969c). Central to his message was a call to

rally behind the workers and peasants in African states against the rule of a treacherous petty bourgeois class. The next day, Nyerere's editorial vehemently opposed his case of armed revolution: "What makes Dr Rodney…believe he has the right to preach violence and sedition" (*The Nationalist*, 1969b). While Rodney envisioned socialism's triumph in Tanzania hinging on African revolutions, Nyerere, focused on building socialism in Tanzania alone, preferred to preserve the international status quo.

The tug-of-war around Rodney's controversial speech exposed a moment of divergence between his own political development and the trajectory of the Tanzanian state. Rodney's case for revolution reflected the appreciation for guerrilla Marxism he had harnessed abroad. During his nine months in Jamaica from January to October 1968, his Black Power activism sparked fear among the Jamaican elite, which banned him from the country (see Chapter 3). He organised meetings with Rastafarians, unemployed youth, and students, expressing his willingness to discuss "the question of revolutionary violence as a means of ending injustice" (Rodney, no date, a). After his expulsion, he went to Cuba where he encountered a model of state-led socialism far more advanced than Tanzania's and built on the foundation of a victorious guerrilla struggle (Guerra, 2022; Chukwudinma, 2023a).

Upon his return to Dar es Salaam, Rodney immediately committed himself to sharing lessons from the Cuban experience with Tanzanians. On 10 July 1969, he spoke on "the Cuban revolution and its relevance to Africa" at an event organised by the USARF on campus (Hirji, 2017, pp. 106–107). One of the group's new members, Karim Hirji was mesmerised: "He made us laugh and ponder at the same time. His exposition of U.S. imperialism made the case for the essential relevance of the Cuban experience to Africa unimpeachable. I am sure that that evening Walter won over many wavering student minds to the cause of African liberation" (Hirji, 2017, p. 107). Rodney established close friendships with Hirji, Henri Mapolu, and Issa Shivji while reconnecting with students he met during his first visit. The USARF had expanded

its ranks to 20 active members and gathered numerous affiliates. Despite its small size on a campus of over 1,200 students, the USARF influence was substantial, driven by relentless activism. One memorable incident, recounted by Issa Shivji, involved disrupting the elitist Rag Day protest in May 1968, a tradition inherited from Oxford and Cambridge, where students mocked poverty by pretending to be beggars. This event earned the USARF respect as a left-wing organisation on campus (Interview with Shivji, 2023a). The group strove to organise a plethora of activities, as detailed by Hirji:

> A public lecture on "Apartheid and Zionism;" on Wednesday afternoon, the 2nd Vice President of Tanzania, Rashidi Kawawa is scheduled to speak on "The Role of the Youth in Socialist Tanzania." He will be followed by a film show on Vietnam organized by the National Liberation Front of Vietnam; on Thursday, a film show and speeches will mark Che Guevara Day (Hirji, 2010, p. 30).

According to Shivji, these endeavours were always self-financed, often involving late-night mimeographing sessions in the Faculty of Law Cyclostyle room. Rodney participated in many of USARF's activities, including the group's Sunday Marxist ideological classes. In November 1969, he contributed his first article *African Labour under Capitalism* to the USARF's and the campus TYL's joint publication *Cheche*, named after the Bolshevik newspaper *Iskra* (spark) (Rodney, 1969a). Though members of TANU, the radical students had embraced a non-conformist stance toward the one-party state, much to the dismay of party bureaucrats. Influenced by revolutionary literature, they delved into the works of Marx and Lenin, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Amílcar Cabral's *Weapon of Theory*, and Mao's *Little Red Book* (Hirji, 2010). These readings inspired them to scrutinize Tanzania's socialist experiment and its commitment to African liberation. A month later, Rodney emerged as their invaluable ally when speaking on *The Ideology of the African Revolution* at the Second Seminar of East African and Central Youth, organised by Campus TYL and the USARF.

The seminar gathered representatives from the African liberation movement and TANU officials and militants to discuss the prospects, problems and strategies of the African Revolution. Rodney shared a platform with speakers, such as the foreign secretary of the Pan African Congress (PAC) Gora Ebrahim and Tanzania's Vice President Rashid Kawawa (*The Nationalist*, 1969c; Hirji, 2010). In front of a packed auditorium, he not only called for the violent overthrow of the class that had assumed state power following African independence but also exposed its ideological bankruptcy. "The petty-bourgeoisie", he argued, "usually assert that they are choosing the virtues of both capitalism and socialism in order to produce something unique called 'African socialism'.…It is in fact nothing, but the capitalist hyena dressed up in African petty-bourgeois clothes" (Rodney, 1969c). By African socialism, Rodney had in mind the utopian philosophies of Senegalese President Leopold Senghor, Ghana's overthrown president Kwame Nkrumah, or of the slain Kenyan Minister Tom Mboya (Rodney, 1972b). Yet even Nyerere's Ujamaa philosophy claimed affiliation with African socialism (Nyerere, 1987; Zeilig, 2022).

All versions of African socialism refused to consider the advent of socialism as resting on the struggle between antagonistic classes. Instead, they often sourced inspiration from idealised representations of "the African past". Nyerere's Ujamaa, for instance, aspired to revive communal and equalitarian traditional modes of existence, where all members embraced the meaning of hard work (Nyerere, 1987). In essence, African socialism was less concerned with the expropriation of the capitalist class in favour of the exploited workers than binding the entire nation to the will of the state. Rodney's speech invited his audience to appreciate the class realities behind African socialism. This ideology, he argued, enabled the petty-bourgeois class to obscure its objective interest to accumulate wealth and power through the exploitation of African masses and its collusion with foreign capital (Rodney, 1969c).

While Rodney's praxis had become one of supporting class struggles against anti-imperialism, TANU's socialist experiment had mixed results. At first sight, Tanzanian society made some progress in implementing the Arusha Declaration. Between 1967 and 1969, Nyerere and TANU engaged in East Africa's most intensive nationalisation programme (Dias, 1970). In addition to the nationalisation of the banks and the import-export firms, the government had taken over the majority of holdings in the eight manufacturing companies, transferring these shares to the National Development Corporation. In 1969, it had completely acquired the national insurance company, established the Tanzanian Sisal Corporation to manage the nation's main export and was preparing itself to seize the entire wholesale system by February 1970 (Dias, 1970). Furthermore, the policy of Ujamaa, which became synonymous with Tanzanian socialism, had gained momentum in the year Rodney returned. The creation of Ujamaa villages, however, encountered several problems.

First, the project progressed slowly as most farmers refused to move from their individual homesteads into Ujamaa communities. By late 1968, only 180 villages had been created (Ellman, 1975, pp. 318–319). Although Nyerere emphasised persuading peasants, TANU's regional commissioners already forced peasants into these villages during those early days of the land reform. Nyerere published the Presidential Circular No. 1 of 1969 in a bid to hasten the settlement into Ujamaa villages without resorting to force. It directed increased state investment in Ujamaa villages enabling officials to offer social services and incentives, aiming to convince peasants to participate (Coulson, 1977, pp. 90–91). Second, the policy suppressed initiatives from-below, such as the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA)—a successful cash-crop and food-farming settlement of 16 self-governing villages established independently from TANU after independence. While the RDA embodied Nyerere's Ujamaa vision, it came into conflict with the Tanzanian state's ambition to centralise decision-making regarding matters of production (Coulson, 1977; Shivji et al., 2020).

Rodney and TANU's "muddled" non-alignment policy

In 1969, the shortcomings of Ujamaa socialism were not yet obvious to Rodney. His *Ideology of the African Revolution* exempted Nyerere and TANU from his criticism directed at African regimes. Rodney believed that Tanzania stood as the exception in Africa because it was run by a progressive petty bourgeoisie committed to breaking with imperialism through nationalisation and the Ujamaa villages (Rodney, 1969c). However, his speech raised strong criticism towards TANU's contradictory foreign policy of non-alignment. "There continues to be muddled thinking on non-alignment", he said (Rodney, 1969c). Arguing for Tanzanian non-alignment to take a more anti-Western stance, Rodney complained about the equal treatment Tanzania gave to both Cold War camps: "To believe that progressive elements can, on the one hand, encourage the American capitalist and the West German neo-fascist alongside workers' states on the other hand is to make a serious mistake which could delay the emancipation of our people for many years" (Rodney, 1969c). Rodney's critique underlined how the policy of non-alignment led to many contradictory allegiances rather than asserting Tanzanian independence.

Nyerere's balancing act avoided public alliances with Cold War powers and accepted aid from any nation that refrained from imposing conditions on Tanzania (Shivji et al., 2020; Roberts, 2022). As Rodney suggested, Nyerere played into American hands, favouring diplomatic and economic ties with West Germany over the German Democratic Republic (GDR). By August 1968, TANU's relationship with East Germany had strained. It accused the GDR of meddling in Tanzanian affairs, promoting propaganda against its ally in the non-aligned movement: Mao's China. It further opposed the GDR and Russia over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, allowing the TYL to protest in front of the Soviet Embassy (Roberts, 2022). In the same year, Nyerere restored diplomatic relations with Britain, which

had been severed in 1965 following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by white settlers in Zimbabwe (Pallotti, 2009, p. 70).

Nevertheless, Nyerere occasionally took a stance against the United States and the West. By 1967, for instance, he expelled the U.S. Peace Corps, welcomed a delegation from Vietnam, and actively encouraged protests against the American invasion (Rodney, 1969a). He permitted the Soviet Union to smuggle weapons through Tanzania to socialist liberation movements, namely FRELIMO. At the same time, he refused aid from the Soviet Union, which had critiqued the utopian socialism advocated in the Arusha Declaration. Instead, TANU turned to the pro-western Scandinavian countries for aid and trade and to Communist China, which confronted U.S. imperialism (Bienefeld, 1975; Shivji et al., 2020, pp. 85–87). The decision to engage with China was influenced by the fact that China did not impose political conditions on its aid, providing Tanzania with support without compromising its sovereignty. Nyerere's foreign policy thus reflected a delicate balancing act, navigating the complexities of Cold War geopolitics.

The vacillations of Nyerere's foreign policy reflect both economic imperatives and security concerns. Following the Arusha Declaration, Tanzania increased its dependency on foreign aid and loans from Western countries, despite TANU's rhetoric of building socialism through self-reliance (Coulson, 2013). The lack of results from the Ujamaa villagisation policy coupled with the collapse of the sisal exports market between 1964-71 bought more pressure on Nyerere's Tanzania (Bienefeld, 1975, p. 255; Coulson, 1977, pp. 88–89). Simultaneously, Nyerere and TANU grappled with the challenges of managing the behaviour of African liberation movements on Tanzanian soil and navigating the Cold War dynamics they attracted. As they solidified their status as a centre for African liberation, they grew increasingly concerned about potential subversion by imperialist powers that could threaten their rule (Roberts, 2022). In response to these challenges, Nyerere prioritised maintaining positive

relationships with African countries through organisations like the OAU and the Mulungushi Club, which at the time included the pro-Western dictatorship of Mobutu's Zaire (*The Nationalist*, 1969b; Campbell, 2010, p. 49).

Rodney criticised this approach, warning that it would be a mistake for TANU to unite with "the murderers of Patrice Lumumba" (Rodney, 1969c). His concern was that forming Pan-African unity with petty-bourgeois heads of state rather than aligning with the African masses could be detrimental to African liberation. Nyerere, unsurprisingly perhaps, accused Rodney of wanting to cause havoc: "We shall not aid the African revolution by allowing revolutionary fervour to spill beyond our borders…and creating hatred towards this country [Tanzania]" (*The Nationalist*, 1969a). This reaction to Rodney's internationalism reflected that 1969 had been a tumultuous year for the African Revolution.

When Rodney returned to Dar es Salaam in June, the Cold War city had become an unstable mecca. First, it was marked by internal divisions among guerrilla movements headquartered in the city, impairing their military offensives across East and Southern Africa. For example, SWAPO and the ANC held conferences to address personal and strategic divisions within their movements. Secondly, it had become a city of spies as the CIA and Portuguese secret police roamed the city (Roberts, 2022). Rodney's UDSM colleague Ned Alpers who befriended FRELIMO leader Eduardo Mondlane and his wife Janet at a market in 1967, recalled: "After I met the Mondlanes…two days later there was a knock on our door, and it was Eduardo Mondlane who had already found out through his network that I wasn't a CIA agent. Believe me. There were CIA agents at the university" (Alpers, 2022). Thirdly, it was a place where counterrevolutionaries openly and covertly conspired against their leaders, catching even cautious figures like Mondlane off guard (Roberts, 2022).

The three aspects of Dar es Salaam's instability played out in the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane in February 1969 (Roberts, 2022). Although Rodney's speech did not

mention the leadership crisis that engulfed FRELIMO, he appears to have been familiar with it (Yahya-Othman, 2013, p. 355). He had met Mondlane and grew closer to the leaders, such as Marcelino Dos Santos, and future Mozambican president Joaquim Chissano after his return to Dar es Salaam (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022; Interview with Bgoya, 2023). Alpers recalled: "In 1967, Eduardo [Mondlane] wrote a name down somewhere in my papers, telling me to see his rival, Lazaro Kavandame. Years later, at FRELIMO parties, we were chanting 'Down with Kavandame'" (Interview with Alpers, 2022). Kavandame's ethnic nationalism led to the Makonde people's separation from FRELIMO in northern Mozambique, disrupting crucial northern front operations. The split, expressed by Kavandame's opposition to FRELIMO's socialism and alliance with the Soviet Union, escalated tensions. Accused of collaborating with the Portuguese secret service, Kavandame's conflict with FRELIMO persisted despite TANU's mediation attempts, culminating in Mondlane's murder (Roberts, 2022).

Nyerere's editorial, "Revolutionary Hot Air", criticised Rodney's speech amidst local tensions, fuelled by events like Mondlane's assassination that brought violence to Tanzania. Facing Cold War pressures and African liberation challenges, Nyerere's one-party state sought to assert control by monitoring and restricting the freedom of expression for Marxist students and staff, both Tanzanians and guests. Appearing on the seminar's last day, Nyerere's editorial shook the USARF as it indirectly accused them of promoting sedition (*The Nationalist*, 1969a). Fearing a potential ban, the USARF cancelled its plans to include seminar contributions in *Cheche*'s second issue. At midnight, the group received a tip that some members would be arrested for cyclostyling the conference papers. Overwhelmed by panic, USARF's George Hajivanis and Ramzan Meghji. disposed of the incriminating evidence by burning the copies. "Revolutionary Hot Air" had suffocated radicals (Hirji, 2010).

Feeling compelled to clarify his stance, Rodney answered Nyerere in *The Nationalist* on 17 December 1969. While refraining from an apology, he adopted a conciliatory tone, defending his socialist views and reaffirming his commitment to the Tanzanian revolution. He expressed intent to adhere to party discipline and avoid hindering Tanzanian foreign policy, stating, "One asks nothing more but to be allowed to learn from, participate in, and be guided by the African revolution for socialism" (Rodney, 1969e). The ideological tug-of-war between Rodney and Nyerere highlighted the deep divisions over the meaning of socialist anti-imperialism. The following year, this division would almost frustrate Tanzania's diplomacy.

Rodney's revolutionary Third World internationalism and *The Standard* under Ginwala (1970)[3]

Nyerere's editorial stance against Rodney and the campus radicals suggested that *The Nationalist* would no longer serve as a platform for discussing radical ideas. However, less than a year later, Rodney reignited controversy with the publication of two articles in *The Standard,* the government's largest English-speaking newspaper: "Revolutionary Violence: An Answer to Oppression" and "Revolutionary Action–Way to Justice" (Rodney, 1970b, 1970b). In these articles, he controversially defended kidnappings and hijackings by Latin American and Palestinian guerrilla movements. This controversy was facilitated by the nationalisation of *The Standard* months earlier in February 1970. It illustrates the contradiction in Tanzania's attempt to establish an anti-imperialist media while relying on the abilities of left-wing expatriates and students. Conversely, it reveals how Rodney and the radicals around him gained in influence by seizing the new space of expression that opened before them. This

[3] During the period of this thesis, I published parts of this section in a blog post. See Chukwudinma, C. (2023b) 'Walter Rodney and Palestinian liberation', *Review of African Political Economy*. Available at: https://roape.net/2023/11/10/walter-rodney-and-palestinian-liberation/.

allowed them to stir debates and spread internationalist and socialist ideas in a bid to shift Tanzania's foreign policy leftward.

Founded in 1930, *The Tanganyika Standard* thrived as a quintessential colonial newspaper. It opposed TANU's mobilisation against colonialism and its Africanisation policy in the wake of independence. When its ownership fell to the British Lonrho multinational in 1967, *The Standard* adopted a more approving tone of Nyerere's rule. Owned and edited by European men, this colonial relic received 80 per cent of its coverage from the London-based Reuters news agency and therefore imposed a pro-Western viewpoint on African affairs (Brennan, 2015).

Nyerere's decision to nationalise *The Standard* stemmed from his desire for a newspaper that accurately represented Tanzanian's non-aligned Pan-Africanism on the global stage. At the same time, Nyerere justified the acquisition in nationalist terms, responding to the TANU cadre who wanted more Africanisation to promote Tanzanians. "We want Tanzanians to have control of this newspaper, and we want those Tanzanians to be responsible to the people", he wrote in the first editorial of the nationalised paper (*The Standard*, 1970d). He had long delayed the nationalisation of *The Standard* because Tanzania lacked trained local journalists and editors to operate major newspapers. To compensate for this lack of expertise, Nyerere hired African freedom fighters stationed in Tanzania who were sometimes more left-wing than TANU (Roberts, 2022, pp. 224–226).

The lack of experts to run the nationalised companies explained Nyerere's astonishing decision to hire Frene Ginwala (1932-2023), a Marxist South African Indian woman in her mid-thirties, as managing editor of *The Standard*. Ginwala was both a member of the African National Congress and of the South African Communist Party. Her Indian heritage and gender, coupled with her self-assurance, elicited hatred and jealousy from her employees (Grundy, 2023). Dressed in a sari, Ginwala ran *The Standard* with an iron fist, making her employees

work round the clock. Turning the newspaper into a socialist platform, she replaced many conservative European editors with left-wing ones (Sturmer, 1998, pp. 120–127; Grundy, 2023). She hired Richard Gott, a British reporter who documented Che Guevara's visit to Africa in the mid-1960s. Then, she hired Philip Ochieng, a Kenyan radical columnist, who would later recall his time at *The Standard* in a favourable light: "I was far freer in my commentaries than I had ever been or ever would be again" (Ochieng, 1992, p. 134). Every morning, she hosted a two-hour socialist workshop where her staff read and discussed the works of Marx, Lenin, and Fanon (Grundy, 2023).

Under Ginwala's leadership, *The Standard* emerged as a respected socialist and anti-Western newspaper in the eyes of the Tanzanian left. It showed support for Nyerere and TANU that was "by no means servile to the government", remarked author Martin Sturmer (1998) in his work on the Tanzanian media. "Not even Nyerere himself was entirely free of criticism", he wrote (Sturmer, 1998, p. 122). *The Standard* could afford to be critical because it had different priorities than *The Nationalist*, though their coverage overlapped. It projected the TANU's non-alignment in international affairs, giving the party an air of openness to foreign observers, while *The Nationalist* served as a nation-building instrument (Roberts, 2022, p. 226). Whereas Nyerere and TANU encouraged debates in *The Standard*, they censured them in *The Nationalist* as they could jeopardise national unity behind the party.

Published on 5 and 6 November 1970, Rodney's articles in *The Standard* pioneered a Marxist analysis of left-wing terrorism that ran counter to the views of the Tanzanian state and many Tanzanians. He refused to look at kidnapping and hijacking in the Global South as isolated, immoral acts as the Western media did. He examined them as powerful answers to historical injustices. These methods stemmed, as he explained, from regions in which the Western bourgeoisie with their Latin American and Arab counterparts subjected natural and human resources to the crudest forms of exploitation. He defended hijacking and kidnappings

as weapons of the weak required in times of revolutionary retreat. They acted as a counterweight to anti-guerrilla warfare tactics and crackdown upheavals, frustrating Western powers (Rodney, 1970b, 1970c).

On kidnappings, he wrote: “When we exchange our currency for money from the developed countries the rate of exchange is always unfavourable because they set the terms. But when comrades in Latin America exchange kidnapped diplomats for prisoners the rate of exchange is good” (Rodney, 1970c). Through his creative and witty use of the lexicon of unequal exchange theory, Rodney underlines that kidnappings can briefly overturn the power relations between the Western capitalist and the toilers of the Global South. A few lines beforehand, Rodney informs readers that the abduction of the Belgian ambassador in Brazil in September 1969 led to the release of 15 political prisoners (Rodney, 1970c). The rate of exchange was thus favourable because the kidnappings saved important revolutionaries.

In his second article, Rodney defended the hijackings carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine as “armed propaganda” (Rodney, 1970b). He argued hijackings raised the morale of the oppressed and ensured that a particular cause grabbed the international community’s attention. Among other things, his piece contained praise for the young guerrilla Leila Khaled who led several hijackings on behalf of the Front. In the manner of a dedicated feminist, Rodney described the 24-year-old “as an example of a woman liberated through struggle” (Rodney, 1970b). Rodney understood hijacking as a means for Palestinian guerrillas to reinstate the demand for a one-state solution which was being ignored by the West and opposed by Israel. Presumably, a two-state solution would only create a weak Palestinian state—dependent on Israeli resources and living under the threat of a more powerful army backed by the United States. The hijackers, as Rodney explained, were not demanding the exclusion of Jewish immigrants. On the contrary, their solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict

rested in the creation of one united secular society "based on the principle of socialism and equality", he wrote (Rodney, 1970b).

Rodney had frustrations to express. He was annoyed that Tanzanians around him repeated the anti-terrorism propaganda of Western media. Hijackings appeared on the front pages of *Newsweek* and *Time* magazine in September 1970 (*Newsweek*, 1970; *Time*, 1970). His justifications for left-wing terrorism essentially intended to persuade Tanzanians not to impose conditions on their international solidarity with Palestinians. He wrote: "If we call ourselves 'revolutionary' in Tanzania, we cannot be out of sympathy with those who, because their objective condition is different, define their revolution differently" (Rodney, 1970c). His words meant that revolutionaries operating in very oppressive conditions had no choice but to use violence.

Last but not least, Rodney (1970c) anticipated Nyerere and TANU's support for the United Nations (UN) General Assembly resolution against hijacking in November 1970 (UN General Assembly Resolution on Hijacking, 1970). He certainly knew Nyerere placed much of his faith in the UN, seeing it as a platform for mobilising support for the anti-colonial struggle in Southern Africa. But this made TANU capable of sacrificing its commitment to support Palestinian Liberation and other Third World movements to appease Western powers. That is why Rodney's article singled out the hypocrisy of the UN alongside Britain and the United States for ignoring the boycott of arms to the Apartheid state in South Africa but finding time to conduct an emergency session on hijacking (Rodney, 1970c).

Defending the seemingly indefensible, Rodney had dropped a bombshell that reverberated throughout Tanzania and beyond. In reference to the UN resolution against hijacking by Palestinian activists, the Jamaican governmental paper, *The Weekly Gleaner*, accused Rodney of "embarrassing yet another government", adding to his reputation as a troublemaker since his expulsion from Jamaica in 1968 for his Black Power activism (*Advocate*

News, 1971). While Rodney's controversial article went against Tanzanian foreign policy, it did not trigger a public response from TANU. Even if TANU had planned a response, it likely would have been eclipsed by what followed the next day. The British High Commissioner to Tanzania, Horace Philips, with the imprudence of a coloniser who forgot he was now among liberated people, wrote a long diatribe against Rodney's article to the minister of Foreign Affairs: "I find it disquieting that such an article compounding Dr Rodney's support yesterday for the kidnapping of diplomats should find a place in the government newspaper", Philips wrote (*The Standard*, 1970e).

The commissioner then pointed to Rodney's position as a foreigner intruding in the affairs of the sovereign state (*The Standard*, 1970e). Unbeknownst to him, he was making the same mistake. Philips reminded the minister that Rodney's speech *Ideology of the African Revolution* had been "officially denounced" last year before sharing his expectation for similar repudiation (*The Standard*, 1970e). Philips was angry at the left-wing and pro-Palestinian turn *The Standard* had taken after becoming a government newspaper. Referring to Rodney's arguments in defence of Palestinian and Latin American terrorism, he told the minister: "It is little comfort to know that the editor might dissociate herself from these" (*The Standard*, 1970e). Unfortunately for Philips, the letter he sent to the minister was intercepted.

Now, in the hands of Tanzanians, it ignited the largest anti-British public outcry in a decade. On 8 November, the letter was ridiculed on the front page of *The Sunday News*. In a bout of fury, Ginwala answered Philips in her editorial, accusing Philips of "gross interference" in the internal affairs of Tanzania (*The Sunday News*, 1970). "His action comes ill from a citizen of a country that has not hesitated to proclaim freedom of the press", she wrote, determined to humiliate the diplomat (*The Sunday News*, 1970). Five days later, Ginwala's editorial was followed by a flurry of letters defending Rodney and criticising Philips and British imperialism. Published under the title "U.K envoy under fire from our readers", one of four letters read: "On

Dr Rodney's 'foreignness' Mr Philips should be the last to utter a word" (*The Standard*, 1970f). "Dr Rodney is an African whose ancestor was shot out of their homes, kidnapped and carried away with bestial brutality by members of Philip's race" (*The Standard*, 1970d). A schoolgirl called for Philips's kidnapping as punishment: "Take him [Philips], to an Ujamaa village, and make him dig for 48 hours nonstop before releasing him", she wrote (*The Standard*, 1970f).

Rodney's defence of the methods used by Palestinian freedom fighters had provoked a representative of imperialism in Tanzania and awakened a profound anti-British backlash among the people. It jeopardised the cordial relationship Nyerere's Tanzania rebuilt with Britain after breaking diplomatic ties with the British over their support for Rhodesia's illegal declaration of independence in 1965 (Pallotti, 2009). Through his article in Ginwala's *Standard* defending the struggle of Latin American and Palestinian freedom fighters, Rodney proposed an internationalism that served as a radical alternative to the opportunistic foreign policy pursued by the Tanzanian state.

A year after the publication of Rodney's article, Ginwala was dismissed by Nyerere for her own socialist views and replaced with a Tanzanian loyal to him. No longer tolerating dissenting voices in the media, *The Standard* merged with *The Nationalist*, creating the heavily state-controlled *Daily News*, in April 1972 (Sturmer, 1998, pp. 126–127; Roberts, 2022, pp. 232–235). The Walter Rodney Papers in Atlanta offers no evidence of how Rodney felt and responded to the controversy surrounding his article. All that is known is that he never published in the governmental newspaper again.

The national debates that made *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*

Rodney's mission to carry out the battle for socialist ideas during his early years reached its zenith with the publication of his monumental text *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (HEUA). His book analysed how the expansion of capitalist relations of exploitation and oppression, through the slave trade and colonialism, stifled African development while

contributing to European industrial development (Rodney, 2012). Throughout the book, Rodney demonstrated his skilful use of Marx's historical materialism to reconstruct Africa's past, not as a series of isolated events, but as a continuous process by which the present could be elucidated. Rodney thereby analysed the conflictual interaction between the development of the forces of production and relations of production across time and space. Applying Marx's method, he discerned Africa's dynamic pre-colonial mode of production, ranging from the prevailing communalist mode, distinguished by the absence of class inequality and low productivity, to states resembling feudal Europe. Moreover, historical materialism enabled him to understand the impoverishment of the African worker and peasant in its totality, as both the cause and effect of the global dominance of the Western capitalist class (Rodney, 2012).

Lenin's theory of imperialism profoundly influenced Rodney's analysis of colonialism in HEUA. Lenin (2010) described imperialism as a new stage of capitalism marked by the emergence of monopolies, which consolidated and centralised capital by outcompeting smaller firms. These monopolies, essential to national economies, tended to merge with large banks and the state to strengthen their ability to compete internationally (Lenin, 2010). Thus, imperialism designated the process by which the economic competition between monopoly firms translated into a rivalry between their nation-states over the control of global markets and territories (Callinicos, 2009, Harman, 2003). In a 1970 article, Rodney applied Lenin's framework to analyse colonialism as a political manifestation of monopoly capitalism's dominance in Africa. He argued that imperialism did not disappear with the formal end of colonial rule but evolved, shifting from overt political control to a more insidious focus on economic exploitation (Rodney, 1970c). This argument recurred in HEUA and Rodney's later writings as he observed the growing dominance of transnational monopolies concentrating wealth through the exploitation of Africa's resources and labour in the Global South (Rodney 2012, 1980).

In addition, HEUA was inspired by dependency and unequal exchange theory, which identified imperialism primarily as a system transfer of value from the Global South to the advanced capitalist countries of the West (Harman, 2003). The Global South was condemned to underdevelopment as long as it remained entrenched as an unequal supplier of raw materials and cheap or unfree labour. Rodney echoed thinkers like Paul Baran and Gunder Frank when he spoke about breaking from the capitalist system (Baran, 1957; Frank, 1967, pp. 35–36, 2013). In his preface, he wrote: "African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries" (Rodney, 2012, p. xi). Rodney deliberately refrained from spelling out what breaking from imperialism actually meant in his book, as the onus for carrying out this task belonged to the African people.

This section is not concerned with analysing HEUA, as several scholars have already accomplished this task (Hirji, 2017; Wengraf, 2018a; Chukwudinma, 2022; Zeilig, 2022). Rather, its focus is on the organic process that contributed to its making. More often than not, scholars have paid attention to the global context and the global intellectual influences behind Rodney's work (Hirji 2017, Zeilig 2022, Wengraf, 2018a). However, it must not be forgotten that HEUA embodies the reciprocal interpretation between the local and global, between Tanzanian socialist nation-building and African independence in the Cold War, as described above. Here, I explore how Rodney's book emerged from his collective activism and his immersion in the localised controversial debates surrounding Tanzania's national development strategy.

One of the first and most important debates that shaped how Rodney perceived ideological division was the tourism debate that engulfed the UDSM campus and the pages of Ginwala's *Standard* in the spring of 1970 (*The Standard*, 1970b). While a national debate, the question of tourism related to TANU's foreign policy and its collaboration with Western

imperialist nations (Shivji, 1973b). Throughout 1969, Rodney had witnessed TANU take a clear stance in favour of tourism. *The Nationalist* of 29 November produced a 20-page supplement devoted to the "promotion of the tourist industry in all its respects" (*The Nationalist*, 1969a). Five months later, *The Standard* reported that Nyerere laid the "first stone" for the expensive Kilimanjaro airport, designed for safari visitors in northern Tanzania (*The Standard*, 1970c). The radical students in the TYL and USARF resented these developments. Already in August 1969, students Karim Hirji and Issa Shivji prepared a TYL report on tourism, in which they delivered a scathing critique of the official position. Using evidence from Caribbean and Latin American countries, they argued that tourism could not bring development, let alone along socialist lines. On the contrary, it would increase wealth inequalities, exploitation, and the transfer of surplus value from Tanzania to advanced capitalist countries (TANU Youth League, 1969). Shivji recalls: "We handed over the report to Nyerere's private secretary but received no response from the government" (Interview with Shivji, 2023a).

In response, USARF's Mapolu, who worked for *The Standard*, convinced Ginwala to publish the main arguments of the TYL report in the editorial of May 25 (*The Standard*, 1970a; Interview with Shivji, 2023a). The editorial sparked an intense debate in the pages of *The Standard* opposing left-wingers to pro-capitalist intellectuals, lasting until July 1970. These debates culminated in a Q&A session with the Minister of Tourism on campus one evening. Leigh Mullings, an Afro-American lecturer at UDSM who attended the meeting, remembers Rodney's sharp and hilarious remarks to the minister: "He pointed out to the minister that when people go to Europe for tourism, they go there to eat French food and French things. But when they come to Africa, they are not going to eat African food, and you'll have to import all that food" (Chung, 2012, p. 80). In his own creative way, Rodney echoed one of the TYL report's

chief arguments against the idea that tourism increased Tanzania's earnings in foreign exchange and profits.

While the minister supposed TANU would invest the earnings from the sale of African foodstuffs into development projects, Rodney drew his attention to the realities of European tourist consumption. Catering to the expensive and unseasoned taste of European visitors was a costly affair that diverted resources away from investments in agricultural development aimed at increasing Tanzanian self-reliance (Chung, 2012, pp. 79–82). Tourism would drain state revenues and therefore hinder economic progress while perpetuating underdevelopment and dependency on the West.

Years later, Rodney spoke of the tourism debate as the most significant one exposing the diverging class allegiances within the Tanzanian elite (Rodney, 2022a). Recounting Fanon's insights from *Wretched of the Earth,* Rodney shared with his audiences the Tanzanian elite's alignment with the Western bourgeoisie. The memorable passage, prominently featured on the opening page of the TYL report (1969), underscored Fanon's warning:

> The national bourgeoisie organises centres of rest and relaxation and pleasure resorts to meet the wishes of the Western bourgeoisie. Such activity is given the name of tourism, and for the occasion will be built up as a national industry....the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe (Fanon, 1963, pp. 153-154).

This quote captured the sentiment of Rodney and radicals on campus who feared that TANU would renege on the promises of the Arusha Declaration. In Shivji's recollections, the minister felt so humiliated after being hounded with counterarguments by the students that he complained to Nyerere about the disrespect he had endured. The president looked at him and replied: "Well, go back and answer them" (Interview with Shivji, 2023a). Nyerere had tolerated and even encouraged the debate, but he did not side with the students. TANU thus continued promoting tourist ventures.

This passage gives insight into the complex nature of the tug-of-war between campus radicals and Nyerere's regime. Left-wing students and staff members respected Nyerere's humility, his commitment to Pan-Africanism and enlightened leadership. They largely conceived their role as supporting Nyerere by backing his policies of nationalization and Ujamaa village settlement to isolate the conservative pro-Western members of TANU. Nyerere was more approachable than most African leaders, often offering space for dialogue, debates, and the exchange of ideas. For example, in June 1970, in the midst of the tourism debate, he invited the Marxist students of the USARF to his home. In Hirji's account, the students raised their concerns about the class nature of the struggle for socialism in Tanzania, the need for alliance with socialist states, and more participatory governance. Nyerere appeared approachable and casual, expressing a desire for continued dialogue with "true socialists" and sharing his struggles in comprehending Marxist theory. The USARF members left the meeting feeling confident and hopeful (Hirji, 2010; Zeilig, 2022).

The Standard of 13 November 1970, where readers defended Dr Rodney against the UK envoy, carried a sombre title on its front page: "Ban Claim by USARF" (*The Standard*, 1970a). Days earlier, on the evening of 9 November, TANU had banned the USARF and its publication *Cheche* for promoting "foreign ideology" on campus, which meant Marxism. Hirji recalls: "We have a long meeting that fateful night. Rodney, [Professor Joe] Kanywanyi, and about ten student activists are present. Nothing can undo the death sentence handed down — that is clear. But we decide not to take it lying down" (Hirji, 2010, p. 96). That night, with the moral support of Rodney, the USARF published *Our Last Stand* (Hirji, 2010, p. 96). The group then circulated the statement across campus and the city, informing everyone about the injustice they suffered: "Organisations can be banned, individuals can be liquidated, but ideas live on" (Hirji, 2010, pp. 207–212).

A debate of greater consequence than the one on tourism triggered the ban of the USARF. It revolved around Issa Shivji's article "The Silent Class Struggle", which influenced Rodney's perspective on neo-colonialism. Featured in *Cheche*'s special issue of September 1970, Shivji's ground-breaking study argued that TANU's nationalisation failed to significantly increase the ownership of the one-party state and workers over the Tanzanian economy (Shivji, 1973b). The Tanzanian one-party state fell short of breaking away from the imperialist world economy. The nationalised banks and companies continued to develop partnerships with the subsidiaries of powerful Western multinationals and therefore remained dependent on them. This state of affairs rendered the petty bourgeoisie (or bureaucracy) around TANU, incapable of extending state power to the workers. Shivji, therefore, supposed that Tanzania exhibited the features of a neo-colony, despite the promises of the Arusha Declaration to generate a national basis for wealth accumulation. He wrote:

> On the one hand, there is the economic and political bureaucracy (objectively backed by the international bourgeoisie, the country being still in the neo-colonial framework), and on the other are workers and peasants as represented in their most vocal and conscious elements – largely small groups of intelligentsias, including a few enlightened leaders (Shivji, 1973b, p. 22).

Shivji supposed an alliance between the petty bourgeoisie and the masses would only occur with a socialist revolution that immediately cut the ties of TANU bureaucrats with foreign capital. With this possibility in mind, he saw in Tanzania a non-violent "silent" class struggle. A struggle where peaceful methods, criticism, education, and persuasion, would serve to hold the petty bourgeoisie accountable to the interests of the peasants and workers (Shivji, 1973b, pp. 32–35). Shivji's astute criticism of TANU nationalisation infuriated the one-party state, pushing it to ban the USARF (Hirji, 2010, 2019). *Cheche* continued to be published under the name *Maji Maji* as the organ of the campus TYL, allowing the debate on Shivji's article to continue on campus. "The Silent Class Struggle" incited the radical students and staff to raise questions about the progress of Ujamaa and its meaning for the workers and peasants. Although

it triggered several responses supporting Shivji's stance, it also prompted some comradely disagreements (Shivji, 1973a). One disagreement was articulated by Walter Rodney.

Rodney's comment on the silent class struggle appeared in the first issue of *Maji Maji* in January 1971. His article arose out of heated debates on the topic between himself and Karim Hirji, who spoke in defence of Shivji's thesis at a Social Science Conference in December 1970 (Hirji, 2017). What transpired through this debate is that Rodney showed much greater optimism than his two student comrades about the revolutionary character of the petty bourgeoisie ruling the one-party state. Rodney agreed with the essence of Shivji's argument, that TANU had removed much of the cutting edge from its nationalisation policy. He, however, disagreed with how his comrade framed the problem, as he remarked:

> One must take this rift inside the petty bourgeoisie as the point of departure for political action. It is not a question of revolutionary forces against the petty bourgeoisie but of a struggle within that social stratum which is called the petty bourgeoisie (Rodney, 1971c, p. 6).

Where Shivji defined silent class struggle as a conflict opposing the petty bourgeoisie to the working masses, Rodney saw it as an ideological divide between two factions of the petty bourgeoisie. Where Shivji blamed the whole petty bourgeoisie for the slow progress of socialism, Rodney accused him of making loose generalisations. The achievement of socialism, as he counterposed, rested upon the ideological battle between the progressive political bureaucracy around Nyerere and the conservative economic bureaucracy that aspired to partner with foreign capital. While Rodney's account of Tanzanian socialism was more hopeful than Shivji's, he emphasised the need for "scrutinizing the overall implications of the policies pursued by the economic bureaucracy at every stage" (Rodney, 1971c, p. 6). This statement highlighted Rodney's alignment with the USARF in his non-conformist support for Nyerere's regime. Together they had raised questions that TANU found difficult to answer and tolerate.

HEUA, which stemmed from discussions on Ujamaa, development, and neo-colonialism in Tanzania, extended these debates to address the broader concern of African

underdevelopment. Rodney was concerned that most African nations found themselves in a much worse predicament than Tanzania a decade after independence (Wengraf, 2018a, pp. 31–57, see 2018b). While these nations had won political independence, they had failed to break ties with the old colonial powers. Their economies were dependent on European and American companies. Through his book, Rodney (2012) aimed to challenge the perspective of progressive African intellectuals who held the belief that African development would be enhanced by trade deals, loans, and investments from advanced capitalist countries, urging them to reconsider their stance.

Rodney crafted his book with a collaborative spirit that exemplified the cooperation among campus activists. In the summer of 1971, he shared draft chapters with comrades Hirji and Mapolu, who provided valuable proofreading (Zeilig, 2022, pp. 125–126). Rodney asked his comrade A M Babu, Tanzania's radical socialist minister, to write the postscript, linking Rodney's historical argument directly to Africa's present. "Foreign investment", Babu wrote, "is the cause, and not a solution, to our economic backwardness" (Rodney, 2012, p. 284). The little investment that Africa received went into the extraction of raw materials and the exploitation of labour for the benefit of the Western capitalist classes. Rather than improving crucial sectors such as healthcare and education, foreign investment tended to enrich a small group of African leaders and businessmen collaborating with Western states and multinational corporations. For Rodney and Babu, the way out of this impasse was to break Africa's dependence on imperialist powers through development strategies empowering the workers and peasants.

Conclusion

Rodney's time in Tanzania, between 1966 and 1972, reveals the dynamic interplay between his aspirations to underline the relevance of Marxism to Africa and the challenges posed by the Tanzanian national liberation movement. During his first visit, his mission aligned

with the goals of the Arusha Declaration to bridge the gap between the elitist university and the nation. Already, Rodney had begun to notice an ideological division within TANU around the slow implementation of Nyerere's declaration.

However, a moment of divergence occurred in 1969 when President Julius Nyerere publicly criticised Rodney for his speech advocating the violent overthrow of African governments. This speech reflected the radical changes in Rodney's politics influenced by his experiences abroad and interactions with Tanzanian students upon his return in June of that year. Thus, Rodney, alongside the USARF, found himself in a tug-of-war with a Tanzanian state that was managing an unstable mecca of African liberation and consumed by its own contradictions. Defending the left-wing terrorism and the African revolution, Rodney counterposed Nyerere's opportunistic foreign policy of non-alignment with radical internationalism, which sided with the working masses and freedom fighters in the Global South. In dialogue with radical students, he critically scrutinised TANU's policy on tourism and nationalisation. Rodney's engagement in debates regarding national development served as inspiration for his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (HEUA), which held international capitalism responsible for Africa's impoverishment.

Yet, Rodney and his comrades found themselves losing the tug-of-war with TANU. As TANU sought to control democratic freedoms, its intolerance towards debates questioning its rule only intensified. The harsh tirade from Nyerere against Rodney, TANU's animosity towards Marxism and left-wing terrorism, its newfound openness to tourism and capitalist ventures, the banishment of the USARF, and the gradual decline of Ginwala's influence through *The Standard* collectively contribute to elucidating the incremental changes in Rodney's mind. These events serve to increase the contradictions in his consciousness, progressively distancing him from his initial support for TANU. The next chapter examines

the sudden leap his Marxism underwent toward embracing workers' self-activity. It presents his transformation as intimately tied to the class struggles and TANU's new authoritarian turn.

Chapter 6: Towards socialism from-below: Walter Rodney's Marxism and Tanzanian Ujamaa

Introduction

There is a hidden significance behind the speech Walter Rodney gave at the UCLA Centre for African Studies on 30 May 1972. Speaking on *Problems of Third World Development*, the Afro-Guyanese historian explained how the Western ruling class stifled the development of the Global South while profiting from unequal trading terms and the exploitation of labour it imposed on the rest of humanity. He warned his audience against the petty bourgeoisie—the infinitesimal educated and privileged stratum that had seized state power in most underdeveloped nations. In exceptional instances, such as Tanzania under President Julius Nyerere, Rodney saw the petty bourgeoisie as challenging imperialism. Elsewhere in the Global South, he dismissed it as "a stratum serving [the] international capitalist class" (Rodney, 1972a, p. 125). Rodney nevertheless concluded with optimism as he so often did. Freedom from imperialism "will come from those who are not yet liberated", he declared (Rodney, 1972a, p. 128).

Although Rodney impressed those who attended the discussion on imperialism and underdevelopment, there was nothing unusual about his speech up to that point. It reinstated the arguments contained in his masterpiece *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, which was published that same year (Rodney, 2012). The surprise, however, came in the Q&A session. Fortunately, the Q&A appeared with the transcript published in the autumn issue of *Ufahamu* in 1972 (Rodney, 1972a). There, Rodney revealed something fresh and thought-provoking about the meaning of socialism, which informs contemporary academic and activist thinking on the topic.

When someone asked him to comment on Tanzania, where he had resided since June 1969, Rodney began his reply by praising the socialist direction taken by Nyerere and his party,

the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Yet his answer took a sudden, unexpected turn. For the first time, he criticised what he called the "bureaucratisation" of the Tanzanian one-party state, which had embarked on an authoritarian path. More importantly, he celebrated the burgeoning Tanzanian workers' movement, challenging the bureaucracy through "work stoppages", "strikes", and "occupations" (Rodney, 1972a, p. 130). This was atypical. Rodney had hitherto supported the state of the TANU bureaucracy as the driver of socialism. His speech marked his first publicly known admission of his growing pessimism towards Nyerere's socialist experiment. It marked the beginning of his discovery of a new political force in the Tanzanian scene and a decisive shift in his Marxism. Six years later, on 29 June 1978, he had lost confidence in the Tanzanian regime, as he stated:

> My feeling is that in spite of all the rhetoric TANU has not been transformed...It remains a nationalist party under the control of the petty bourgeoise…incapable of providing the basis for sustained socialist transformation (Rodney, 1978c).

This chapter draws upon a variety of primary sources to examine how Rodney's Marxism came to distinguish TANU's socialist rhetoric and imaginings from its actual class content, deeds, and interest, separating its appearance from its essence (Marx and Engels, 2010a, p. 119). I refer to articles in the Tanzanian student journal *Maji Maji*, including one authored by Rodney from The East African Collection at the University of Dar es Salaam. Moreover, I analyse Rodney's lesser-known monograph, *World War II and the Tanzanian Economy*, found at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the Senate House Library in London, United Kingdom (Rodney, 1976g). To add unique personal perspectives to this chapter, I have included interviews with Patricia Rodney, Walter Rodney's widow, and his associates in Guyana and Tanzania, whose insights offer intimate understandings of his life and politics.

I trace Rodney's political development in tandem with the movement of Tanzanian society between 1972 and 1978. I argue Rodney's application of Marxist theory to engage with

Tanzanian socialism, also known as Ujamaa, inspired a fundamental change in his approach to socialism. Rodney gradually abandoned his conviction that socialism could be delivered by the Tanzanian state bureaucracy and its president for the idea that it must be conquered by the self-emancipatory struggles of the working class. In the space of six years, he shifted his politics from socialism from-above to a closer embrace of socialism from-below.

Zeilig picked up on the final moments of this shift when he analysed his Hamburg Lectures in the spring of 1978. He pertinently revealed that Rodney's fascination with the Tanzanian workers' movement led him to acknowledge the proletariat as the "central organising force" in Tanzanian national liberation rather than one player out of many (Zeilig, 2022, p. 297). I build on Zeilig's argument by presenting Rodney's development as a drawn-out process over time and space. Taking a geographical approach, I insist that Rodney's international travels are central to understanding his transformation. Travelling abroad, especially after his departure from Tanzania in June 1974, afforded him the chance to broaden his horizons and freely express his opinions without fearing repercussions. Thus, his travels are in themselves a vital cause of his changing perspective. Overseas, Rodney experienced other struggles that shaped his outlook on Tanzania.

A geographical approach

A passage from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* captures the essence of this chapter's geographical approach to explain Rodney's transition away from socialism from-above:

> There are men who search in every part of the world: I am not. I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the *real leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself (Fanon, 2002, p. 122).

Fanon's words aimed to emphasise that the fight against racism goes beyond a mission to reconnect with a mystical African past that is solely incumbent on black people. Instead, this struggle belongs to the present of human emancipation and the creation of a new radical

identity. By doing so, he presented a contradiction between time and space, contrasting the idea of being a "prisoner of history" with the active process of "endlessly creating" oneself through movement in space. Fanon thus saw travel as the medium through which this contradiction can be resolved by emancipating oneself from history.

However, there is reason to doubt that human consciousness can free itself from the past simply by changing the location of its body. After all, Marx warned of the persistence of old ideas when he claimed, "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx and Engels, 2010a). Similarly, this thesis has previously demonstrated that Rodney's travel from Jamaica to Cuba in 1968 represented a shift in his "positionality" and "spatio-temporal horizon" (Harvey, 2000). Yet, this shift was less of an escape from his past activism in Jamaica but rather an opportunity to develop a radical perspective on guerrilla struggle in the Americas, one that was grounded in his reflection on past realities. Therefore, Fanon's assertion must be slightly revised; movement intrinsically invokes contradiction rather than rupture: a thing that moves can be in one place but at the same time, elsewhere (Engels, 2020). This chapter shows that a part of Rodney stayed in Tanzania even after his departure in 1974, as he continued to reflect on the political situation there and draw conclusions for his struggle in Guyana. It illustrates how his travels intensified the contradictions in his mind and, in ways more complex than Fanon anticipated, led to a "real leap" in his politics.

The notion of a leap is not unique to Fanon. Marxists long before him discussed it when employing the dialectical principle of the transition from quantity to quality to understand historical change (Lenin, 1964; Rees, 2005; Sheehan, 2017; Engels, 2020). This principle stipulates that every sudden leap is the result of an accumulation of gradual changes within a phenomenon. The principle of transition draws strength from that of contradiction, which insists that the conflicting forces within every phenomenon render its existing state subject to

continuous change. However, dialectical change is not a linear process but "a development that proceeds in spirals", as Lenin (1964, p. 54) remarked. Therefore, it contains a great deal of unevenness, setbacks, breaks, and sometimes catastrophes precisely because it owes its dynamism to conflicts. In Rodney's case, there was no smooth and predictable transformation out of socialism from-above.

The previous chapter portrayed Rodney as conflicted, supporting Tanzanian socialism while also being critical of it. It underlined the tensions between him and TANU as the party grew less tolerant of ideological dissent. Focusing on Rodney's travels, this chapter delves into how these gradual changes continued to accumulate, causing a qualitative leap in his Marxism. Guided by the dialectic of change, its geographical approach underlines the interplay between temporal change (Rodney's evolving political views) and spatial movement (his travels) in shaping Rodney's politics. Moreover, it illustrates how the past Tanzanian workers' movement weighed on Rodney's consciousness in the late 1970s, particularly as he engaged in intellectual pursuits in the United States and participated in workers' struggles in Guyana. This experience propelled him to reshape his socialist identity, echoing Fanon's concept of self-invention and the refusal to be constrained by history.

Socialism from-above or from-below: which side was Rodney on?

In 1966, eight years before Rodney's speech at UCLA, the American Marxist Hal Draper published an article entitled *Two Souls of Socialism*. In its pages, he introduced the division between socialism from-above and socialism from-below as the fundamental one running through the history of the socialist movement. The partisans of from-above shared the view that enlightened leaders can deliver socialism to the passive and grateful masses without ever being held accountable by the latter. In contrast, those in favour of from-below conceive the masses not as objects but as the subjects of history (Draper, 1966). The self-emancipatory struggles of the active working masses, "reaching out for freedom with their own hands,

mobilised ‘from below’ in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny”, wrote Draper (1966, p. 9). These struggles, as he claimed, represented the only viable path to socialism.

Draper developed his thesis in the midst of the Cold War when most people confused socialism from-below with the anti-worker regimes of the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba. His distinction nevertheless has relevance to left-wing politics today. On the side of socialism from-above, Draper would have included the social democrats of our time who promised to hand down reforms after winning elections to state offices, such as the UK’s former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders in the U.S., and Chile’s president Gabriel Boric. One of his most important insights is that Stalinists, supporters of the Soviet Union’s political system between 1928 and 1991, and reformists both unite in their contempt for the self-activity of the masses, despite their stark political differences (Draper, 1966, p. 9). They favour delivering reforms from-above rather than seeing self-conscious people fight to bring about a new world for themselves.

The alternative of socialism from-below, which Draper associated with the classical Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg, had a distinct class basis. Its realisation rested on the self-emancipation of the class deprived of the means of production and forced to sell its labour power to the bourgeoisie who owned the factories and workplaces. It rested on the struggles of this direct producing and exploited working class from whom the capitalist pumps out “unpaid surplus labour”, as Marx put it in *Das Kapital* (Marx, 1992, p. 791). Draper deemed the working class as “a special class” (Draper, 1978, pp. 46 and pp. 33–50). He wrote in his later work: “The proletariat is the only class that has the social weight and power to carry through the abolition of the old order and to build a new society” (Draper, 1978, p. 46). Through this statement, he hinted at why Marx and Engels (Marx and Engels, 2018) identified the proletariat as the only class able to carry out socialism from-below.

First, the working class holds more objective power than other classes by virtue of its central importance to capitalist production. Draper located the authority of wage-labour over capital in "the strategic role of the indispensable services performed by the proletariat in keeping society going" (Draper, 1978, pp. 46–47). The working class derives its strength from its interdependent relationship with the capitalist class as exploited producers of wealth for the latter. It can articulate its collective power to halt production through strikes and workplace occupations. The withdrawal of labour underlines a second feature of the working class: it is a collective class. The expansion of capitalism pressures people to migrate into urban spaces for work, concentrating them into workplaces where production is socialised. Although workers often perform different tasks in offices and factories, they tend to build a shared consciousness against exploitation. When mass strikes and protests turn into revolutions, the workers introduce democratic ways of re-organising society, such as the establishment of worker councils or soviets (Choonara, 2017, pp. 20–21).

In 1972, Rodney's Marxism vacillated between the two irreconcilable souls of socialism. On the one side, stood the classical Marxist education he received under Trinidadian Marxist C L R James during his doctoral studies in London. On the other side, stood the Third World Marxism and Stalinism, for which Rodney possessed a profound respect since his undergraduate years in Jamaica, having travelled thrice to Cuba and once to Moscow in the 1960s (Rodney, 1990; Chukwudinma, 2023a). Although Rodney adhered to the theory of workers' self-emancipation, he also leaned toward the dominant brands of socialism from-above, which deviated from it. His Marxism was influenced by a world where the Soviet Union, China and Cuba had consolidated power and seemed to challenge Western imperialism.

Rodney's unpublished manuscript on the historiography of the Russian Revolution, written in 1971, revealed his favourable stance on the Soviet Union (Rodney, 2018). Rodney (2018) regarded the Soviet Union as a progressive alternative to Western capitalism, primarily

due to its state ownership of the means of production and its centralised planning, which he viewed as instrumental in advancing economic development. He dedicated an entire chapter to defending the land collectivisation and industrial success of the Soviet's Five-Year Plan (1928–1933) against bourgeois academics who dismissed them. Rodney (2018) pointed to the country's rapid metamorphosis from an agrarian society into an industrial power, with investment rates surpassing the West. He appreciated the Soviet Union for lifting millions of peasants and workers out of poverty and illiteracy, presenting this feat as proof of its superiority over capitalism.

Rodney, nevertheless, did have some criticisms of the Soviet regime. He criticised the bureaucratic abuses of Stalin's regime and condemned the violent forced expropriation and exploitation of peasants during the land collectivisation of the 1930s. More significantly, Rodney remained sceptical of Soviet historians' claims that the Soviet Union was now building communism, and that socialism had been achieved by 1938. He did not see a society that had reached abundant wealth and abolished classes to the extent the state was ready to wither away. Instead, Rodney saw an expanding and assertive state, still enmeshed "in contradictions with the capitalist world" (Rodney, 2018, p. 121). He accused the Soviet Union of acting like a capitalist state in certain instances, such as requesting land from China during the Sino-Soviet negotiations and invading countries like Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 (Rodney, 2018, p. 121).

Yet Rodney did not interpret these failures as signs of a fundamental flaw within the Soviet system. His drafted chapters notably omit discussions about the Soviet bureaucracy's destruction of trade unions, workers' councils, and other remnants of workers' control established in the early days of the Russian Revolution (Rodney, 2018; see Cliff, 1974). Instead, he regarded the most troubling aspects of the regime as policy errors and malpractices within a state striving to build a better society under the constraints of the capitalist world. In

1971, he noted: “In the final analysis, however, while Soviet transformation departed from socialist norms in many ways, it remains a superior alternative to capitalism and bourgeois democracy from the viewpoint of workers and peasants” (Rodney, 2018, p.121). Rodney maintained a similar stance until his death in 1980, extending the likes of North Korea, Vietnam, China, and Cuba (see Rodney, 1980b).

Rodney overlooked how these state-led regimes modified the class basis of Marxism while professing allegiance to Marxism. Stalinism, as Marxist Tony Cliff and C L R James argued, represented the dictatorship of the Soviet bureaucracy, which erected itself as a state capitalist class exploiting the workers through state ownership of the means of production (Cliff, 1974; James et al, 2013). The Chinese (1949) and Cuban (1959) revolutions claimed to chart a socialist path for underdeveloped nations through guerrilla warfare in the countryside. Removing Marxism from its proletarian roots, they identified the peasantry as the revolutionary agent insofar as it was led by generals from the intellectual petty bourgeoisie. These urban generals could manipulate peasants because of their atomised and impoverished existence as petty-commodity producers employing their own labour, deprived of the collective power exploitation conferred on the workers (Molyneux, 1985; Cliff, 1986).

Like the Soviet Union before them, both China and Cuba faced tremendous pressure from the global capitalist system to close the technological and industrial gap that left their economies vulnerable to assaults and invasions from the West. Thus, once in power, they emulated the Soviet-style bureaucracy, taking state control over the economy and introducing state-planning. They equated nationalisation and land reform with socialism rather than as a means to working-class control. They suppressed strikes and trade unions, seeing them as an obstacle to their plans to rapidly industrialise their underdeveloped nation by exploiting the working masses (Cliff, 1986). During his time in Tanzania from 1966 to 1967 and 1969 to 1974, Rodney encountered a variant of state capitalism, which newly independent African

states termed “African socialism”. The most radical expression of this utopian ideology, such as Nkrumah’s Ghana or Nyerere’s Tanzania, emphasised the renewal of egalitarian ways of African traditional life while denying the reality of class antagonism. In truth, this strain of socialism from-above amounted to what Draper called “educational dictatorship”: the despotism of elitist petty bourgeois intellectuals over the masses (Draper, 1966, p. 23).

Tanzanian Ujamaa from-above

In April 1972, a month before his speech at UCLA, Rodney published a paper that associated Tanzanian socialism with classical Marxism. Entitled “Ujamaa and scientific socialism”, the article represented one of his most powerful stances in defence of Tanzania’s socialism (Rodney, 1972b). In the early 1960s, Ujamaa, “familyhood” in Swahili, referred to Nyerere’s philosophy, which emphasised the revitalisation of the traditional communal ways of life in the countryside. It spoke of an ideal past where everyone worked harder while people distributed land and resources with the utmost equality (Nyerere, 1987, pp. 4–11). In the aftermath of the 1967 Arusha Declaration, Nyerere’s government turned this philosophy into a policy of land reform aimed at the development of impoverished rural areas. Through his declaration, Nyerere announced a break with the pro-Western development strategy he had pursued since independence, which relied on foreign aid and investment. The new direction was one of self-reliance and socialism (Shivji et al., 2020).

In theory, Ujamaa meant that the one-party state would encourage the peasantry to move from individual homesteads into collective farms. There, peasants would learn modern farming methods aimed at increasing their output to ensure the competitiveness of Tanzanian export crops for the international market. In truth, Ujamaa resembled past catastrophic villagisation schemes, such as the colonial groundnut scheme of 1922 and those recommended by the World Bank in the 1960s. The only distinction was that TANU prioritised the modernisation of traditional villages at its own cost rather than relying on foreign capital. The

early schemes failed because the government hired managers with little expertise in agriculture to oversee the farmers' productive performance, making them semi-proletarian or "government slaves", as Tanzanian scholar Issa Shivji wrote (Shivji et al., 2020, p. 101, 2023b, pp. 112–113). The Ujamaa scheme would also end in failure due to poor implementation and bureaucratic misconduct.

Rodney's enthusiasm for Ujamaa stemmed from his three-week-long visit to the Ujamaa villages in the famine-ridden region of Dodoma in late 1970. TANU convinced peasants to move into Ujamaa villages near water supplies, promising to provide them with food for famine relief. Rodney, alongside students, volunteered to help the TANU cadre hired to build infrastructure for farming and living in the villages (Hirji, 2010, pp. 80–81). In his article, he defended Ujamaa against Soviet and Western Marxists who dismissed it as "African socialism" since Nyerere's thought rejected Marxist notions of class struggle. Nyerere only saw two conflicts in Tanzanian society: the first pitted the Tanzanian people against imperialism, while the second pitted the wealthy town against the impoverished countryside (Shivji, 2017, pp. 201–205).

Although Rodney knew these theoretical shortcomings, he argued Ujamaa as a policy had recognised class antagonism by expropriating land from landowners. Like Nyerere, he supposed collective farming offered an alternative to the capitalist farming that colonialism had introduced in some regions, which gave rise to a few rich farmers exploiting their landless counterparts (Rodney, 1972b). Socialism was about preserving the Ujamaa villages from capitalist penetration and strengthening the technological help of state-led socialist nations, such as China and the Soviet Union. The Afro-Guyanese historian, therefore, claimed Ujamaa drew a path to socialism that avoided capitalist development (Rodney, 1972b).

He found powerful inspiration for his argument in Marx's correspondences between 1877-81 on the Russian Commune, which practised collective farming. With ingenuity,

Rodney identified that Marx did not have a deterministic or prescriptive conception of development. The founder of communism had indeed supposed that the Russian path to socialism could bypass capitalism. He argued the commune could become the "fulcrum of social regeneration" provided it remained unpenetrated by capitalism and crucially supported by an international proletarian revolution (Anderson, 2016, p. 2023). Rodney, who saw Ujamaa in the Russian Commune, downplayed this last point. Rodney was right to invoke Marx against the leftists who thought Tanzania must follow the same development as Europe. He opposed the idea that Tanzania must undergo a period of intensive capitalist industrialisation, where the working class would increase in size before achieving socialism. Tanzanians could struggle for socialism in the present rather than endure more decades of insufferable capitalism (Rodney, 1972b).

Rodney, however, was mistaken in implying that socialism could be achieved by "using peasant production as the basis" and without a proletarian revolution (Rodney, 1972b). In seeing the one-party state as a driver of socialist transformation and peasant production as its basis for national accumulation, Rodney assigned only a passive role to the working class, a position he held since his early years in Tanzania. In May 1967, he wrote an essay where he talked about workers and peasants being able to "build their own society" (Rodney, 1968a). However, Rodney ultimately conceded they were unprepared to run the factories that had been nationalised after the Arusha Declaration:

> Because in Tanzania proletarian skills are not yet fully developed and because the present working class provides a too narrow social base to be in exclusive control of industry, the factories cannot be perfectly democratic or socialist units (Rodney, 1968a, p. 78).

Rodney saw the working class as too small, disorganised, and undereducated to provide leadership to the Tanzanian nation's liberation struggle. His stance reflected the absence of the Tanzanian working class on the national scene. Nyerere and TANU had banned strikes since 1963. Later, independent trade unions were also banned after TANU suspected the involvement

of trade union leaders in the army mutiny of 1964 (Kamata et al., 2020). Thus, Rodney expected the Tanzanian bureaucracy to oversee the workers' education and prepare them to take over production. Because Rodney assigned the leading role of a socialist revolution to the state, he defended that the struggle for socialism rested first and foremost on the ideological battle between the progressive and pro-Western elements of the petty bourgeoisie. In 1971, he explained:

> One must take this [ideological] rift inside the petty bourgeoisie as the point of departure for political action. It is not a question of revolutionary forces against the petty bourgeoisie but of a struggle within that social stratum, which is called the petty bourgeoisie (Rodney, 1971, p. 6).

Rodney took to heart the "idea of class suicide" notably referenced by the Guinean-Bissau guerrilla leader Amílcar Cabral. Both remained convinced the petty bourgeoisie could offer revolutionary leadership if it sacrificed its elitism by committing suicide to resurrect itself as a cadre "identified with the deepest aspirations of the people", wrote Cabral (2007, p. 166). This idea could only, however, suggest an idealist solution to the problem of petty-bourgeois elitism. One that focused on changing attitudes while overlooking the objective and material basis of class loyalties. One possible reason for this belief is that Rodney refused to see bureaucracies like those in the Soviet Union and TANU as a class, let alone a ruling one. His notes on the Soviet political elite read: "The bureaucracy is not a class; the fundamental characteristic of a class is what they own and how they earn their living. By these yardsticks the bureaucracy is the servant of a class…they can be controlled by workers" (Rodney, 1969d).

Rodney appeared here to associate capitalism with private property, not state ownership of the means of production. With regard to Tanzania, this limitation meant he viewed TANU as a layer wavering between the international bourgeois and the Tanzanian masses. He expected the TANU bureaucracy to share state power with the workers and peasants through the nationalisation of foreign companies and Ujamaa land reform (Rodney, 1971c, pp. 3–6). Despite his grasp of classical Marxism, his support for Tanzanian socialism from-above

stemmed from his recognition of the numerous obstacles that could hinder workers' self-liberation. He held aspirations that the one-party state could play a pivotal role in this regard.

Between Michigan and Dar es Salaam: Rodney and the authoritarian bureaucracy

Rodney's enthusiasm for the Tanzanian socialist experiment began to fade with the authoritarian turn of Nyerere's regime. At the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), where he taught, he witnessed TANU growing intolerant of criticism towards its policies after Nyerere appointed one of his loyal subordinates, Pius Mweska, as vice-chancellor. In November 1970, Mwseka banned the United Student African Revolutionary Front (USARF) for promoting "foreign ideology"—Marxism (Hirji, 2010, p. 34). Rodney was an honorary member of USARF and a contributor to its magazine *Cheche*. On 8 July 1971, the vice-chancellor ordered the public arrest and rustication of student union president Symonds Akivaga, sparking a weeklong pro-democracy protest and boycott by the students, which Rodney supported. These events reflect more sombre changes in the nation (Hirji, 2018, pp. 106–45).

The first reason behind the turn relates to TANU's desire for control and security in an unstable international context. It was tied to Tanzania's position as a rear base and headquarters for most liberation movements in Southern Africa fighting Portuguese colonialism, South African Apartheid and Rhodesian white-minority rule since the early 1960s. Hosting socialist-inspired guerrilla movements, such as FRELIMO of Mozambique, made Nyerere's regime vulnerable to Cold War geopolitical intrigues—the American CIA and the Portuguese secret service spied on his country. On 25 January 1971, Nyerere feared the threat of an invasion upon learning that Idi Admin overthrew his friend and ally Ugandan president Milton Obote. The event came months after the Portuguese staged a failed invasion of Guinea-Conakry to assassinate President Sekou Touré and capture Amílcar Cabral, who directed Guinea-Bissau's independence war against Portugal (Roberts, 2022, pp. 237–245). In response, TANU

published the booklet called *Mwongozo: TANU Guidelines* (1973), where it promised to revitalise the African revolution against the threat of an imperialist assault through the setting up of "domestic counter-revolutionary puppets" (Tanganyika African National Union, 1973, p. 4). It called on Tanzanians to defend the one-party state and denounce its internal opponents.

The second reason is related to the socio-economic problems of the nation. Ujamaa villages were growing slowly. Despite persuading peasants to settle in collective farms, Nyerere grew more frustrated as most peasants were unenthusiastic about moving into them. By late 1968, TANU identified only 180 villages as Ujamaa ones, but only around 20 had introduced communal farming. In response, Nyerere published the Presidential Circular of 1969. Although the document still advocated for earning the consent of the peasants, it urged the state to actively engage in the formation of these villages (Shivji et al., 2020, p. 179). Reflecting these concerns, *Mwongozo* called for the concentration of power into the hand of the one-party state in order, it was hoped, to better direct production and labour. "The time has now come for the party to take the reign of all mass activities" it read (Tanganyika African National Union, 1973, p. 4).

It was from afar that Rodney observed the worst moments of TANU's authoritarian turn. From February to late June 1972, Rodney travelled with his wife and his three children to the United States to take up the "Martin Luther King Jr. Writer in Residence" fellowship at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor (Thomas, 1971, 2023). The same month, Nyerere reshuffled the TANU cabinet. The president replaced his more critical left-wing ministers, such as the Zanzibari Marxist Abdulrahman Babu and Ngombale-Mwiru, with people who obeyed him to the letter. On 17 April 1972, the dictator of Zanzibar, Karume, was shot dead by two ex-members of Babu's dissolved Umma Party in revenge. Nyerere arrested Babu and 40 ex-members of his former party on the mainland and detained them without trial (Wilson, 2007, p. 11, 2013, p. 82 and see pp. 77–95).

News of the detention shook Walter and Patricia. They had become close friends with Babu, his wife and his immediate family. Babu had written the post-script to Walter's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. "We just hung out together. We would go to the beach with our kids", Patricia recalled about her friendship with Babu's wife (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). The news about Babu's arrest was a watershed moment for the couple. It stirred them away from considering a long-term future in Tanzania and procuring Tanzanian citizenship (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). Rodney became a coordinator for the international campaign to free Babu. Upon his return to Dar es Salaam, Rodney made several visits to his friend in jail; he organised Babu's defence committee meetings from his home while working with human rights lawyers (Bgoya, 2023; Campbell, 2023).

These issues weighed on Rodney's mind when he accepted an invitation from his long-time American friend Ned Alpers to speak at UCLA on 30 May 1972 (Alpers, 2022). And yet, Rodney revealed something optimistic about post-*Mwongozo* Tanzania. He spoke about the "healthy self-assertion by the workers" in the past year (Rodney, 1972a, pp. 129–130):

> Workers in their factories, using Mwongozo as a sort of article of faith, have been attacking the bureaucracy, have been attacking the managers and the officials who have been placed over them. Strikes and work stoppages therefore often mirror, in a small way, the ongoing struggle between the people who are directly at the production line and those who are supposedly making policy in society (Rodney, 1972a, p. 130).

Rodney's words underlined his nascent awareness of the emergent workers' movement of the early 1970s. Only a month earlier, his article "Ujaama and Scientific Socialism" assigned no significant role to the working class in the Tanzanian agrarian path to socialism. But the burgeoning workers' struggle caused a sudden shift in his views (Rodney, 1972b). He began to conceive work stoppages and strikes as a serious counterweight to TANU's bureaucratisation. He consequently began to see in the small proletariat a class capable of holding bureaucrats to account through its struggles at the point of production (Rodney, 1972a).

Although he still retained a great deal of optimism about Nyerere, the Afro-Guyanese historian now saw an emergent conflict between the working masses and bureaucracy. The battle for socialism thus was more than one of ideas.

One subjective factor that explains Rodney's step towards socialism from-below was his past debates with his radical comrades at UDSM. His comments at UCLA reflected the growing attention paid to the Workerist movement by the radical students and staff members at UDSM. For example, the September 1971 issue of the radical student magazine, *Maji Maji*, included an article on strikes in Tanzania. The author, Nick Asili, remarked the workers downed tools because they had lost all "faith in NUTA"—the state-controlled and only legal union that never sided with the workers in bargaining disputes (Asili, 1971). Then, in January 1972, Henri Mapolu produced a report for the workers for the Economic Research Bureau at UDSM. He exposed that TANU's recently established workers' committees had not increased workers' control in the factories because they were overwhelmingly dominated by managers (Mapolu, 1972, pp. 1–43).

All these works observed that clause 15 of *Mwongozo* served as a catalyst for workers' strikes. Clause 15 of the TANU guidelines stipulated: "There must be a deliberate effort to build equality between the leaders and those whom they lead. For a Tanzanian leader, it must be forbidden to be arrogant, extravagant, contemptuous and oppressive" (Tanganyika African National Union, 1973, p. 5). A few years later, in 1975, Rodney would explain that TANU issued *Mwongozo* to appease the workers who complained about bad management in the workplace. The guidelines acted as a leadership code, showing the workers how Tanzanian managers would be better than the colonial ones. But TANU's efforts to appease workers backfired. Instead, as Rodney explained to his UCLA audience, the workers took it upon themselves to implement *Mwongozo* in the workplace, leading to spontaneous strikes and occupations (Rodney, 1972a).

Long before him, some UDSM Marxists had come to the view that Tanzania was not socialist. Rodney's paper on Ujamaa sparked the indignation of his former USARF comrades, Issa Shivji, Henry Mapolu, and Naijuka, who told him bourgeois socialism could not be confused with Marxism. Shivji recalls: "We had a very heated discussion. We argued against Rodney. I said to him: 'Comrade, what are you doing!? We are analysing and characterising this state as bourgeois socialism while you are giving it legitimacy'" (Interview with Shivji, 2023a). Bourgeois socialism meant the rule of the TANU bureaucracy. Where Rodney saw the bureaucracy as a stratum that could serve the masses, Shivji identified it as having turned into a ruling class. According to Shivji, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie owned the means of production through the state and exploited the workers and peasants. At the same time, the bureaucracy remained a weak ruling class by virtue of its economic dependency on the assistance of Western imperialism (Shivji, 1973a, pp. 57–88).

Shivji developed this idea in 1973 through his long essay on the post-*Mwongozo* struggles entitled *The Class Struggle Continues*, which informed his later work on *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (Shivji, 1976). The essay encouraged Rodney to take a much more radical stance on the bureaucracy upon his return from the United States. "In Tanzania, as elsewhere, the strengthening of the state has gone hand in hand with the emergence of privileged classes who themselves depend inordinately on the state machinery for power and accumulation", he wrote, commenting on Shivji's essay in August 1973 (Rodney, 1973, p. 32). Rodney here agreed with Shivji on the shortcomings of state ownership: it only allowed the bureaucracy to expand its ranks and dominate the proletariat by accumulating lucrative official positions (Rodney, 1973). His new stance was not only due to the oppressive circumstances in Tanzania. Shivji's article inspired him to apply Marx's historical materialism to understand the formation of classes in Tanzania as an objective social relationship production evolving over time.

In his substantial commentary, Rodney focused on the evolution of Tanzania's petty bourgeoisie from its humble beginning as petty civil servants under colonial administration to leaders of the nation's liberation struggle. As the privileged section of people received education while colonialism underdeveloped the nation, the petty bourgeoisie rose to articulate the grievance of the peasants and workers against the colonial ruler. Because it possessed no control over production, the petty bourgeoisie had a vested interest in taking over the colonial state. Once the members of this African elite negotiated independence, "the state was a ready instrument for developing themselves as a class", argued Rodney (1973, pp. 31–32). Although he still had doubts about whether the bureaucracy had become a full-blown class, he showed growing signs of resentment towards it.

Months later, Rodney would become even more discouraged by developments in the countryside. In November 1973, Nyerere ordered the compulsory mass villagisation and resettlement of peasants into Ujamaa Village, abandoning his earlier emphasis on persuasion. While only 15 per cent of farmers lived in collective villages in 1973, TANU would boast to have moved over 70 per cent in 1977 (Boesen, Storgaard Madsen and Moody, 1977, pp. 11 and pp. 170–172; Shivji et al., 2020). The regime's despotism had turned into something qualitatively different as the president sought to respond to the food shortages and the fall of commodity prices due to the oil crisis by exploiting the rural population to plant more crops. Over a year later, Rodney would criticise TANU for telling peasants to move to areas that were inappropriate for farming, while deploying the armed forces if the peasants refused to relocate. Reflecting on the mistreatment of farmers, he warned: "It is always dangerous for bureaucratisation to parade in the name of socialism. It happened of course under Stalin" (Rodney, 2022a, p. 269). From his past interaction with peasants, Rodney realised that the bureaucracy, which displayed similarities with its Soviet counterpart, controlled every decision regarding production in the Ujamaa villages.

In June 1974, Rodney left Tanzania for good with a great deal of disillusionment, which challenged his lingering optimism about TANU. “In an atmosphere of uncertainty, the best tactic is to appear disinterested!” he cynically remarked at the cold reception towards Shivji’s essay at UDSM (Rodney, 1973, p. 26). He was acknowledging that Tanzania’s authoritarian turn had reduced many socialists on campus to silence.

Between the United States and Guyana: rediscovering the proletariat

Unforeseen circumstances in Rodney’s life set him on a rapid path toward the rediscovery of the working class after he left Tanzania in the summer of 1974. Rodney was a feared and known critic of the Guyanese dictatorship of Forbes Burnham, who labelled him a troublemaker since his expulsion from Jamaica for his Black Power activism in 1968. Weeks before he resettled in his hometown of Georgetown, Guyana, Rodney learnt that Burnham’s government had rescinded his appointment as head of the history department (Kwayana, 1988, pp. 47–48). From thereon, his life turned into one of relentless travel across four continents—to wherever he secured paid fellowships and lectureships to support his family, where he could write, talk, and debate to support his political development.

When Rodney wrote to James Turner, who founded the Africana Studies Center at Cornell University, he was still preoccupied with Tanzania. He was keen to partake in the institution’s monograph series on “the political economy of Colonial Tanganyika” (Rodney, 1974b). In October 1974, he argues in his proposal: “Over the last year, I actively pursue archival research in Dar [es Salaam].…the University [UDSM] for the first time offered an M.A which was placed under my care and was devoted to Tanzanian economic history” (Rodney, 1974b). In the years of the Workerist turn, Rodney had turned to examining the formation of the Tanzanian working class, which figured as the centre of his monograph *World War II and the Tanzanian Economy.*

In his book, Rodney demonstrates how the wartime demand for military assistance and agricultural products accelerated the rise of classes in Tanganyika. He emphasised the colonial state's role in creating a working class by conscripting Africans into the colonial army as porters and railroad workers rather than soldiers and recruiting them as labour for settler-owned sisal plantations (Rodney, 1976g). In the final chapter, Rodney provides insight into the workers' transition from spontaneous to organised struggles at the end of the war. Commenting on the wage struggles of sisal workers of the Kisangani Estate in 1945, he describes their initiation of small work stoppages and then bigger strikes, releasing their collective power at the point of production. Through strikes, as Rodney argued, the workers gradually overcame their divisions on the plantation (Rodney, 1976g, pp. 10–50). Their common class interest cut across their perceived ethnic and regional differences between skilled and unskilled workers. "In a word, the working class was maturing and achieving a consciousness of itself as a class", he wrote (Rodney, 1976g, p. 48).

The growing size, consciousness, and militancy of the rural proletariat explained why it influenced the burgeoning trade union movement, which proved vital to the anti-colonial struggle of the 1950s. Yet Rodney stressed that the more organised transport workers and dockers provided the vanguard of the struggles the greater strategic position within the colonial economy than the rural workers:

> Workers at the ports and on the railways were closely tied to the import/export function of the economy….It is not surprising that African dockworkers and railway workers who went on strike are associated with nationalist epic and martyrdom in all the coastal areas.…Dockers in Tanganyika went on strike in 1937 and 1939 and they defied the war-time defence regulation in 1943. Continued subsequent resort to strike weapon and an early appreciation of trade unions potentially bought dockers and railway workers with some material gains and stimulated other workers (Rodney, 1976f, pp. 48–49).

As this passage shows, he recognised the working class as a "special class" (Draper, 1978, p. 46). Echoing Draper, Rodney highlighted above that the workers' power derives from its importance to the operations of the colonial capitalist economy. This strategic position

arising out of exploitation meant the Tanzanian proletariat could impose its social weight over society, despite its small size. Rodney listed strikes and unionisation as examples of how workers, concentrated in the plantations, railroads, and cities could find a collective solution to exploitation. He presented these methods as a consequence of their rising collective anti-capitalist consciousness, which enabled them to draw lessons from workers' struggle in the metropolitan centres (Rodney, 1976g, p. 49). With these historical lessons in mind, Rodney turned his attention to the present in his speech on "Class Contradictions in Tanzania" in April 1975 and later his activism in Guyana.

Speaking at Northwestern University in the Chicago suburbs, Rodney drew a deeper radical conclusion on the workers' movement of 1974. He declared with a great deal of enthusiasm that the workers' agitation around *Mwongozo* threatened the TANU bureaucracy with revolution (Rodney, 2022a, p. 271). Whereas, at UCLA, he only considered the working class as a counterweight to the bureaucracy, now he came close to acknowledge its leadership. Many of the examples of workers' self-activity discussed in the Hamburg Lectures in 1978 already appeared in his speech in 1975.

He discussed the high point of the workers' movement, the Mount Carmel Rubber factory occupation of 1973, where workers locked out their managers and ran the factory themselves. Rodney understood that the workers in the rubber factory were striking against the rule of capital and therefore asserting their ability to run the factory in the national interest better than the management. By taking over the factory, "they were posing a more fundamental question: the question of who controls production, who is the boss in a so-called socialist society", he said (Rodney, 2022a, p. 272). Rodney had realised that workers had developed a revolutionary consciousness through their own experience of struggle. They had the power to propose a new democratic and collective way of organising society. He returned to the central argument of classical Marxism that only the working class can liberate itself and the oppressed

in society through its collective struggle at the point of production. If TANU could not hand down socialism, it had to be won from below.

The Afro-Guyanese historian, furthermore, recognised that the petty bourgeoisie swiftly suppressed the workers' occupation. It feared the strikes could spread to other factories, overturn its dominance over production, and threaten its existence as a ruling class. He said: "The petty bourgeoisie is still essentially in control of the state, and it could not allow the working class to exercise this type of initiative, so those workers had to be rounded up and scattered" (Rodney, 2022a p. 272). Yet, Rodney still retained "a confidence tinged with hope" that a progressive section of petty bourgeoise in TANU would listen to peasants and workers and rule in their interest (Rodney, 2022a, p. 274). However, he was soon to lose all confidence in it.

Rodney's rediscovery of the working class was not just an abstract theoretical process or a reflection upon his past experiences in Tanzania. It was deeply connected to his activism in Guyana as a member of the WPA—a pressure group which he joined in 1976, months after returning from the United States. Rodney translated his new theoretical insight on self-emancipation into a revolutionary practice in the fight against the dictatorship of Forbes Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC), which pitted the African and Indian Guyanese working people against one another (Lewis, 1998; Zeilig, 2022; Seecharan, 2023). Rodney helped the WPA establish bases among the mainly Afro-Guyanese mineworking communities of Linden, MacKenzie, Kwakwani, and Everton (Kwayana, 1988). In the words of an Indo-Guyanese retired mineworker, Ali Majeed, Rodney ran an ideological class on Sunday that "raised the consciousness of the workers" (Interview with Majeed, 2022). He relished teaching miners on Marxist political economy and the Russian Revolution of 1917 as well as discussing Guyanese politics and labour conditions in the Bauxite regions (Interview with Majeed, 2022).

Majeed credits Rodney and the WPA for inspiring him and his comrade to build the Organisation of the Working People (OWP), which vowed to challenge the inactivity of the trade union bureaucracy to better confront racism in the workplace (Interview with Majeed, 2022). In a country where racial divisions had been entrenched since colonialism, it was remarkable that a predominantly Afro-Guyanese workforce had elected him as a shop steward, knowing that he wanted to fight the bosses. On 9 December 1976, rank-and-file mineworkers led by Majeed and the OWP staged a spontaneous walkout after the Trade Union Congress betrayed them by accepting a pay deal below inflation (Quamina, 1987; Majeed, 2022). The strike not only resembled those in Tanzania in its method but also in its motives. It expressed the workers' anger at the state bureaucracy of Burnham's PNC, which had failed to improve the livelihood of its workforce by nationalising the economy (Quamina, 1987).

Majeed recalled that the strike mobilised the solidarity of the whole community when he and 14 of his comrades were arrested for picketing strike-breaker workers. "Thousands of people protested in front of the police station saying, "Release the brothers now!"", he recalled, full of pride (Interview with Majeed, 2022). Both Majeed and mineworker Humphrey remembered that Rodney had been very active in the strike. Rodney attended and reported on the court case against the miners for WPA newssheet *Dayclean*. In its aftermath, he spoke at public meetings in Georgetown to rally support for mineworkers (Interview with Humphrey, 2022; Majeed, 2022). In one letter to the editor of *The Citizen*, Rodney accused the pro-government newspapers of disseminating false reports about his whereabouts to support the narrative that "the Linden strike has been the work of agents of destabilisation" (Rodney, 1976c).

The evolution of Rodney's Marxism embodied the dialectical relationship of theory and practice in several ways. First, he sided with workers against a bureaucratic state that claimed to be socialist similar to Nyerere's regime (Zeilig, 2022, pp. 228–229). Secondly, miles away

from Tanzania, he became directly involved in another concrete, spontaneous manifestation of workers' power, which harboured more lessons in struggle. Whereas the absence of leadership characterised the Tanzanian wildcat strikes, the Guyanese walkout, in contrast, demonstrated clear leadership through the OWP's agitators, offering Rodney insights into the potentials of organised rank-and-file militancy. Immediately after the dispute, the OWP, in consultation with the WPA, published a pamphlet indicative of its socialist radicalisation. "Capitalism cannot make profits if labour is withdrawn", it argued, before stressing the need for workers' control over production (Organisation of the Working People, 1977).

Last but not least, Rodney witnessed the state repression unleashed on Majeed and 42 arrested workers, where police tear-gassed them in their cells (Organisation of the Working People, 1977; Majeed, 2022). He perhaps felt the same humiliation that the Tanzanian workers had gone through a couple of years earlier when their strikes were crushed by the TANU one-party state. It is this growing resentment towards the anti-worker, bureaucratic socialism from-above that he brought with him to his lecture in Hamburg in 1978.

The Hamburg lectures and beyond: lost illusions

From April to late June, Rodney taught a course entitled "African Development 1878-1978" at the University of Hamburg (Rodney, 1978a; Zeilig, 2022). Zeilig, who analysed the lectures, illustrated Rodney's acknowledgement of the centrality of workers' struggle in the Tanzanian national liberation. He underlined how Rodney placed emphasis on the wildcat character of strikes, which caused fears and aversion to bureaucracy. They were wildcat because they "were not strikes which the union initiates but strikes which come from below. The workers themselves decide on direct action", Rodney explained to his students (Rodney, 1978c). Zeilig identified how Rodney recognised the special significance of the spontaneous strike. Transcending the immediate economic demands of the workers, it announced the possibility of a new society under the leadership of the proletariat (Zeilig, 2022, pp. 284–297).

Rodney had only briefly touched on the issue of spontaneity during his 1975 speech on "Class Contradictions in Tanzania". Apart from this example, his analysis of the proletarian movement was not fundamentally different from his 1975 speech.

If the Hamburg lectures represent a qualitative shift in his thinking, it is first and foremost because they reveal in striking ways how Rodney lost all faith in Nyerere's regime. When speaking in 1975, Rodney had not fully acknowledged the real class content of the Tanzanian state. He defined "the state as an arena of struggle between the petty bourgeoisie and proletariat" while he claimed the masses were "being brought into politics of participation" (Rodney, 2022a, p. 271). In so doing, Rodney advocated for reform, not revolution. In his eyes, the publication of the TANU guidelines, *Mwongozo*, exemplified how the pressure from the workers and progressive members of the petty bourgeoisie could lead to the transformation of TANU into a proletarian state. He saw in strikes and occupations a method for making the petty bourgeois bureaucracy peacefully submit to the will of workers.

Yet, at the time of the Hamburg lectures, Rodney observed that the one-party state remained under the exclusive control of the bourgeois bureaucracy. He was not impressed by the renewed socialist rhetoric that emerged after TANU merged with the Afro-Shirazi Party of Zanzibar to become Chama Cha Mapinduzi (The Party of Revolution) in 1976. "The party reflects the same class dominant with state", he lamented (Rodney, 1978c). He abandoned his earlier emphasis on the ideological divide of the petty bourgeoisie. He now identified that the Tanzanian petty bourgeoisie as a whole had consolidated itself as a ruling class alienated from the masses through its state ownership of the means of production and its collusion with Western imperialism. "We might say Tanzania and Guinea would represent the development of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie", he said (Rodney, 1978c). Rodney here joined without reservation the position of his UDSM comrade, Shivji, who had published his *Class Struggles in Tanzania* (Shivji, 1976). Furthermore, Rodney drew on the evidence of his UDSM comrades

Henri Mapolu and G. Phillipson (1976) to illustrate how TANU proved incapable of any socialist transformation in the countryside.

Rodney exposed the total failure of the Ujamaa villagisation project, the kernel of Nyerere's socialism, which he had sincerely defended in 1972. Following his UDSM comrades, he argued Ujamaa had failed to increase production and transform social relations in the countryside by turning the peasants into the decision-makers (Mapolu and Phillipson, 1976). He was speaking at a time when Nyerere and TANU claimed to have moved over 13 million peasants, 70 per cent of the rural population, into Ujamaa villages (Shivji et al., 2020 p. 187). Above all else, Rodney was disappointed at the lack of democracy in villages. He explained, "The bureaucracy needs to reproduce itself and present itself to the peasants as the class holding all the expertise" (Rodney, 1978b). Before, Rodney tended to see the failures of Ujamaa in terms of bureaucratic abuses occurring within a socialist framework. He supposed such errors could be rectified by the progressives in TANU. In 1978, he located the failure of Ujamaa's objectives within the bourgeois bureaucracy, which sought to exploit the peasants and semi-proletarians to increase production on the international market to ensure its survival as a ruling class.

Rodney's powerful analysis of the failure of Ujamaa revealed his awareness of the signs of collapse in Tanzania's economy, including the impact of falling commodity prices on the world market following the oil crisis of 1973-79. It was almost as if he anticipated that Tanzania, which incurred heavy debts to finance Ujamaa, would follow most African countries in capitulating to the structural adjustment policies of the IMF. He stated:

> Whenever the IMF has to lend…it will say…we are not lending your money to buttress your program of social medicine, the health services are no real concern of ours, we want to make sure that you return your economy to a very solid foundation with the context of international capitalism (Rodney, 1978c).

But there existed in Rodney's mind an alternative to the austerity regime of Western imperialism that would force Tanzania to cut education, social and health care to repay loans: the workers' struggle. Evoking the high points of the Tanzanian workers in 1973 and 1974, Rodney told his students that the workers went on strike for reasons much deeper than higher wages and argued: "Look such and such administrator, in other words, a member of the economic bureaucracy such a person is sabotaging our economy, or such a person is engaged in corrupt activities" (Rodney, 1978c). He expressed his conviction that workers could take control and overthrow the hierarchy of factory production. Tanzanian workers were telling the bureaucracy through their actions: "We as workers are capable of running this enterprise more efficiently than the economic bureaucracy" (Rodney, 1978c). He identified the workers as those able to propose an alternative democratic society.

Rodney understood that for all their heroic achievement, the strikes of the 1970s in Tanzania were rapidly crushed by the state, like the Guyanese mineworker dispute of 1976. Therefore, the Afro-Guyanese historian began to reflect seriously on the limits of spontaneity. However, his Hamburg lectures remain silent on these issues. Instead, Rodney's reflections appeared in his editorial for the first issue of *Transition*, a journal launched in 1978 by WPA members at the University of Guyana, where he discussed again the pitfalls of the Tanzanian situation and the transition to socialism in the Global South. What transpired through his article was the idea that the partisans of socialism from-below should not limit themselves to extolling proletarian spontaneity. It stressed that a strategy based on proletarian self-emaciation required revolutionaries to consider the intricate relationship between spontaneous action and organisation (Rodney, 1980b, pp. 14–15).

When discussing the failure of Tanzanian socialism, Rodney wrote that the leap from capitalism to socialism "is no mere spontaneous process. It involves changing levels of consciousness, building a working-class organisation and discipline and above all

revolutionising the state" (Rodney, 1980b, p. 14). Rodney understood spontaneity was fundamental to any revolutionary process. Spontaneity revealed the combativeness and maturation of working-class consciousness. However, spontaneous movements had their weakness due to the uneven character of proletarian consciousness as workers never come to a simultaneous embrace of revolutionary ideas. Impulsive struggles from-below too often fall to non-revolutionary leadership—vanish or capitulate to repression because they cave into the wishes of the less conscious majority rather than the active minor.

Rodney pointed to one remedy for ensuring the victory of the active masses when he vowed to build an organisation of the working class able to harness their self-activity (Kwayana, 1988; Zeilig, 2022). He was pushing for the creation of a network of activists centred around radical elements in the working class who would agitate socialism from outside the state, not from within as reformists do. Through sustained agitation, revolutionary activists and workers would pull the exploited and oppressed to their side. In 1978, he showed an appreciation for the working class as the only class able to lead the national liberation struggle in Tanzania and more broadly throughout the Global South to socialism.

Conclusion

Rodney's speech at UCLA in 1972 began his move away from Tanzanian socialism from-above. His immersion in Tanzanian society and his travels abroad accelerated his recognition of workers' power and his pessimism towards Nyerere's regime. By 1978, in Hamburg, he abandoned the idea that Nyerere and the TANU state could hand down socialism. Although Rodney shifted his perspective in Tanzania, he did not transform crucial aspects of his support for socialism from-above. Until his murder in 1980, Rodney still considered the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba as socialist states in spite of their imperfections (Rodney, 1980b).

I suspect Shivji's (1976) concept of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie did not allow Rodney to look more critically at these regimes from-above. In his conception, a bureaucratic bourgeoisie could only exist in a neo-colonial state, where a bureaucracy depended on the Western bourgeoisie for trade and investment. While the concept suited Tanzania, it had limited application elsewhere. Unlike the Tanzanian bureaucracy, the Chinese and the Soviets seemed to have severed ties with Western capitalism. Therefore, Rodney saw them as more advanced socialist nations. While Rodney did recognise a bureaucracy within these state-led regimes, he saw it in service of the working masses. In *Transition*, he held optimistic views regarding China's collectivisation efforts, which he contrasted with the failure of Ujamaa (Rodney, 1980b, pp. 11–17). It is possible that he lacked information on the realities of China's horrific Great Leap Forward of 1958-61. In this campaign, Mao's bureaucracy heartlessly exploited the peasantry on state farms to industrialise China rapidly. The "Great Leap" ended in catastrophe with the death of 30 million peasants due to famine (Becker, 1996).

Rodney nevertheless made tremendous strides towards socialism from-below at a time when many Marxists went the other way. By 1978, he recognised that the Tanzanian working class could lead the national liberation struggle to socialism. He returned to Marx's central idea, foreseeing and practising proletarian self-emancipation as the key to a society free from class oppression. He continued to build on this powerful idea through his own experience as a full-time organiser of the working people in Guyana. In 1979, a year after returning from Hamburg, he turned the WPA into a revolutionary socialist party, organising protests and strikes against Burnham's regime (Kwayana, 1988; Zeilig, 2022). Unfortunately, the Guyanese state assassinated him a year later, cutting short his growing appreciation of the working class. Rodney's evolving Marxist outlook on Tanzania sharpens our understanding of socialism from-below as the only genuine socialist theory and guide to action centred on the self-emancipatory potential of the working class.

Chapter 7: Rodney and the struggle for unity among Guyanese working people

Introduction

One month before his return to Guyana, after 14 years abroad, Rodney had already become the focus of a multiracial rally reminiscent of the nation's anti-colonial gatherings in the 1950s (Kwayana, 1988). In August 1974, two to three thousand Guyanese rallied at the University of Georgetown in support of him (Hinds, 1999). They learned that Prime Minister Forbes Burnham's regime had pressured the University of Guyana to overturn his appointment as head of the history department, confirming that Rodney's past activism in Jamaica in 1968 still stoked fears among the PNC leadership. Rodney's popularity as a Marxist critic of the government and advocate for racial solidarity threatened a regime that presented itself as progressive socialist abroad while fostering racial division at home. Despite a global campaign led by intellectuals, Rodney's hopes for reinstatement were not realised (Boukari-Yabara, 2018). He had to resettle in his homeland jobless and in conflict with the ruling party.

This chapter explores Rodney's transformation into an organiser of the Guyanese working people from his return to Guyana in 1974 until late 1979. It argues that Rodney made his most significant contributions to socialism from-below during this period, deepening his confidence in working-class self-emancipation, which he had initially gained in Tanzania. First, he elaborates a dialectical materialist explanation of the relationship between race and class in Guyanese history that convinces him of the upmost importance of the class struggle for overcoming racial divisions among African and Indian workers. Second, Rodney's efforts at building the WPA to challenge Burnham's dictatorship reveal that his theoretical insights translated into a practical solution; he identified the revolutionary political party as the necessary form of organisation to unite workers against Burnham's dictatorship.

Rodney's contributions from Guyana demonstrate the unity between theory and practice in Marxism, marking a departure from the intellectual role he was confined to as a foreign visitor in Dar es Salaam (Zeilig, 2022). However, this unity cannot be understood without uncovering how it came into being. Dialectical reasoning, which focuses on processes and interrelations, is necessary for this task because it avoids Cartesian logic, which renders things motionless by isolating them from their historical and geographical context (Harvey, 2000; Rees, 2005). Accordingly, this chapter proceeds by deciphering the contradictory processes that Rodney internalises, which determine his praxis as a complex structure in motion within a larger totality. Geographer David Harvey adds useful precision on how internalisation occurs: "I, as an individual, do not in practice internalise everything in the universe but absorb mainly what is relevant to me through my relationships (metabolic, social, political, cultural) to processes operating over a relatively bounded field (my ecosystem, economy, field)" (Harvey, 1996, p. 53). Identifying the processes relevant to Rodney involved an exploration of his writings, interviews with his WPA comrades, oral testimonies, letters, correspondences, and finally, the use of Guyanese newspapers to reconstruct the national class struggle.

This chapter begins by exploring the development of Guyanese society from the anti-colonial movement of the 1950s up to Rodney's return in 1974. The point of discussing this first process is to show that Guyana's historical struggles, though justified and fought on racial and ideological grounds, ultimately expressed a conflict between and within social classes. It is this underlying reality, driving Guyanese society, that Rodney would internalise and reflect in his own writings. The second process, intersecting with the first, involves Rodney's leap out of Black Power after the Sixth Pan-African Congress in June 1974. This shift prepared him to offer a materialist analysis of race and class, demonstrating his grasp of the dialectic in Guyanese history. The third process articulates Rodney's conscious intervention in Guyanese history as a WPA activist as it transitions away from being a pressure group to better shape

class struggle in the late 1970s. It demonstrates how his theoretical insights on anti-racism translated into his practical recognition of the revolutionary party.

Process I: The development of a racialised class struggle in Guyana (1950-76)

At first sight, the political situation that Rodney encountered upon his return in 1974 appeared as one between personalities and their political parties. Cheddi Jagan, the Indo-Guyanese father of modern Guyanese anti-colonial nationalism and leader of the opposition PPP, challenged Forbes Burnham, the Afro-Guyanese who ruled Guyana at the helm of the PNC. Second, the situation paraded as a conflict between their state-led socialisms. Jagan's PPP aligned with the Soviet Union while Burnham's PNC favoured China and Tanzania as inspirations for the Cooperative Republic it proclaimed over Guyana in 1970 (Seecharan, 2023). Finally, the struggle presented itself as a racial one. The PPP garnered the support of the Indo-Guyanese majority, while the PNC earned the support of the Afro-Guyanese minority. Burnham and Jagan spoke in favour of racial unity while accusing the other of racism (Premdas, 1992). Both leaders convinced themselves and their supporters that their racial and ideological differences divided them. However, the real cause of their animosity was found in their diverging class interests.

Jagan's PPP and Burnham's PNC embodied the contradiction between two factions of the Guyanese middle class (petty bourgeoisie) with distinct material conditions of existence. Forbes Burnham personified the aspirations of the Afro-Guyanese middle class, which emerged from slavery. In the decades after slavery was abolished in 1838, this small class forged its path to wealth and influence in British Guiana through education in villages and towns. Burnham was born in 1923 as the son of a schoolmaster in Georgetown (Lewis, 2024). He became a lawyer after studying at the London School of Economics, following the path of successful Afro-Guyanese headmasters, legal professionals, civil servants, and military men.

This African creole elite, which played a role in the colonial administration, began to see itself as the heir to the state (Lewis, 2024).

In contrast, Jagan's ties belonged to the Indian middle class, which developed out of indentureship on the colonial plantations. Born in 1918, Jagan was raised the son of an Indo-Guyanese canecutter on the Port Morant estate in Berbice who earned a promotion to become an estate driver (Seecharan, 2023). It was through these kinds of promotions to foreman roles that a few Indians found opportunities to accumulate capital. A small-business class consequently arose through rice farming and milling, cattle rearing, milking, and commercial trading (Shiwaran, 1990). Much like its African counterpart, the rural Indian middle class increasingly valued schooling in the towns for social mobility through legal and political professions after indentureship ended in 1920. Jagan exemplified this burgeoning trend within the Indian middle class. In the 1930s, he attended Queens College, the most prestigious school in British Guiana. Then, he earned a dentistry degree from Northwestern University before entering politics (Seecharan, 2023).

The migration of Indians to Georgetown in the interwar (1919-39) period set in motion competition with their African counterparts. David de Caires explained: "It was the movement of the Indians from the rural areas to Georgetown that, for the first time, created a much greater interplay between the old black professional class, who had been acculturated much earlier" (de Caires, cited in Lewis, 2024, p. 44) This intra-class rivalry explained why the multiracial nationalist movement of the 1950s represented a "coalition of disparate interests likely to break under pressure" (de Caires, cited in Lewis, 2024, p. 44). The Indian middle class, seeking legal-administrative support for their commercial ventures, envied Africans for their representation in the elected legislature, linked to their roles in the colonial state's professional sectors (Nehusi, 2018). This position gave Africans access to the patronage system of the colonial administration allowing it to promote relatives into the civil service and increase their pensions

and salaries. Conversely, the African petty bourgeoisie resisted efforts by Indian newcomers to assert themselves in the legislature. They resisted universal suffrage by insisting on reading tests as a requirement for voting, taking advantage of the lower literacy rates among Indians (Jagan, 1972; Nehusi, 2018). Despite this competition, both groups shared a common animosity toward colonial rule, as the British imposed barriers to their advancement.

The contradiction between petty bourgeoisie operated within larger conflicts. Guyanese petty bourgeoisie clashed with the colonial ruling class, but a more significant conflict existed between the colonial rulers and the exploited Guyanese workers. On one side, stood the white planters and foreign companies backed by the colonial state. On the other, stood the Indian sugar workers, African urban workers, bauxite miners and plantation labourers. The anti-colonial sentiment of the Guyanese people intensified during the urban and rural strikes of the inter-war period, which culminated in the 1939 Leanora plantation strike and riot. Amid rising proletarian struggles, African and Indian middle-class leaders founded trade unions. They aimed to overcome their class limitations by organising the working masses. This role enhanced their bargaining power with the colonial state and helped assert their aspirations. If negotiations failed, they led struggles against the colonisers with mass support (Premdas, 1974).

Jagan and Burnham's political ascension mirrored this historical trajectory. It transitioned from their involvement in narrowly race-based middle-class associations to engaging in race-based trade union activism that united workers under the leadership of the petty-bourgeoisie (Lewis, 2024). In the 1940s, Jagan became treasurer of the East Indian Manpower Citizen Association and left to establish the more militant Guiana Industrial Workers' Union (GIWU) in 1947 to better represent sugar workers (Spinner, 2021). Meanwhile Burnham participated in the British Guiana Labour Union and became its president in 1956. Political organisation, however, remained segregated until the late 1940s when the anti-colonial

struggle demanded racial unity. The need for unity became evident after the 1948 16-mile funeral procession for five sugar workers killed by colonial police during a GIWU-organised strike on the Enmore plantation (Rabe, 2005). Jagan's Political Affairs Committee, founded in 1946, aimed to build a multiracial organisation to challenge the colonial state and planter oligarchy. It therefore recruited Forbes Burnham and other Afro-Guyanese activists, leading to the formation of the PPP in January 1950 (Rabe, 2005; Nehusi, 2018; Spinner, 2021; Seecharan, 2023; Lewis, 2024).

Jagan assumed leadership of Guyana's first multiracial party, with Burnham serving as its chairman. For a moment, an anti-British alliance between the two races and their petty bourgeoisies coalesced around two personalities. Under their joint leadership, the early PPP thrived, organising mass rallies that resonated with both Indian and African working class anti-colonial sentiments. Walter's parents, Edward and Pauline Rodney, exemplified working class Afro-Guyanese support for the party. Edward hosted political discussions at home, while Pauline travelled long distance to attend political rallies (Rodney, 1990). The Rodneys sent their children to distribute the PPP manifesto in Georgetown. "They were not political ideologues, but ordinary people taking their destiny into their own hands", (Rodney, 1990, p. 8) remembered in 1975.

In the 1953 general elections, the PPP won a landslide victory, securing 18 out of 24 House Assembly seats under a new constitution with universal suffrage. However, the PPP's government lasted only 133 days as Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union permeated Guyanese politics (Palmer, 2010). Despite Jagan's communist rhetoric, the PPP's agenda was reformist, focusing on expanding the Guyanese middle class in preparation for independence. For instance, it aimed to democratise and secularise the education system by multiplying scholarships for working people, allowing Rodney to attend Queens College (Lewis, 1998; Palmer, 2010). And yet, the Americans associated the PPP with Soviet Marxism,

pressuring Britain to deploy troops to remove the PPP from power. The 1953 imperial invasion led to the suspension of the constitution and arrest of PPP leaders, fracturing the party. Two years later, a split between Burnham and Jagan created rival Burnhamite and Jaganite factions within the PPP, reflecting divisions within the petty bourgeoisie, each prepared to subdue the other. Burnham now accused Jagan of being a "communist stooge" to support his aim of leading Guyanese independence with Western approval (Premdas, 1982, p. 183).

Once Burnham formed the PNC, after his humiliating defeat to Jagan's faction in the 1957 elections, the ideological divide became a racial one as both parties mobilised for elections on the basis of racial loyalty. The PPP mobilised Indian support, while the PNC garnered African loyalty. Although the PPP won the 1961 elections, securing votes from the Indo-Guyanese majority, Cold War politics interfered again (Nehusi, 2018; Seecharan, 2023; Lewis, 2024). The CIA destabilised Jagan's government in Guyana by funding strikes and racial unrest (Waters and Daniels, 2005). It thereby exploited African dissatisfaction with the PPP's 1962 budget, which denied pay rises to the predominantly Afro-Guyanese civil service (Nehusi, 2018; Lewis, 2024). In 1964, the U.S. financed a coalition between Burnham's PNC and the United Force, which represented local capitalists of Portuguese and Chinese descent. Concurrently, the British modified the electoral system to proportional representation, reducing Jagan's chances of electoral success (Premdas, 1979). Jagan's defeat in the same year pushed the country to the brink of civil war, with escalating racial tensions leading to 176 deaths and extensive displacement (Lewis, 2024). Thus, with the support of Western powers, Burnham's PNC led Guyana to independence in 1966.

When Rodney returned to Guyana in 1974, bitter animosity between the African and Indian communities still lingered, despite the PNC's rhetoric of racial harmony (Westmaas, 2004). This propaganda was overshadowed by the domination of the Afro-Guyanese bureaucracy, which continued to discriminate against Indians. As the Afro-Guyanese electorate

was in the minority, the PNC could only maintain power by manipulating electoral outcomes, as evidenced by the rigged elections of 1968 and 1973.

In 1970, during the fourth year of Guyanese independence, Burnham declared Guyana a Cooperative Socialist Republic, betraying his Western allies (Premdas, 1978, 1982). His ideological shift was driven by Guyana's dire economic situation. The Guyanese economy depended heavily on bauxite, sugar, and rice, which accounted for 80 per cent of exports (Premdas, 1978; Lewis, 2024). However, such revenues proved insufficient to support demographic growth and an Afro-Guyanese state bureaucracy, overstaffed through clientelism. Initially, the PNC aimed to revitalise the economy through foreign aid and loans. However, after reducing the threat of Jagan's communism, financial assistance from Washington diminished. Moreover, class struggles posed significant challenges. The Indian middle-class, controlling rice production, boycotted the PNC's economic program, causing rice production to halve between 1965 and 1973 and plunging parts of Guyana into near famine. Strikes by underpaid Indian sugar workers, led by PPP-affiliated Guyana Agricultural Worker Union (GAWU) officials, further disrupted sugar exports (Premdas, 1978).

From 1970-76, Burnham's PNC embarked on a nationalisation programme justified under the rhetoric of socialism and anti-imperialism. During this period, the state took over 32 businesses and banks, starting with the Canadian-owned Demerara Bauxite Company (Demba) in 1971, followed by Guyana Timbers in 1972, Reynolds Metals Company in 1975, and the London-Based Bookers in 1976, which had monopolised the sugar industry since slavery (Premdas, 1978, 1982; Lewis, 2024). Challenging Western interests, Burnham aligned with Third World leaders and anti-imperialist movements. He publicly supported the Black Power movement in the Caribbean and the United States in the early 1970s. In 1973, he invited Julius Nyerere to Guyana to showcase his national service program, modelled on Tanzania's.

Supporting African liberation, he allowed Cuban planes, en-route to the Angolan guerrilla war against Portuguese and South African colonialism, to refuel in Guyana (Lewis, 2024).

Several authors argue that Burnham silenced his left-wing critics and erased the stigma of his cooperation with the CIA by rebranding himself as an anti-imperialist leader abroad (Premdas, 1982; Seecharan, 2023; Lewis, 2024). However, Burnham's embrace of state-led socialism (or state capitalism) served another purpose. It provided the Afro-Guyanese professional petty-bourgeoisie with a governance model centred around nationalisation, allowing it to dominate the means of production and become a ruling class. At the PNC conference of September 1974, Burnham declared, "It was also decided that the party should assume unapologetically its paramountcy over the government which is merely one of its executive arms" (PNC, 1974). The PNC moved towards a one-party state, controlling 80 per cent of the economy through nationalisation and bringing departments and public institutions under its control. This centralisation of power strengthened Burnham's ability to victimise Indians and dissenting Africans, evident in Rodney's cancelled appointment at the university.

Interviewed in 1976, Rodney labelled Burnham's regime as "Pseudo-socialism" (Rodney, 1976a, p. 121). In another interview that year, he explained that nationalisation had failed to break ties with foreign capital, liberate wage-labour from exploitation, and resolve the economic crisis. It was only a nominal shift from foreign to local ownership, leaving the country mired in debt, dependent on poor trading terms and inflation from the 1973 oil crisis (Rodney, 1976e). Despite its rhetoric of racial harmony, the PNC used racist manipulation to deflect blame from its role in the economic crisis:

> The regime simply goes around, papering over cracks, posturing that there is no racial discrimination. But in actual fact, they play upon the fears of the Afro-Guyanese masses. They exacerbate the fears of the Indo-Guyanese masses in everyday affairs; the manipulation of the courts, the question of granting employment, the structure of the national services, the employment in the public services, and the armed forces (Rodney, 1976e).

He accused the government of using its control over jobs to hire blacks over Indians especially in the armed forces and public services, while firing and harassing those speaking out against racism and poor working conditions (Rodney, 1976e). Such was the political situation that Rodney was determined to understand and transform.

Process II: Reflecting the dialectic of Guyanese history

A leap out of Black Power

Engels once remarked that "the dialectic of the mind is only the reflection of the forms of motion of the real world, both of nature and of history" (Engels, quoted in Sheehan, 2017, p. 26). To this quote, it must be added that while most people reflect these forms in a distorted and fragmented manner, a Marxist strives to consciously appropriate real-world processes (Molyneux, 2012). Where most scholars accepted the outward appearance of Guyanese society, Rodney's historical writings would demonstrate a dialectical reflection of the class dynamism of Guyanese society. This accomplishment, however, cannot be understood without discussing another process that prepared him to think dialectically about race and class.

One of Rodney's closest comrades, Tacuma Ogunseye, explains why Rodney did not join his Pan-African organisation, African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA), upon his return to Guyana. He "had little interest in the celebration of culture; he was looking for ways to overcome the division between Africans and Indians" (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022). Rodney recognised that, while the message of black pride was important for Afro-Guyanese people, it had nothing to offer the Indian majority in Guyana. Eusi Kwayana (1988, p. 7) observed that Rodney had "already made a natural, or necessary leap through black power to the science of the revolutionary working people, Marxism" upon his return to Guyana. Although Kwayana (2022) could not pinpoint when and how his transition occurred, it was a qualitative change in his racial politics coinciding with his

rediscovery of working-class power (Chapter 6). Rodney's political evolution was intricately linked to the waning global influence of Black Power and Pan-Africanism.

A speech delivered by Rodney at a conference in Dar es Salaam, sometime between 29 November and 7 December 1975, serves as a clear example of his evolving perception of Black Power as a contested ideology and a movement in decline. Speaking on *Support for African Liberation in Afro-America and in the West-Indies*, Rodney (1976d) argued that Caribbean states had recently co-opted Black Power in the context of support for anti-colonial wars in Southern Africa. By posing as defenders of black unity, the Caribbean petty bourgeoisie hypocritically presented themselves as allies of the non-aligned movement (Rodney, 1976d). He singled out Antigua's government's call for Zimbabwean independence while opposing African liberation solidarity marches in its country. Regarding Burnham's Guyana, he explained that "the present regime practises anti-Indian racism, while supposedly speaking on behalf of all Guyanese in denouncing white racism" (Rodney, 1976d, p. 16). Rodney (1976d, p. 18) warned his African audience against this new opportunist trend, asserting that "it is no longer sufficient to draw a line simply between those who are pro-imperialist and anti-imperialist". He advised that so-called socialist governments should be judged based on how they treat the working people and not on platitudes to anti-imperialism and black pride (Rodney, 1976d, p. 6).

Rodney drew his conclusion from events surrounding the Sixth Pan-African Congress (PAC) of June 1974 in Dar es Salaam, the first to take place in independent Africa. The Sixth PAC was initially conceived as grassroots rather than a state-led affair. The idea emerged from the 1969 international Black Power conference in Bermuda, leading to the establishment of the U.S.-based Temporary Secretariat with C L R James's support (Markle, 2017; Adi, 2018). Despite gaining international recognition with Nyerere's backing, the Secretariat's plans never materialised owing to tensions between the national states and grassroots organisations. Among

them, Burnham's Guyana opposed the inclusion of Eusi Kwayana's Pan-African group, African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA), while Gairy's Grenada objected to the left-wing New Jewel Movement's participation. The OAU formed a committee that usurped decision-making from the Secretariat (Markle, 2017). Except for the 200-strong African American delegation, the congress became the prerogative of African and Caribbean states (Boukari-Yabara, 2017; Markle, 2017). As a coordinator for the Sixth PAC, Rodney penned a position paper voicing his disappointment sometime between April and May 1974 (Hill, 1974; James, 1974).

In his document, Rodney reiterated his longstanding criticism of the African petty bourgeoisie as a deceitful elite representing "the negation of Pan-Africanism" (Rodney, 1976f, p. 28). He accused it of defending its narrow class interests by becoming compradors of the Western ruling class over its territory rather than defying imperialism through African unity. The paper equally conveyed the important changes in his Marxism during those years. He no longer saw revolutionary leadership in leaders of nation-states, but in the small and militant African working class and the guerrilla movements in Southern Africa. He wrote: "Our brothers in the South are striking blows, which include attacks on enemy bases in Angola, the destruction of rail links in Mozambique, the disruption of production through strikes in Namibia and South Africa" (Rodney, 1976f, p. 29). Rodney concluded that Pan-Africanism must be an internationalist, anti-imperialist, and a socialist weapon owned by the exploited and their radical organisations (Rodney, 1976f, pp. 33–34).

It appears Rodney wanted to build a left-wing platform by bringing together his contacts from African liberation movements and black activists in the Americas, where he had an audience. His Jamaican friend Robert Hill, who worked under Vincent Harding for the Atlanta-based Black Radical think-tank the Institute of the Black World (IBW), promised Rodney the organisation would distribute 5,000 copies of his position paper for Sixth PAC (Hill, 1974). In

the same letter, he told Rodney that many "are looking to you to carry a strong revolutionary line against the official fandangle" (Hill, 1974). Unfortunately, Rodney fell ill days before the congress and could not attend (Rodney, 1976f).

At the activist level, the Sixth PAC exposed fractures within the Black Power movement, signalling its decline in the United States and worldwide. The congress witnessed intense debates on whether African liberation was foremost a class struggle or a racial one, involving Marxist and Black Nationalist factions within the African American delegation and the Southern African delegations (Fuller, 1974, 2023; Kalamu ya Salaam, 1974; Madhubuti, 1974; La TaSha Levy, Hill and Claude, 2008; Alkalimat, 2022). The congress's aftermath prompted Rodney to accept that an increasing number of black activists believed "Black Power and Pan-Africanism are too limited to provide further scope for the development of black people's struggle" (Rodney, 1975). He, who had been a living symbol of Black Power, now revised his stance, acknowledging that the strategy of mobilising on racial lines had lost ground.

In his 1975 speech in Tanzania, Rodney spoke of the decline of Howard Fuller's African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC), a movement he admired, to illustrate his point. Established in 1972, the ALSC embodied Rodney's (vision of a "Black nationalist front" uniting Black Marxists, Black Nationalists, and Pan-Africanists to organise fundraising activities in support of African liberation (Rodney, 1976d, p. 3). Fuller, who met Rodney in Tanzania in mid-1971, later invited him to speak at the ALSC's first African Liberation Day demonstration in San Francisco on 27 May 1972, alongside the Black Panther Party's co-founder Bobby Seale (Interview with Fuller, 2023). The rally in San Francisco drew 10,000 people, second only to the one in D.C., which attracted 30,000 people (Alkalimat, 2022). Despite this initial success, the ALSC disintegrated by 1974 due to division between Marxists and Nationalists, as Rodney remarked: "the Sixth Pan-African Congress…completed the disintegration of the black front [ALSC]" (Rodney, 1976d, p. 5). Between 1974 and 1976, the

tensions, splits, and decline of Black Power and Pan-Africanism convinced him to abandon the quest for a black united front and instead focus on aligning African Liberation with socialism. However, this shift brought its own challenges.

One problem he identified was that African revolutionaries in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola issued a blunt condemnation of all forms of Black Nationalism as divisive, citing examples such as Kavandame's split from Frelimo (Rodney, 1976d). While this attitude was justified in Africa, it overlooked the historical complexities of race in the United States. It caused consternation among many African Americans, including those embracing Marxist ideas, who prioritised organising within the black community above all else because of racism in the U.S.'s labour and socialist movement (Rodney, 1976d). Howard Fuller's words encapsulate this sentiment: "I was a Marxist, I believed in world revolution, but I never trusted the white American working class" (Interview with Fuller, 2023). Regarding the African perspective, Rodney fully grasped that the anti-colonial struggle had motivated revolutionaries in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola to extend solidarity with the working classes of Europe and white progressives (Rodney, 1976a, 1976d).

Through his travels to the United States following his dismissal from the University of Guyana in 1974, Rodney turned into an ambassador of socialist Pan-Africanism, striving to bridge this gap between both sides. In so doing, he stressed the utmost necessity for African Americans to learn from the more political advanced guerrilla struggles in Africa. "The consciousness of Southern African leadership outstrips that of those sections of Afro-American leadership which attached importance to ethnic identity to the virtual exclusion of other considerations", he wrote (Rodney, 1976d, p. 9). Division among African Americans regarding who to support in Angola's liberation war gave Rodney's mission a sense of urgency. In 1976 at Howard University, he made a case for supporting the socialist MPLA while exposing the

pro-American imperialism of UNITA, which garnered African American support by identifying with Black Nationalism (Rodney, 1976b).

Rodney was well-suited for this revolutionary diplomacy. He had cultivated an audience among both Marxists and Black Nationalists as a figurehead of Caribbean Black Power and as the author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. The Atlanta-based Institute of the Black World invited Rodney to lecture alongside his Black Nationalist friend, Bill Strickland, at its summer symposium on "Racism and Capitalism in American National Development", from July to late August 1974 (IBW, 1974). He made broader arguments about the constraints on focussing the anti-racist struggle on the black community. "I keep insisting that we will mess our analysis up if we see all these categories as historically unchangeable. What is a white man today may not be a white man tomorrow", Rodney said in response to Strickland's claim that white people are inherently racist (Rodney and Strickland, 1974, p. 1). Rodney's assertion that a "black man given power in capitalist society is no less bestial and brutal than a white man", informed that prioritising racial solidarity risked obscuring the class divisions existing within the black community (Rodney and Strickland, 1974, p. 2).

Some of Rodney's other interventions refrained from providing clear-cut answers. They nevertheless showcased a remarkable adeptness at raising the most controversial issues and subjecting them to thorough examination that accounted for various perspectives. He, for instance, addressed the question of multiracial alliances at *The Black Scholar* 's retreat on "The Pan-African Movement: What Is to Be Done" in March 1975 (*The Black Scholar,* 1975). Similar to ALSC, the Journal's staff had suffered serious division on the question of race or class (*The Black Scholar,* 1975). The only trace of what appears to be Rodney's contribution to the gathering are typewritten and hand-scribbled notes on sheets of paper from Cornell University, where he worked in the spring of that year. The notes convey that he wanted his audience to reflect upon the growing presence of African Americans in the Communist Party

of America, alongside the fact that socialist movements in Asia and Africa considered white workers as their allies (Rodney, 1975). “The more critical issue”, he asked “is whether the black Marxist conceptualises organisation at this issue at this moment in the U.S.A as transcending the historical barriers of race” (Rodney, 1975). Rodney was pushing his African American audience to contemplate the possibility of emancipating themselves from the prism of history to seize the prospects of the present (Rodney, 1975).

By grappling with division among black militants, Rodney transformed his own views on Black Power. Because it had become a contested ideology following the fall of the ALSC, appropriated by Caribbean heads of states and weaponised by the enemies of the Angolan MPLA, Rodney was prepared to move on:

> Support for African liberation is now more readily portrayed as part of a historical responsibility which extends to anti-imperialist struggles in Chile, South-east Asia, the Middle East and even Europe itself given the possibilities which have been opened up in Portugal. Imperialism is…a new focus for attack by blacks who previously were satisfied to couch their support for African liberation solely in terms of ethnic identification (Rodney, 1976d, p. 4).

Rodney’s quote from his 1975 speech was notably optimistic, yet it served to underscore his shifted focus: supporting African liberation was not merely about uniting Africans but rather advocating for a radical form of international class solidarity. This approach he hoped would give postcolonial independence a genuine socialist character. Thus, when Rodney made his definitive return to Guyana in 1975, his Marxism had undergone a qualitative leap out of Black Power, paralleled by his ongoing rediscovery of working class power. He was a changed man because he recognised that the circumstances around him had changed. Having come to terms with the decline of Black Power and the betrayal of Pan-Africanism by the African and Caribbean petty bourgeoisie, he shifted towards Marxism to address the issues of race and class in Guyana.

Race & class in Guyanese history and politics[4]

Rodney's analysis of race and class in Guyana is one of his most important contributions to socialism from-below. His writings and speeches from 1976 to 1980 aimed to capture the historical development of Guyanese society (Rodney, 1977a, 1978b, 1979a, 1981d, 1981a, 1981b, 1989). In his seminal work, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*, Rodney reconstructs history from the standpoint of a developing Guyanese working class (Rodney, 1981a). He presents racism as an intra-class contradiction between African and Indian workers, arising from the conflict between capital and free labour. Rodney drafted the second volume of his intended trilogy before police raided his home in 1979, confiscating the manuscripts (Rodney, 2022). He produced the first volume amid his hardships as a banned professor organising within the WPA. His main editor and WPA comrade, Andaiye, recalls, "He wrote everywhere.…In the car if he wasn't driving, standing on the street corner, on the stelling waiting to board the Berbice ferry, waiting for public meetings to begin...often surrounded by the police" (Andaiye, 2020, p. 248). Rodney's body of work provides a Marxist position on racism, forming the foundation for an anti-racist strategy based on worker agency.

Rodney's approach departed from a paradigm in Caribbean studies that viewed racism as a matter of personal prejudice or cultural difference divorced from history. Pluralist theory depicted the Caribbean as a patchwork of distinct, fixed ethnic identities segregated from one another and whose coexistence owed a great deal to the colonial state (Smith, 1961; Hoetink, 1967). Its proponents remained pessimistic about the capacity of ethnic groups to strive for a single society, assuming that cultural loyalty would trump inter-racial alliances. Pluralist theory reified race. It abstracted race from the social relations of its origins before conferring it the power to determine the organisation and behaviour patterns within society. Rodney noted that

[4] Some passages in this section appear without referencing in my short introduction to Rodney's life and work, published during this thesis. See Chukwudinma, C. (2022) *A Rebel's Guide to Walter Rodney*. London: Bookmarks Publications.

pluralist ideas influenced Guyanese historians seeking to understand the origins of racial violence in the 1960s. He singled out a quote from Roy Glasgow for its defeatist view on the impact of indentureship, quoting him as saying that "events [moved] inexorably towards culture conflict as more and more immigrants poured into the country" (Rodney, 1981a, p. 188).

In contrast, Rodney's Marxist approach aimed to overcome pluralism's static and superficial description of racial spite by identifying the social origins of racism. It was no longer a matter of abstracting race from its historical reality but rather of tracing its development within the wider societal context that determined it. Rodney conceived racism as a product of the global expansion of capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, rooted in the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial plantation economy established by Western empires in the New World. Speaking at Columbia University in 1978, he stated:

> In many of the studies on racism, there has arisen in the last several years a tendency to want to find the roots of racism in some very distant epoque, using sources like the bible, using the very earliest contact between Africans and Europeans. And it seems to me one of the weaknesses of such scholarship and the methodology it utilises, is that it uses acts of individual pre-judice between white and blacks or the way that a particular black is treated in European society. But it does not follow through to see where that prejudice is transferred from being a mere individual prejudice to an institutional relationship. And it's only in the plantation society, the slave society in the New World that a framework was established precisely for those institutional relations (Kilombo Uk, 2015, 14:50).

Rodney viewed racism, an invention of the slave-owning planter class, as a capitalist ideology and oppression stemming from the profit-making interests of the exploiting classes. The enslavement of Africans and forced indentured labour from India heralded the dawn of this modern oppression. In Rodney's words, this novelty was characterised by "the involvement of race as a category in determining who had access to the means of production", and the spread of racist ideology to rationalise systems of exploitation (Kilombo Uk, 2015, 16:30).

Yet, the real power of Rodney's writings lies in his materialist explanation for the persistence of racism in Guyana after the abolition of African slavery in 1838 and until the

1970s (Rodney, 1977a, 1979a, 1981d, 1981a, 1981b, 1989). He demonstrated that changes in the conditions of capitalism, bought by the abolition of slavery and decline of sugar exports from the Caribbean, acted as a breeding ground for the reproduction of racism in Guyana. He thereby offered a lucid understanding of the function that racism plays under capitalism as a means to divide the working class.

First, Rodney identified the racial tensions between workers arising out of the economic competition on the plantation in the decades after the abolition of slavery. In his article "Plantation Society in Guyana" and his *History of the Guyanese Working People*, Rodney explained that most former slaves became plantation workers and fought the planters over decent wages and working conditions (Rodney, 1981d, 1981a). They even organised two general strikes after emancipation. Although the strike of 1841 was victorious, that of 1847 failed because the planters imported indentured Indians to act as strike-breakers. The white planter class had introduced cheap and contract-bound labour from India to ensure a stable labour supply against African militancy. Rodney argued that Indian indentureship created excess labour in British Guyana, which enabled the planters to use unemployment to control the workforce (Rodney, 1981d, 1981a). If Africans refused the terms of employment, they feared Indians might replace them. At the same time, as Rodney notes, indentured immigration split the working class. African workers tended to perform skilled labour, such as cane-cutting, while the Indians did the menial tasks (Rodney, 1981d, 1981a).

In explaining this intra-class conflict, Rodney debunks the myth that African slaves deserted plantations after emancipation to become peasants, leaving a labour shortage that had to be filled by indentured workers (Mohamed, 2014). Using land ownership statistics, Rodney (1981a, p. 652) argued that this flight was instead a "residential withdrawal"—former slaves moved to free villages to escape planter control while still working on the plantations. Rodney contended that freed Africans had transformed themselves into a rural proletariat, freely selling

their labour and challenging employers (Rodney, 1978b, 1981d). Rodney defended this point against the Plantation Economy Model, associated with progressive scholars from the New World Group, such as Lloyd Best, Jay Mandle, and George Beckford (Mohamed, 2014; Timcke, 2023).

In viewing Guyanese plantations as the supreme social and economic institution in society, the model problematically posed the main contradiction in Guyanese history as one between peasant villages and the plantation (Mandle, 1973). In Rodney's view it upheld the myth of the African peasantry, assuming different modes of existence for Africans, perceived as outside the plantation, and Indians, seen as tied to it. It explained racism from this flawed assumption, sharing pluralist theory's essentialisation of cultural differences and a pessimism towards unity. It in turn overlooked the rich examples of Africans and Indians developing similar responses to their conditions (Kilombo Uk, 2015; Rodney,1981d).

Secondly, Rodney (1981a, p. 180–181) demonstrated that the racist ideas and stereotypes invented by the planter class appealed to both African and Indian workers. Africans adopted the white planter stereotype of the "venerable swamy", depicting Indians as hardworking, dependent, diligent, deceitful, and thrifty. Conversely, Indians saw Africans as "Quashie", irreparably indolent, rebellious runaways who puzzlingly excelled in the ardours of cane cutting. Economic competition on plantations, driven by mass unemployment from declining sugar prices on the international market and surplus labour, led African workers to resent Indians as job stealers and tools of the planters. Meanwhile, Indians viewed Africans as lazy workers who would have starved without indentured labour. Rodney explains:

> They [Indians] were in no position to know whether Africans were starving before indentured immigration got under way. But it was one of the self-evident truths of planter propaganda that the whole country would have been ruined had not the estates been saved by indentured immigration; and in that eventuality, the "lazy nigger" would certainly have starved. As for the crudities of the typical African estimation of Indians, it is not in the least surprising that these should have been heavily influenced by prevailing planter misconceptions, given that even Creole African self-images were conditioned by white racist ideas. Ideological confusion and psychological oppression were as crucial to the maintenance of the plantation system as were

> the administrative controls and the final sanction of the police force. In a heterogeneous society, the impact of racist perceptions was obviously magnified, and its principal consequence was to hold back the maturing of working-class unity by offering an explanation of exploitation and oppression that seemed reasonably consistent with aspects of people's life experience (Rodney, 1981a, p. 181).

Racism gave the rural proletariat a false sense of comfort in the face of the exploitation and misery Indians and Africans suffered in colonial times. The division rendered the working class unable to challenge capital.

Thirdly, Rodney identified that the ruling class in Guyana engaged in a conscious manipulation of the racial tension between Africans and Indians to ensure its maintenance in power. He notes that "early in the history of indentureship, planters recognised the practical value of having a working population segmented racially; and they never lost sight of the opportunity of playing off the two principal races-by using one to put down any overt resistance by the other" (Rodney, 1981a, p. 188). The colonial state of the planter class devised polices to ensuring that both races policed each other. Rodney quoted one planter who explained to the West Indian Commission that the safety of his class relied upon taking advantage of the animosity between Africans and Indians: "The two peoples do not intermix. That is, of course, one of our great safeties in the colony when there has been any rioting. If the negroes were troublesome every coolie on the estate would stand by one. If the coolies attacked me, I could with confidence trust my negro friends for keeping me from injury'" (Rodney, 1981a, p. 188). This "divide and rule", which separated and weakened workers in the face of exploitation, meant that the wages in Guyana stagnated from the 1840s until the end of indenture in 1920.

The final point of Rodney's historical analysis underscored that the post-independence Guyanese elite, despite being non-white, used similar racist manipulation to protect their class interests. By the 1970s, Guyana had plunged into a political stalemate between the major political parties, which Guyanese liberal scholar Ralph Premdas aptly described:

> ...neither the PPP nor the PNC projected itself as a communalist party. Each had developed a sophisticated party manifesto with a clear definition of programmes justified in non-ethnic

> terms towards building a socialist society. While each did this, at the same time the grassroots party organizations surreptitiously peddled a different line of ethnic solidarity and loyalty.…The result was a stalemate in the erection of rigid ethnic rules (Premdas, 1992, p. 23).

On occasion, however, the racism was transparent. In his speech at Columbia University, Rodney (1978) criticised Burnham's regime for reviving old stereotypes of Indians being greedy to vilify the 135-day strike of Indian sugar workers in 1977-78. During this period, Burnham recruited 6,000 African strike-breakers to end the industrial dispute (Roopnaraine, 2012). However, Rodney identified numerous historical examples where Guyanese workers were able to overcome these divide-and-rule tactics from the ruling class. The 1900s told a different story from the fragmented class struggles of the 1800s, where African and Indian labourers often united against their bosses.

Rodney (1981a) devoted the final chapter of his *History of the Guyanese Working People* to the 1905 rebellion. During this period, Indian sugar workers mounted a strike that spread to African canecutters and stevedores, setting the stage for an unprecedented multiracial alliance. Although the revolt was crushed by the colonial state before the alliance crystallised, the events of 1905 convinced Rodney that racial unity was achievable through class struggle. As African and Indian workers launched strikes over wages and working conditions, they spontaneously began to recognise their shared interests against capital, thereby overcoming their racist prejudices. When speaking at Columbia University, Rodney stressed that Guyana's history was rich with examples of multiracial solidarity, as workers united again during the strikes of 1924, 1938, and the 1950s in the anti-colonial movement (Kilombo Uk, 2015). Reflecting on the 1905 revolt, he argued the colonial authorities immediately grasped the threat posed by this interracial struggle. In Rodney's words, they identified the uprising as "the most dangerous thing that has happened in the history of the colony" (Kilombo Uk, 2015, 43:25). They consequently quelled the uprising with tremendous speed and severity to prevent an African and Indian alliance from consolidating (Kilombo Uk, 2015).

While Rodney admired the spontaneity of Guyana's multiracial strikes, he acknowledged that the newfound solidarity and confidence among workers evaporated the moment the ruling class defeated the strike, allowing old prejudices to resurface. Rodney concluded that workers' spontaneous struggles needed to be channelled by an organisation that would allow African and Indian workers to forge an irreversible bond. In this respect, he saw the anti-colonial alliance of the 1950s as a fragile one, resting on the electoral ambitions of Jagan and Burnham (Kilombo Uk, 2015). Rodney aspired to politicise the masses in ways that had not been done before. Therefore, he joined the WPA in 1976 to fight racism and the Guyanese dictatorship.

Process III: Conscious interventions into the class struggle (1974-79)

Rodney and the transformation of the early WPA

This section explores how Rodney consciously intervened in Guyanese history to address the organisational challenges in unifying the multiracial working class and their allies against Burnham's regime. This process connects his leadership in the WPA, and its transition from a coalition into a political party, to the episodes of popular resistance in Guyana between 1975 and late 1979. Rodney's role as a leading member of the WPA underscored his efforts to defend the objective interest of the working masses against the major parties who spoke of unity but practiced racism. Yet winning over workers shaped by decades of racial animosity involved finding the type of organisation capable of coordinating the most radical workers to convince their less radical counterparts of the utmost necessity of racial unity against Burnham's regime. The WPA, which Rodney joined, had emerged as the first since the anti-colonial PPP in the 1950s to prioritise uniting Guyana's racial groups.

The WPA, formed in November 1974, started as a small pressure group uniting four left-wing organisations: ASCRIA, a Black Nationalist group led by Eusi Kwayana; IPRA, an Indian nationalist group led by Moses Bhagwan; the Maoist People's Vanguard Party (WPVP);

and RATOON, with left-wing academics, such as Clive Thomas and Maurice Odle. Rodney, Rupert Roopnaraine, and Andaiye joined as independents (Westmaas, 2009). Initially, the WPA did not aim to become a political party. Its volunteers focused on educating the masses through agitation and social action, supporting the 1973 multiracial land rebellion and protesting Rodney's ban from the university in 1974 (Westmaas, 2009). They published and distributed a single-page newssheet called *Dayclean*. Their focus on agitation assumed that the regime would change through the multiplication of independent protest movements encouraging mass spontaneous resistance. It gave them a sense of moral superiority over Jagan's PPP, which pursued an electoral strategy. However, the large-scale resistance from 1974 to 1978 following the PNC's declaration of paramountcy forced the WPA to gradually change its organisation and strategy (Hinds, 1999). The WPA benefited from the arrival of Marxist thinkers, such as Walter Rodney and Rupert Roopnaraine.

One pressing question concerned the alliances of the WPA. The organisation sought to escape the danger of becoming a small sect isolated from the movement by working in popular campaigns alongside other organisations. This step was difficult for a group of dissident PPP members harbouring personal and political animosity towards Jagan's party. This decision triggered debates and a split from the WPA by Maoist WPVP, led by former PPP leader Brindley Benn, in 1976 (Hinds, 1999). The animosity towards the PPP was well-founded. By 1975, the PPP had tamed its opposition to the PNC following its ideological transition from anti-communism to pro-communism (Kwayana, 1988; Lewis, 1998; Hinds, 1999; Westmaas, 2004). The PPP ceased advocating for "non-cooperation and civil disobedience" against the PNC and instead declared "critical support" for it (PPP, 1977, 1979). This new political direction resulted from advice Jagan received from the Soviet Union, which sought to avoid conflict between two socialist parties (Lewis, 1998; Kwayana, 2022; Seecharan, 2023).

Consequently, the PPP chose to support Burnham's nationalisation programme and ended all boycotts of the rigged parliament (PPP, 1977, 1979).

Despite knowing Jagan's PPP represented a flawed alternative to Burnham's regime, the WPA chose to collaborate with them. The WPA viewed the PPP as allies because they were the main opposition to Burnham and rooted in the Guyanese labour movement, representing most sugar workers. The PPP also received support from the peasantry and their farming association as well as the Indo-Guyanese business sector (Rodney, 1976a; Birbalsingh, 2007; Hinds, 2023; Mohamed, 2024). Rodney and his colleagues recognised that by aligning with the PPP, the WPA could promote its ideals of racial unity and advocate for resistance against Burnham, thereby attracting PPP supporters to its more radical political stance.

Among all things, the WPA participated in the PPP's Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee in 1975. Rampersaud was an Indian PPP activist, whom the PNC framed for the murder of an African policeman in July 1974. After two unsuccessful trials, the state removed the Rampersaud case from the predominately Indian Berbice county to Georgetown assuming that jurors in the majority Afro-Guyanese city would show hostility to Rampersaud (Nagamootoo, 1977). The committee led a grassroots campaign, organising nationwide public meetings, with attendance ranging from 100 to 5,000, mass pickets and rallies in front of the courts (Hinds, 1999). At a joint PPP-WPA rally in Georgetown during the third trial, Rodney delivered a powerful and impassioned speech, condemning the PNC-led state's exploitation of racial insecurities among ordinary Afro-Guyanese people to imprison an innocent Indian. He perceived this injustice as an afront to the dignity of those who had fought and freed themselves from slavery:

> First of all, to tell you the truth, sitting in that courtroom, which I've attempted to do on as many days as possible, I have felt sick when I've seen one black man after another come to that witness box, lying his head off, being shown to be lying….It is insulting to be sitting down and seeing ordinary working class or peasant black people being reduced to the level of being made

> toys and puppets of people who do not have their interests at heart. Whatever else we may have been in our history in this country, we have been a people with dignity (Rodney, 1977b, p. 5).

Rodney (1977b, p. 6) further told his audience that the "system doesn't stop at racial discrimination. Because it is a system of class oppression, it only camouflages its class nature under a racial cover". The state would eventually target anyone, as it upheld a racist system of class oppression that benefited the ruling elite. The campaign's rallies and protests where he spoke ultimately convinced a predominantly African jury to acquit Rampersaud in November 1977. The alliance between the WPA and the PPP around the Rampersaud case marked a turning point in the politics of racial solidary. It instilled in practice the belief that multiracial movement could overcome racial divisions among both racial groups and forge a protest movement against the state (Kwayana, 1988; Hinds, 1999).

The WPA adopted a more aggressive stance towards fostering multiracial unity within the burgeoning labour movements, working in close collaboration with trade unions. The previous chapter outlined Rodney and the WPA's active support of the predominantly African mineworkers' strike of 1976 and their affiliation with the OWP, a left-wing faction of the pro-PNC Guyana mineworkers' union (see Chapter 6). However, the WPA had less influence among the Indian sugar workers as it refrained from encroaching on the domain of its allies, the PPP (Kwayana, 1988). The eruption of the 135-day strike in the sugar industry during 1977-78, the longest in Guyana's history, presented the WPA with an opportunity to engage with pro-PPP Indian workers. A year prior to the dispute, the PPP proposed the formation of a National Patriotic Front government to combat imperialism, suggesting a shared parliamentary power with the PNC. Nonetheless, Burnham rejected this proposal following a series of unproductive negotiations (PPP, 1977). This breakdown of unity talks spurred the PPP-backed union GAWU to initiate a dispute over wages (Roopnaraine, 2012). The WPA successfully persuaded African miners to donate in support of the 21,000 striking Indian plantation workers (Hinds, 1999). Its collection for the strike relief challenged the idea that all Africans were

strike-breakers, especially after Burnham had sent unemployed Afro-Guyanese to replace or terrorise the strikers. Reminiscing about his first involvement with the WPA during this tumultuous period in Guyana upon his return from the United States in 1977, WPA leader Roopnaraine recalled:

> The very first political activity I got involved in when I returned in 1977 was mobilising strike relief for a big sugar strike that year, the 135-day sugar worker strike. I got very involved in that and Walter was going around speaking at GAWU meetings encouraging the sugar workers and giving immense solidarity to them….In fact the PPP handled that strike rather badly, and we had to counter the propaganda that Burnham was putting out "the sugar workers want everything"….That was having its effect on the public sector workers who happen to be Afro-Guyanese (Roopnaraine interviewed by David Hinds in *Hinds' Sight*, 2015, 4:48).

As the WPA's engagement with labour movements deepened, it became clear that structural changes were necessary to strengthen the organisation's capacity to mobilise the working class (WPA, 1978b). By 29 January 1978, the WPA agreed on an interim constitution that transformed the organisation from a coalition into an integrated structure (WPA, 1978c). This included an executive leadership, a membership list, and various committees working under a secretariat responsible for recording, organising, and coordinating the day-to-day political activities of the organisation. The WPA's interim draft constitution revealed a willingness to recruit a network of activists from the working class into a disciplined organisation rooted in the masses and capable of leading the anti-dictatorial movement. These changes were driven directly by the need to strengthen the organisation (WPA, 1978c). Implementing these structural changes was a drawn-out and imperfect process filled with debates, disagreements, and disruptions due to activist priorities.

And yet, the referendum boycott campaign of 1978 revealed the organisational strengths of the integrated WPA. Burnham's PNC proposed a referendum vote to amend the constitution with a two-thirds majority in parliament, circumventing the need for national elections. The referendum would grant Burnham dictatorial powers, allowing his regime to suppress democratic rights without scrutiny. In response, the WPA initiated the Committee for

the Defence of Democracy (CDD), PPP, the Liberator Party, and the People's Democratic Movement—along with the OWP and GAWU—while cooperating with the Concerned Citizens' Committee (CCC). In the spring of 1978, these organisations launched a series of mass meetings attended by thousands across the country, urging Guyanese to "Stay home Monday! [10 July 1978] don't vote!" (*Catholic Standard*, 1978a). The PNC severely repressed these activities. On 21 May, the *Catholic Standard* reported that PNC militants armed with sticks attacked an anti-referendum picket in Georgetown, breaking three ribs of Martin Carter, Guyana's most famous poet. Later, PNC forces violently disrupted a CDD meeting in Georgetown, attended by 5,000 people (*Catholic Standard*, 1978b).

While the anti-government forces declared the boycott successful, with less than 15 per cent participation, it did not stop the PNC from declaring itself the victor and suspending elections due in 1978 (*Catholic Standard*, 1978c; *Dayclean*, 1978). The WPA resolved to take a more confrontational stance toward the PNC, shifting from a small volunteer organisation to a disciplined and efficient one. This new orientation was reflected in Rodney's role in founding the WPA Brigade to improve the distribution of its *Dayclean* publication (Interview with Alli, 2022). Since its inception, WPA activists had taken it upon themselves to distribute the publication at protests, rallies, and door-to-door. More than any other newspaper in Guyana, *Dayclean* spoke to the experience of the working people while providing a comprehensive view of society. It exposed the economic deprivation in which the state kept its people and openly criticised the corruption, racism, and authoritarianism of Burnham's PNC and imperialism in Guyana (see *Dayclean* 1975-80). *Dayclean* encouraged popular resistance and drew lessons from international revolts.

As Burnham's PNC banned all free press, state repression interrupted the WPA's attempts to print and sell the publication in public spaces. In 1976, the police raided the WPA offices, seizing all ink and printers before arresting Eusi Kwayana and Moses Baghwan,

charging them with illegally publishing a newspaper. Bahgwan would be jailed for 19 days two years later (Bhagwan, 1978). The WPA addressed the problem by turning *Dayclean* into an organising pole around which the organisation could better structure itself. It aimed to build resilience against interruptions caused by state repression by involving the working class in the paper's distribution and thereby extending systematic agitation for the WPA's political positions while building networks with the masses to prepare them for revolt. In early 1979, Rodney drove this development by recruiting working class and unemployed youngsters from Georgetown into a new distribution unit called the East Ruimveldt Brigade. Desmond Alli explains how Rodney recruited him into the brigade:

> In early 1979, Walter Rodney came to my gate with East Ruimveldt activist Dr. Dennis Canterbury and Osase. They were going house to house distributing *Dayclean*. He spent the afternoon talking with me. The next time he came alone, and I took him around my neighbourhood, California, East Ruimveldt, considered the heart of the People's National Congress (PNC). Most people were charmed by Walter's personality, while others were apprehensive. A few weeks later, the WPA held public meetings on Pineapple Street. At first, PNC thugs stoned the speakers, but more people came out to listen to Walter, and they stopped the PNC thugs. Walter convinced me of what he was trying to do, that working-class emancipation would eliminate racial politics in the country. I put some friends together, and we had a discussion. Walter brought out the East Ruimveldt Brigade, a committed group of young men who were to become the frontline distribution unit of the WPA (Interview with Desmond Alli, 2022).

Composed of 15 activists from Georgetown, the brigade did more than sell papers. They worked tirelessly to organise postering runs and flyer distributions to promote WPA's propaganda and public meetings. They often faced PNC thugs, being chased, beaten, arrested, and occasionally murdered by the police (Interview with Alli, 2022). Paradoxically, their operations revealed that the WPA had much more ground to cover in becoming a centralised organisation. They only reported to Rodney and had little interaction with others in the WPA leadership. Alli and his comrades never formally applied for WPA membership, even when it became a political party in the summer of 1979 (Interview with Alli, 2022). The organisational looseness within the WPA stemmed from a silent contradiction between those accustomed to

social movements and those favouring a centralised political party. This contradiction was never fully resolved in Rodney's lifetime, as the organisation's energies were consumed by a popular rebellion (Correspondence with Westmaas, 2022; Interview with Hinds, 2023).

Building a revolutionary party in the midst of rebellions

The WPA entered 1979 anticipating an intensified struggle against the PNC amidst worsening economic condition, marked by rising unemployment and shortages. *Dayclean* ran headlines "The Year of the Turn" and "The Shah Gone, Gairy, Who Next?" hopeful that Guyana would echo the wave of international revolts (*Dayclean*, 1979c; *Dayclean*, 1979a). In January 1979, WPA members watched the Iranian revolution against the monarchy. By 13 March, the Grenadian revolution, led by the New Jewel Movement, toppled Gairy's dictatorship. Following this, the general strike in Dominica ousted the government in June while the Sandinista rebellion in Nicaragua triumphed over Somoza dictatorship (*Dayclean*, 1979b). Despite international revolts, the first half of 1979 in Guyana saw fewer protests and strikes compared to the previous year (Gopaul, 1997; Interview with Odle, 2022). On 30 May 1979, the WPA aborted its 1,000-strong rally against item shortages in Georgetown when the PNC denied it permission to march, while supporters and the House of Israel, an armed militia funded by the ruling party, vandalised its van and equipment (*Catholic Standard*, 1979e). According to Maurice Odle, a WPA executive member, the organisation struggled to attract a substantial audience despite Rodney's frequent street corner speeches. "The reception we received was not very great", he remarked. "The thing that really galvanised the population was when the fire occurred" (Interview with Odle, 2022).

On 11 July 1979 around 2 am, three explosions and a fire engulfed the PNC headquarters, the Ministry of National Development, and the national oil company annexe. The pro-government newspaper, *Chronicle*, reported armed arsonists disguised as GDF personnel ambushed and tied up security guards (*Sunday Chronicle*, 1979). Burnham's PNC arrested

most WPA leaders, charging Rodney, Roopnaraine, Clive Thomas, and Karen Da Souza with arson. As news spread, hundreds of Guyanese joined WPA pickets at prisons to gather information and campaign for their freedom (Kwayana, 1988). Odle, briefly placed in the same cell as Rodney, recalled the mass rallies supporting the WPA during the three days they awaited bail:

> Everybody took notice.…From there on the public meetings were really massive! The WPA was accused of burning down the building and the people understood if there is such a force brave enough to challenge Burnham, then we should support this force (Interview with Odle, 2022).

On 14 July, thousands rallied in front of the main Georgetown courthouse, where Rodney and other WPA members were transferred for the bail hearing. The prosecutor made the decision to release the WPA leaders against the PNC's wishes (Kwayana, 1988). Upon hearing the news, the multiracial protesters in their thousands marched triumphantly through Georgetown. The PPP and the anti-dictatorial organisations partook in the rally in support of the WPA (Kwayana, 1988). However, the triumphant mood vanished when Burnham deployed the House of Israel to break up the demonstration. The attackers wounded two WPA sympathisers and fatally stabbed British Jesuit journalist Bernard Darke "in the full view of dozens of policemen who stood flatfooted" reports the *Catholic Standard* (1979b). This act of repression nevertheless failed to intimidate the Guyanese people, who resolutely entered a new phase of protest, which WPA called the "civil rebellion".

From July to October 1979, Indian and Afro-Guyanese workers united against Burnham's regime. Burdened by wage cuts, unemployment, and poor healthcare due to 1978 International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, they launched protests and strikes that shook the PNC dictatorship (Zeilig, 2022). In Kwayana's words "almost the whole society crept out of the shadows into the light of hope, standing in defiance of economic and financial oppression" (Kwayana, 1988). The WPA capitalised on this mood, organising anti-dictatorial gatherings in

Georgetown during the summer. On 15 July, a mass meeting at Durban and Louisa Row experienced a blackout as Rodney spoke. The multiracial crowd fearing attacks by the PNC linked arms and marched, chanting anti-government slogans. Such acts of solidarity were common, with thousands gathering for WPA rallies. Earlier that afternoon, the WPA hosted a press conference, announcing itself as a political party aimed at the "removal of the PNC regime as a prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic culture" and introduced its manifesto "For Revolutionary Socialist Guyana" (*Catholic Standard*, 1979f). A week later, on 20 July, it reiterated the declaration at its largest rally, attracting between 2,000 and 8,000 people to Bourda Mall (sources differ on numbers) (*Catholic Standard*, 1979d). Rodney delivered a speech calling for the removal of the regime: "The PNC must go! And they must go by any means necessary.…We must take the streets", he then suggested (*Catholic Standard*, 1979f). Rodney and his comrades aimed to transform localised struggles over wages and democratic rights into a general movement against the dictatorship. Building a mass party suited for this task required breaking old habits.

Ideology and structure of the incomplete cadre party

Before becoming a political party, the WPA operated through a tight-knit group of a dozen intellectual volunteers (Inteview with Thomas, 2022). This cautious approach sought to shield the organisation from police infiltrations and raids, ensuring its survival. However, the civil rebellion of 1979 forced the WPA to abandon its strict recruitment policy. They opened membership to hundreds of Africans and Indians aged 16 and older from all social backgrounds, if they agreed with its principles and rules (WPA, 1979c). The WPA leadership showed flexibility and audacity by overcoming old habits and routines, driven by the large attendance, enthusiastic applause, and ovations at their public meetings. Throughout 1979, the WPA organised its members into nuclei (branches) of between 5 to 20 people (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022). These groups met weekly to plan local activities, discuss party documents and strategy, and divide responsibilities. According to Nigel Westmaas (2004), the WPA held

educational classes where its members read literature such as Vladimir Lenin's *What Is to Be Done* and Amílcar Cabral's *Party Principles and Political Practice*.

By June 1979, Thomas and Roopnaraine drafted the party programme *Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Guyana*, accompanied by a constitution defining membership roles and responsibilities (WPA, 1979a, 1979d). The WPA stood for socialism based on civil liberties and free elections, contrasting with the PNC's anti-democratic vision and its equation of socialism with state ownership. While the PPP believed in a parliamentary path to socialism, the WPA programme stated, "The Alliance is revolutionary, not reformist", envisioning the conquest of power and building of a classless society achievable only through the self-emancipation of the working class and the oppressed (WPA, 1979d). The WPA's insistence on collective leadership contrasted with the personality cults in the two major parties. As Rodney declared in one of his speeches: "The revolution is made by ordinary people, not by angels; it's made by people from all walks of life, particularly the working class, who are in the majority" (Rodney, 1981e).

WPA leader Andaiye (2020, p. 45) notes, "The party had never fully transformed itself into a cadre party. It had members that were not Marxists at all". Partly because of this non-consolidation, there is confusion surrounding the aspirations of the WPA and Rodney in 1979. Therefore, Andaiye portrayed Rodney as anti-vanguardist, supporting mass movements and free elections. However, according to his closest friend and comrade in the WPA, Rupert Roopnaraine: "Rodney was fully in support of the cadre formation: highly motivated cadre, disciplined, with a vigorous division of labour, knowing principles of revolutionary work, round-the-clock availability" (Quoted in Lewis, 1998, p. 240).

The concept of the vanguard or cadre party is often misunderstood within and outside the Marxist tradition (Harman, 1971). In the Caribbean, some scholars have associated it with Marxist-Leninist groups such as Grenada's New Jewel Movement and Jamaica's Workers

Party, viewed as secretive, dogmatic, and hierarchical. These parties are caricatured as small, tightly knit organisations led by intellectuals operating in secrecy and engaging in armed conspiracy. The vanguard party is opposed to democracy and elections, both within its own organisation and in society at large, making it susceptible to domination by charismatic leaders (Lewis, 1998, 2019; Meeks, 2015; Andaiye, 2020; Payne, Sutton and Thorndike, 2021). However, Rodney adhered to Leninist notions of the vanguard party because he saw it as an alternative to the elitism of small conspiracy organisations and reformist political parties. He believed the party should turn into a mass organisation of hundreds and thousands but did not see it as representing the whole working people (Rodney, 1980a).

The mature Rodney of the late 1970s understood the importance of distinguishing the vanguard from the entirety of the working masses. His conception of working people distinguished the workers from the classes they could lead, such as the rural proletariat, peasantry, and lumpenproletariat. It recognised that the working class, through its struggle at the point of production, demonstrated a higher capacity to assert ideological and organisational independence than its allies (Rodney, 1981a, 1981d). However, Rodney recognised that working-class socialism and anti-racist consciousness develop unevenly. While spontaneous struggle reflects progress, it often ends in compromises with the state and vanishes. In a 1980 interview, Rodney expressed this well:

> We feel that there has been a lot of spontaneity in the past, and there is a lot of frustration there, a lot of grievances that are expressed in very quiet fashion. Our task as a political party is to get people organised and mobilised so that they can take action of various types to remedy the situation (Rodney, 1980a, p. 8).

Spontaneity could be organised beyond reformism through a disciplined political party working as a network of trained cadres recruited from the working class to conduct agitation and political education in workplaces and streets. The 1979 rebellion allowed Rodney and his comrades to harness the anger against the regime.

Rodney and the gravediggers of dictatorship

The anti-government movement and solidarity extended beyond WPA-led protests. On 11 July 1979, a wildcat strike erupted in the predominantly Afro-Guyanese mining town of Kawakani, a PNC stronghold (Kwayana, 1988). The workers protested the wage freeze imposed by Burnham's regime in May 1979. The strike quickly spread to larger mining towns like Wismar-McKenzie and Everton, gaining the approval of the Guyana Mineworkers' Union. The strike halted production for six weeks, involving 85 per cent of the 6,000 mineworkers. This strike in one of Guyana's major export industries marked a turning point (Gopaul, 1997). For the first time, Burnham faced a significant challenge from his Afro-Guyanese support base. The regime could no longer use racism to mobilise popular opinion against the strike, as it had done with the sugar workers' dispute of 1977-78. Consequently, the ruling party hesitated for weeks before framing the strike as a "political" one, allowing its momentum to affect Guyanese society (Rodney, 1981c). The regime faced further hurdles in deploying strike-breakers from the predominantly Afro-Guyanese army, a tactic previously used during the sugar workers' strike. However, the mineworkers' strike presented a unique challenge, involving Guyana's most skilled workforce on an unprecedented scale, making their swift replacement unrealistic.

At a rally in September, Rodney described the bauxite strike as the "high point in the history of the Guyanese working class":

> For six weeks, bauxite workers stood firm to force management to implement their collective labour agreement. The Guyanese dictatorship has consistently attacked the living standards of the working class. It is not surprising that the bauxite strike attracted the support of workers everywhere in Guyana. Positive leadership from the four progressive trade unions gave bauxite workers nationwide backing, especially within the sugar industry. Sugar workers and clerks who came out in solidarity also seized the opportunity to advance their own just demands, such as the demand that the government respect 14 dollars a day minimum wage (Rodney, 1981c, p. 16).

Rodney's WPA mobilised solidarity rallies and strike relief for the workers, even garnering tremendous food supplies from farming communities. On 7 August 1979, four unions organised a rally in Georgetown to exert pressure on the officials of the Trade Union Congress

(TUC) to demand the wage increments negotiated in previous years from the government. The leadership of the TUC failed to resolve the issue with PNC and dared not to call for a general strike, exposing its impotency (*Catholic Standard*, 1979a).

The four unions overhauled the TUC passivity by calling for an indefinite solidarity strike with the mineworkers. Nevertheless, the country never achieved a general strike. Although the four unions represented 60 per cent of all Guyana workers, their decision to strike was uncoordinated and full of vacillations from their leadership (Gopaul, 1997). With the exception of NAACIE, none of the unions respected the terms of the strikes. The CCWU leadership refused to mobilise private sector workers, while only calling a one-day-strike in the public sector (Gopaul, 1997). Wazir Mohammed, then CCWU shopfloor organiser who was soon to join and become a leader in the WPA, remembers that he and his comrades successfully pressured the union's leadership to continue the strike action: "We mobilised from within the Union, and we forced the leadership to take a decision. To give solidarity to the sugar and Bauxite Workers Union. To close down the commercial sector in Georgetown and join the strike". The largest of all the unions in Guyana, the PPP-backed GAWU, only permitted four sugar estates to strike limiting action to only 9,706 out of the nearly 20,000 workers it represented (Gopaul, 1997, p. 246).

The solidarity strikes frightened Burnham, who blamed the WPA. Addressing the PNC congress in August 1979, he warned enemies of the regime to "make their wills" (American Embassy Georgetown 1979e). Rodney saw this as a sign of panic. Through relentless activism and public speaking, he imparted to his audience that the multiracial struggle at the point of production represented the most powerful weapon against the dictatorship.

> United strike action teaches us how the dictator can be exposed and how he can be deposed. The regime panicked at the thought of anything looking like a general strike. Burnham knows that no amount of violence or military force can replace the labour power of workers. He has tried cutting cane with the Militia, the National Service and so on, and this was a dismal failure. He did not even waste time trying to introduce scabs into the bauxite industry because he knows that there is no way that would have been accepted. The dictator requires the population to

> produce so as to sustain himself and the clique of parasites who dominate Guyana. That is why mass withdrawal of labour is the ultimate weapon representing the power of the people (Rodney, 1981c, p. 16).

This passage from Rodney's speech "People's Power, No Dictator" in September 1979 powerfully expressed his commitment to socialism from-below. However, by the time he delivered this passionate call to action, emphasising the crucial role of multiracial strikes, the rebellion had already declined.

Decline of the 1979 rebellion

The PNC's repression of the CCWU dispute was unforgiving. The party put union leader Gordon Todd under interrogation until he agreed to end the dispute, which led to the dismissal of 80 store workers (CARIG, 1979). The suppression of the strike was orchestrated by Hamilton Green, Burnham's distant cousin and right-hand man, who held considerable sway in Guyana. Green presided over key ministries, notably labour. Regarded as one of the most feared men in the country, Green always arrived at industrial disputes armed with a gun (Hamilton, 2022). In August 1979, he unleashed strike-breakers coupled with thugs to assault and pepper-spray workers who were picketing at Guyana stores (CARIG, 1979). Green recalls his intimidation tactics:

> It was difficult.…Burnham had become unpopular with a lot of the clerical workers and…you had the Walter Rodney equation. Burnham and I had to use our personal contact with the workers to deal with the picket lines. We talked, to mothers, to sisters, to wives. I boasted that I could go to any home…stir up a pot.…I always had good chaps around me strong young party men (Interview with Green, 2022).

By late August, the regime's repression had coerced the trade union leaders to call off the mineworkers' dispute. The rebellion, as Kwayana remarked, retreated with the collapse of workers' strikes as the backbone of the movement (Kwayana, 1988). There was frustration among the WPA leaders as the united action of the miners and sugar workers failed to grow into a general strike. The WPA was not rooted among the sugar workers and was unable to raise their combativeness, as they still suffered from the defeat of their 135-day strike in 1978 (Gopaul, 1997, 2022). Its influence had not extended beyond the capital and some mining

regions. In May 1980, Rodney criticised the passivity of the leadership of the PPP, trade unions, and anti-dictatorship groups who failed to grasp the potential of the strikes and protests—they believed the regime would be left unshaken (Rodney, 1984, pp. 133–135).

The rebellion's decline left the WPA exposed as they no longer benefited from the cover offered by the mass rallies. On 18 November, the Guyana Police Force killed leading WPA member Ohene Koama (Lewis, 1998). A month earlier, PNC thugs disrupted a WPA gathering in Georgetown, chasing Rodney in the capital. He escaped by hiding in a sewage trench and reached his friend Colin Chomondeley's home "smelling like an unwashed ram goat" (Gibbons, 2011). Rodney saw the movement retreating as state repression hampered the WPA's public activities organisation. The police sabotaged WPA vehicles and detained Rodney three times between September and October (Gibbons, 2011). Rodney and WPA leaders realised that the summer's mass protests had provided some protection. They moved between safe houses to avoid police raids and harassment, trying to regroup.

After the civil rebellion, the WPA argued that Guyana was not ready for revolution because the armed forces did not support the protesters (*Catholic Standard*, 1979c). Some leaders shifted focus to building new WPA branches and work towards a government of national unity. However, without mass protests, the party was more vulnerable to attacks. In February 1980, Burnham's thugs murdered another WPA member, Edward Dublin (CARIG, 1980).

Conclusion

Upon his return to Guyana, Walter Rodney emerged as a leading theoretician and organiser for the working people, influenced by both local and international dynamics that shaped his praxis. Confronting the racialised class struggle in Guyana, which had evolved into a state-bureaucratic PNC dictatorship exploiting racial divisions, Rodney skilfully appropriated these social contradictions to understand the class roots of racism. His transition from Black

Power to a broader perspective enabled him to view Guyanese society through the lens of the entire working class. Rodney's mastery of the dialectics of race and class in his writings not only provided an understanding of racism as a capitalist ideology but also emphasised the importance of class struggle in overcoming racial prejudices among African and Indian workers.

As Trotsky once remarked, "Theory is not formed in direct connection with the practice of today but represents in itself the unification and generalisation of the entire practical activity of humanity, including different epochs in their materially conditioned succession. It is only because theory is not connected inseparably with contemporary practice, but rises above it, that it is capable of acquiring the gift of foresight" (Trotsky, 2016, p. 725). Rodney exemplified this quote with his Marxist approach to racism, anticipating the future struggles of the working class and identifying the organisational tasks ahead. He advocated for a disciplined revolutionary party aimed at the conquest of power to channel the spontaneous efforts of the working class into an enduring multiracial struggle against Burnham's regime. The struggle in Guyana, culminating in the 1979 rebellion, allowed Rodney to apply his theoretical insights practically by helping the WPA transition from a pressure group into a political party serving multiracial protests and strikes. Although the civil rebellion declined under repression, the period from 1974 to 1979 in Rodney's life demonstrates the unity of theory and practice in Marxism.

Trotsky's words, however, do not overlook that Marxist theory develops because it remains accountable to the test of practice. Human practice across time and space eventually challenges existing knowledge, uncovering its gaps and flaws (Molyneux, 2012). In Guyana, practical problems would reveal the weakness of Rodney's efforts to unite theory and practice. While this chapter focused on the social processes underlying Rodney's contributions to the class struggle, the next chapter will explore the inconsistencies in his praxis. Rodney and his

party at times strayed from their commitment to socialism from-below in their approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliances.

Chapter 8: Rodney's Marxism and the question of power

Introduction

On 27 September 1917, two weeks before Bolshevik led insurrection overthrew the Russian state, Lenin published a concise document addressing what he perceived as the fundamental problem inherent in every revolution. "The question of state power", he wrote, "cannot be evaded or brushed aside, because it is the key question determining *everything* in a revolution's development, and in its foreign and domestic policies" (Lenin, 1977, p. 180). The class that held power would define the character of the revolution. In Lenin's reach was the real prospect of a proletarian insurrection that would destroy the bourgeois state and replace it with the rule of the worker's councils, known as *soviets*. Five decades later, the question of power came to haunt Rodney and the WPA. Not because Guyana found itself in a revolutionary situation comparable to Russia in 1917, but rather because it did not.

Although the multiracial civil rebellion marked an unprecedented challenge to Burnham's regime, it progressively vanished after late 1979 (*Catholic Standard*, 1979c). The WPA emerged as new challenge to the PNC, but it lacked influence among working people to change this course of events. Therefore, the problem facing Rodney and his comrades was how to address the question of power when the mass movement had gone into retreat.

For C L R James, Rodney failed on this account. In his January 1981 speech, "Walter Rodney and the Question of Power", James accused Rodney of adventurism whilst still grieving from his mentee's recent death. He declared that "[he] did not wait for the revolutionary people and the revolutionary class to be in conflict with the government before he could start the question of the insurrection" (James, 1981). James attributed the WPA's rushed attempt to organise the seizure of power to their ignorance of Lenin's *Marxism and Insurrection*, which outlines essential conditions for any insurrectionary movement: active

support from the advanced working classes, a nationwide revolutionary upsurge, and divisions within the enemy ranks, especially the armed forces (Lenin, 1972). As Rodney's party had none of these conditions in their favour, James argues that they should have focused on the tactical retreat. He took issue with the fact that Rodney found himself buying walkie-talkies that happened to be primed with explosives from a PNC informant on the evening of his murder (James, 1981). James considered it a political failure rather than a personal one: "No political leader had any right to be there.…The people around him should have seen to it that he was not in any such position", he declared (James, 1981).

In response to James, WPA leader Rupert Roopnaraine asserted in *Walter Rodney and the Answer of Power* that his comrades "were not strangers to the literature on insurrection" (Roopnaraine, 2012, p. 81). He explained that the issue of power stood beyond the WPA:

> An accurate appreciation of the collapse of the 1979 rebellion and the murder of Walter Rodney is not to be found in the gaps of scientific knowledge in the heads of Guyanese, which there most certainly were, nor in their rejection of pseudo-scientific sloganeering but in the failure to consolidate a powerful anti-dictatorial, democratic alliance of parties, and in the fickleness of the leaders of the workers' movement (Roopnaraine, 2012, p. 82).

While James's analysis attributed the rebellion's collapse to the unpreparedness of the masses and Rodney's murder to the WPA's malpractice, Roopnaraine pointed to the failure of the anti-dictatorial alliance. He held the PPP's opportunism and sectarianism as the chief culprit. Roopnaraine cited as evidence the PPP's unsuccessful attempt to establish a National Patriotic Front in collaboration with Burnham's PNC in 1977, its reluctance to work with the Council of National Safety in 1979, and its refusal to actively support the civil rebellion of 1979 and mobilise GAWU workers (Roopnaraine, 2012).

On the one hand, James's analysis did not present substantial evidence to support his criticism of the WPA's adventurism, leaving it unclear what sources he based his claims on. However, this chapter introduces pieces of evidence that have emerged in the decades since James's speech, which may substantiate much of his critique against the WPA's counterclaims.

On the other hand, Roopnaraine's reply absolves the WPA from any responsibility for the failed anti-dictatorial alliance (Roopnaraine, 2012). Considering this debate, this chapter offers its own interpretation of the WPA's approach to the conquest of power, considering aspects overlooked in both James's and Roopnaraine's analyses. It extensively uses oral testimony from WPA members, PPP leaders, and PNC officials, as well as written documents from their respective parties. It also uses telegrams from the United States Department of State, offering valuable insights into Rodney's activities.

This chapter argues that Rodney and the WPA's approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliance suffered from a fundamental flaw that made it ineffective in challenging Burnham's rule: it tended to substitute itself for the self-activity of the working masses, departing from its commitment to socialism from-below. The WPA's actions regarding armed struggle confirmed much of James's intuition regarding Rodney's adventurism whilst its alliance-building efforts revealed his party's opportunism. These shortcomings stemmed not simply from gaps in their knowledge of Marxist theory. More crucially, they came from their isolation from the mass movement and the psychological pitfalls accompanying these strenuous times. The main argument relies on a dialectical approach, which involves distinguishing between the WPA's portrayal of its activities—as reflected in testimonies and documents—and their historical reality. The WPA has often presented its approach to armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliances as separate from the constant struggles within Guyanese society. However, these actions can only be understood when viewed as components connected to a larger dynamic whole.

The first part of the chapter challenges the WPA's idealised representation of its armed struggle. It accomplishes this task by connecting fragmented evidence about the WPA's involvement with arms to the broader historical reality of the Guyanese class struggle. From there, it gradually builds a fuller picture of the WPA by analysing confessions from WPA

leaders about their activities and the underground organisation, as well as first-hand accounts of Rodney's own efforts to acquire weapons. It concludes the section with a previously unknown military plan against the PNC, allegedly found in Rodney's possession but still difficult to authenticate. The second part follows the same approach, demystifying the WPA's conception of anti-dictatorial alliances and examining Roopnaraine's partial explanation. It argues that the WPA bears some responsibility for its failure to build a sustainable alliance with the PPP, which increased its isolation and exposure to state repression, ultimately leading to Rodney's death.

Rodney, the WPA, and armed struggle

Conflicting accounts and reality: The burning of the Ministry of National Development

Since Rodney's death, the WPA has generally refrained from discussing its stance on armed struggle. The exact reason for this choice remains unclear. The accusation of adventurism seemingly continued to disturb the WPA's image of itself long after the party reneged on its pledge for a revolutionary overthrow of the PNC in 1984. Although this charge has emanated from C L R James and WPA sympathisers on the Caribbean left, of much greater concern for the party is that the PNC and PPP have labelled Rodney and the WPA as adventurists to undermine the WPA's legitimacy as a political movement (Green, 2022; Ramkarran, 2022).

Ogunseye, appears to be an exception among WPA leaders. In 2014, he addressed aspects of his party's armed resistance during the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry (WARCOI). When interviewed in the context of this thesis, Ogunseye (2022) reaffirmed his testimony from the inquiry, presenting his account without cross-examining lawyers interrupting him. Referring to the events of 1979, he asserted that the intensifying repression from the PNC-controlled army, police, and paramilitary forces compelled the WPA to consider

overthrowing Burnham as the only means of self-defence. He explained the WPA's reasoning as follows:

> We thought of all possibilities. We looked at the terrain, where troops were stationed, and the population ratio to the size of the territory and concluded that Guyana was not suited for a Cuban-style guerrilla struggle (it had no mountains). We then looked at the urban insurrection as it was done in Grenada. But Grenada was a small island. Even if we seized the capital, Burnham had military capacity outside the city.…So, we felt we were left with one option Iranian-style—mass insurrection. We felt our best interest was a multiracial massive popular uprising which would force the army to side with the people (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022).

Through this account, Ogunseye sought to dispel the notion that the WPA engaged in an adventurist conspiracy. Instead, the WPA modelled its strategy on the Iranian Revolution of 1979, emphasising the self-activity of the masses whilst distancing itself from the conspiratorial methods associated with the Grenadian and Cuban examples. However, Ogunseye's testimony conveys what the WPA intended to do, rather than what actually transpired. It consists of a retrospective justification of its insurrectionary strategy, framing it as prudent and restrained, while leveraging the fact that the WPA never escalated to direct confrontation with the PNC.

Nevertheless, the story behind the burning of the Ministry of National Development and the PNC's headquarters on 11 July 1979, and the confessions of another WPA leader about it, challenges this narrative of restraint. As noted in the previous chapter, the arrest of the WPA leader following the fire sparked the civil rebellion of that summer. What had not yet been mentioned was that the WPA orchestrated the arson, its most violent act of armed sabotage. In 2011, WPA leader Roopnaraine confessed to travel writer John Gimlette: "That July, we burned down the PNC's headquarters and the Ministry of National Development, and then, a few days later, we were all arrested" (Gimlette, 2011, p. 32). The ministry, established by the PNC in 1974, was unpopular among opponents of the regime. In his own account of Rodney's murder, scholar Gabrehui Areghai (2019) explained that the ministry symbolised the PNC's authoritarian turn under the party's paramountcy doctrine. The PNC had merged the ministry with the office of its general secretary. The manoeuvre enabled the PNC to use state funds to

support religious groups, including the paramilitary House of Israel, without declaring the expenditure to parliament.

At around 2 am, a handful of masked revolutionaries carried out the risky arson operation by posing as members of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) to enter the building, before subduing and gagging the security guards (*Sunday Chronicle*, 1979). The operation captured the essence of Che Guevara's teachings, suggesting that acts of violence themselves can create the conditions for an insurrection (Guevara, 1961). In this instance, the WPA separated its activism from any claimed reliance on the spontaneity of the masses. Some of the organisation members still defend the tactic. Wazir Mohamed stated, "The burning of the PNC building had the effect of galvanising the working people into protest" (Mohamed, 2024). This quote reflects the WPA's hope to bring people onto the streets through acts of violence.

Although mass protests erupted in response to the arrest of Rodney and four other WPA leaders, it should not detract from the fact that the burning of the Ministry of National Development was a dangerous political gamble that stood in stark contrast to Ogunseye's Iranian strategy. There is doubt as to whether the arson played in the WPA's favour in the long run, as much of Rodney and his comrades' energy was consumed by court appearances throughout 1979-80. Moreover, it is unclear whether this action was necessary, as bauxite mineworkers had already initiated an unprecedented strike on their own, which might have sparked a broader insurgency. A similar situation occurred during the food shortage protests of 1981-83, which led to strikes in the sugar and bauxite industries, as well as widespread demonstrations (see Interview with Gopaul, 2022).

The arson operation was a symptom of the WPA's limited mass support as a small organisation at a time when the balance of class forces leaned in favour of the PNC. It also reflected the WPA's frustration that mass activity had not increased despite the worsening economic situation between the referendum campaign of July 1978 and the first half of 1979

(Gopaul, 1997; Interview with Odle, 2022). Gopaul's strike statistics indicate that 1979 was a relatively calm year for industrial disputes in the sugar industry, with only 158 strikes compared to an average of 435 between 1978 and 1984 (Gopaul, 1997, pp. 307–309).The defeat of the 135-day strike during the 1977-78 referendum campaign boycott had left sugar workers demoralised. Further contributing to the workers' discouragement, the anti-referendum campaign of 1978, despite its success in mobilising Guyanese civil society, ended in disappointment as Burnham ignored the boycott and declared victory.

And yet, even during the upsurge of struggle in 1979 during the civil rebellion, the WPA still appears to have engaged in acts of sabotage. Roopnaraine admitted to travel writer John Gimlette that the WPA was responsible for burning cane fields. The aim was to exacerbate the economic crisis over which the PNC regime presided by destroying cane fields, as sugar was Guyana's primary export and major source of foreign exchange. Gimlette even named Roopnaraine's arsonist when he read his detailed interview notes to the author: "The WPA turned to violence in 1979. The PPP was blamed for burning cane fields, but Rupert said, 'It was us'. 'Fire terrified Burnham, and he started to lose his edge', said Roopnaraine" (Interview with Gimlette, 2022). This action illustrates the gap between the WPA's small size and its desire to lead an upsurge.

WPA's security committee and the underground cells

Despite its modest size and limited working class support, the WPA made bold efforts to exploit divisions within the armed forces. The party's underground structure drove these initiatives, which exemplified its political adventurism. According to Ogunseye's testimony in the WARCOI, the WPA's executive agreed to the formation of a small security committee in response to the PNC's increased violence against political opponents in the summer of 1979 (WARCOI, Ogunseye, 2014). The committee included himself, Rodney, Roopnaraine and two other people (possibly from the army). It had oversight on all matters of defence; the

establishment of safe houses, the smuggling of members when necessary, spying on the PNC and the House of Israel, and performing background checks on members to ensure security integrity.

The day-to-day running of these tasks fell to the party cells, each consisting of three to five members led by one leader (WARCOI, Ogunseye, 2014b). Ogunseye directed the members in Georgetown, which had the largest number of cells, numbering around 25. Others on the committee managed those in rural areas, such as in Berbice and the West Coast Demerara. The members of the cells were not in all instances members of the party nuclei. Instead, some were trusted associates of the organisation with special expertise. One cell, for instance, took care of electronics to build walkie-talkies (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022). Ogunseye (2022) explained that Rodney's responsibility within the security committee centred around liaising with army personnel in preparation of an uprising:

> I think what Walter was doing was to build up a kind of loyal section of the Army that would have been influential in a popular uprising, that will refuse orders to shoot. Our view is that once the people…if ever we had reached that stage, the big issue would have been whether the Army would have carried out orders or not to shoot the Guyanese people down, and Walter was working to make sure that we had enough influence in the Army, that those orders would not be carried out and in so doing he was putting himself at great risk (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022).

It appears as though Rodney acted on information that he obtained regarding the division within the armed forces based on his contacts in the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). In July 1979 some news of tension in the armed forces even reached the Guyanese public. The Embassy of Georgetown report that Burnham reshuffled the senior command of the army on 13 July 1979, just two days after the burning of the Ministry of National Development and the PNC's headquarters (American Embassy Georgetown 1979c). Among other changes, he appointed Norman McLean, an assistant lieutenant in the Guyana police force with no prior army experience, as his chief of staff of the GDF. This move seemed more like a promotion and was aimed at centralising command of the armed forces under the most loyal senior GDR

officers. McLean himself noted, “I was made head of the joint services, so all came under me in that sense, including the national service, the army, people’s militia, prisons, and the fire service” (Interview with McLean, 2022).

The appearance of a subversive newssheet called *Yam Vine*, “an armed forces publication”, represented another sign of divisions within the army. Its seventh issue in July 1979 circulated in the capital, calling for a Guyanese version of the young officer coup in Ghana under Jerry Rawlings. “ONLY THE YOUNG OFFICERS OF THE ARMY CAN SAVE BLACK PEOPLE AND GUYANA” read the article (American Embassy Georgetown 1979a; *Yam Vine: An Armed Force Publication*, 1979). Eusi Kwayana recalled, “I myself had nothing to do with it [*Yam Vine*]. I will not deny that some WPA people might know something about it. There were people in the armed forces that welcomed WPA activity” (Interview with Kwayana, 2022).

PNC distrusted its own police force and its undercover unit, known as the special branch. The WARCOI testimony of Allan Gates, a former undercover agent who infiltrated the WPA as Roopnaraine’s bodyguard in 1979, reveals significant details about the mood within police at the time. Gates stated that, based on intelligence reports:

> [Walter Rodney] was very influential, and he had a lot of followers. It was also felt that he had infiltrated the Police, the Army, and I am talking about the very top officers. It was a known fact that he had infiltrated the Police Special Branch and that he was getting information and that he was receiving intelligence from Mr. James Mentore (WARCOI, Gates, 2014a).

In a 2022 interview for this thesis, the PNC’s Hamilton Green also mentioned the name of then head of the police special branch, James Mentore, in connection with the burning of the Ministry of National Development. Green recounted he received information about the WPA’s plans to burn the ministry. He told Burnham, who called Mentore to trap those planning to burn the ministry.

> The head of the police special branch was very arrogant and felt that any information coming from outside his sources could not be trusted. So, while the Ministry of National Development

> was burning, James Mentore left the country and never came back. He did not want to face Burnham's wrath (Interview with Green, 2022).

Although Green could not ascertain whether Mentore worked with the WPA, he did suspect that some elements in police and army could not be trusted at the time (Interview with Green, 2022).

There is reason to believe that Rodney's connections with the armed forces went beyond the aim of establishing a loyal base of support within it. They also helped the WPA stockpile weapons and equipment for an insurrection. Roopnaraine made this clear to Clairmont Chung: "It's no secret we were accumulating weapons. We were accumulating equipment of various kinds, and a certain amount of that was coming from the military....[But] Burnham had penetrated so much of the WPA....It was a very dangerous game we were playing" (Chung, 2012, p. 112). The ultimate aim of the security committee was insurrection as Roopnaraine told Gilette: "Well, I wanted an armed insurrection! What a fuck-up.…I thought the army would come out and join us, but Cheddi [Jagan] disagreed and argued – on Leninist principles – that without the army the coup would fail" (Gimlette, 2011, p. 32). It is unclear when this meeting with the PPP leader occurred. What is known is that although the WPA never managed to mount a full-blown coup against the regime, some of its leaders continued to take enormous risks preparing for it long after the civil rebellion had subsided (WARCOI, 2014).

Armed struggle and Rodney's Marxist praxis

In the summer of 1979, the civil rebellion required the WPA to go on the offensive. Under Rodney's leadership, the WPA transformed into a political party, supported strikes, and organised meetings and demonstrations, extending its reach throughout the country with relentless fervour. The defeat of the civil rebellion in late 1979 required a strategic shift towards retreat in order to safeguard its accomplishments. However, the WPA's patterns of activity conveyed a misplaced confidence among its most influential leaders that they could reignite

the upheaval. Rodney was among those who insisted on carrying out militant actions and still saw the possibility of regime change. According Roopnaraine, Walter "felt that if we did not do something about reigniting the mass movement, it would be lost. Walter was always very sensitive about the need for a certain level of militancy" (Chung, 2012, p. 112).

In late April 1980, Roopnaraine and the security committee mounted a risky operation to smuggle Rodney into Suriname. From there, Rodney travelled via Tanzania to Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Weeks earlier, the PNC stopped Rodney's attempt to board a flight to Zimbabwe's independence celebration on 17 April due to the upcoming arson trial in June for burning the PNC headquarters (Boukari-Yabara, 2018). The regime had imposed a travel ban on WPA leaders. It has been suggested that Rodney visited Zimbabwe and met President Robert Mugabe on 17 May, possibly to obtain logistical support and weapons (Lewis, 1998; Roopnaraine, 2012; Zeilig, 2022). However, evidence from Rodney's stopover in Hamburg on his way back from Zimbabwe clarifies his intentions.

A month earlier, Rodney contacted two friends, Imke Meyer and Harald Selling, whom he had met in Hamburg during his stay as a visiting scholar in the spring of 1978 (see Rodney,1984). "Harald [Selling] told me you wanted the number of Peter Lock and Herbert Wulf, Peace Institute at the University of Hamburg", wrote Myer to Rodney (Imke, 1980). In late May, Rodney visited Peter Lock in his office with a special request to be in touch with arms dealers (Interview with Lock, 2022). Lock considers himself a pacifist liberal academic, not a socialist activist. However, because of his expertise on the illegal arms trade, individuals involved with liberation movements occasionally sought him out for information on acquiring weapons (Interview with Lock, 2022). Lock's colleague, Herbert Wulf, whom Rodney did not meet, recalled that members of the African National Congress once contacted his co-workers for that reason (Interview with Wulf, 2022). Lock recalled Rodney's eagerness to obtain information from him:

> He said that he was on a clandestine mission and that nobody should know, and he was bothering me to get contact for dealers in small arms. I was editor of a journal that was designed to inform the peace movement about military affairs. Rodney knew about this and contacted me because I was very informed about the illegal arms trade. For two days I resisted…but since I liked Walter very much, I gave in and gave him three addresses in Bonn, Germany. So, he disappeared with my address and the next message I got is that he was murdered in Guyana (Interview with Lock, 2022).

The addresses that Lock provided included one for the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine, which Rodney admired (Chapter 5). The other was to a person referred to as Germany's most famous arms dealer; Lock could not recall the person's name. As soon as Rodney got the addresses he said, "Thank you, I'm off to Bonn", remembers Lock (2022). Roopnaraine recalled Rodney's militant behaviour in those times: "He felt that if we did not do something about reigniting the mass movement, it would be lost. At that stage he had hoped that whatever assistance he was hoping to get from Africa would tip the balance in favor of the insurrection" (Roopnaraine, quoted in Chung 2012, p. 111). However, Rodney returned to Guyana with no assistance.

From mid-October 1979 to June 1980, the WPA refrained from hosting public meetings in Georgetown due to fear of attacks. During this period, Rodney narrowly escaped death several times while other comrades were killed. He was arrested and released five times, and he and his colleagues had to move from safe house to safe house (Gibbons, 2011). Yet, at the height of PNC oppression and the lowest point of the working people's struggle in April 1980, Rodney spoke of the weakening of the state in a letter he wrote to his friends in Germany:

> The real weakening of the state is, however, becoming clearer now. As it struggles to maintain itself in power without popular support. It is forced to resort to a strategy that alienates the very groups on which it must rely. Manager, cooperation, head and civil servants are protesting or being fired in a developing conflict between their own sense of "professionalism" and the regime's insistence of them toeing the party line. The regime has reorganised the police force and the army under loyal leadership, but its inability to trust the official armed service is leading to a growth in number and size of its private armies; and this is in itself a further impetus to alienation of elements of the official forces (Rodney, 1984, pp. 133–135).

This belief that the struggle would soon resume ran contrary to the analysis of other WPA leaders. In December 1979, Kwayana argued that the rebellion had failed to cause significant division within the armed forces or to consolidate an anti-dictatorial alliance (*Catholic Standard*, 1979c). Rodney appears to have substituted an objective appraisal of the balance of class forces in Guyana for his subjective aspirations. Marx observed psychological pitfalls accompanying the sudden decline of mass movements through his analysis of Communist League members August Willich and Wilhelm Schapper in the immediate aftermath of the 1848 revolution:

> The violent suppression of a revolution leaves a powerful imprint upon the minds of those involved, especially if they are torn away from their homes and cast into exile. So that even people with steady personalities may lose their heads for a longer or shorter period. They can no longer keep pace with the march of events. They refuse to admit that history has changed direction. Hence that playing around with conspiracies and revolutions which compromises the cause they are serving no less than themselves…. (Marx, 1971, p. 131).

Periods of defeat mark a divorce between the combative consciousness of revolutionaries and the mood of resignation among the masses. It may be tempting to call into question Rodney's long-term affinity for a voluntaristic interpretation of Marxism and guerrilla struggle, influenced by Guevarism and Fanonism, which elevated action over regard for objective circumstances (Zeilig, 2022). While Rodney's interpretations were misguided, Marx's above quote denotes that theory tends to rise above the daily practical concerns precisely because it represents a generalisation of aggregate past human experience and practice. Thus, Rodney could have remained vulnerable to adventurism even if he had adopted a perfect revolutionary theory. He might well have theoretically embraced the Iranian revolutionary example or Lenin's stance on insurrection while contradicting his stance on self-emancipation.

The military plan allegedly in Rodney's possession as unverified evidence

Before concluding this section, I wish to acknowledge that the scarcity of evidence regarding the WPA's approach to armed struggle has tested the limits of my dialectical

materialist method. The effectiveness of this method, which seeks to trace the real patterns of the WPA's activities and identify their interconnections with phases of class conflict in Guyana, depends heavily on the availability of verifiable material. While this chapter added evidence supporting James's claim regarding Rodney's and the WPA's political adventurism, key aspects of the WPA's dealings in arms remain elusive. Questions such as the extent of the WPA's preparations for armed struggle, whether they plotted against the PNC government, and, if so, the timing and execution of such plots, stay unanswered and warrant further investigation.

In the following paragraphs, I offer an honest and open reflection on a document that I consider important for shedding light on the mystery surrounding Rodney and the WPA's activities. However, I have been unable to integrate it into my analysis due to my inability to authenticate it. To my knowledge, I am the first scholar to encounter and attempt to verify this document. Therefore, I raise awareness of its existence in the hope that it may become a focal point for further studies, as it has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of the rationale behind the WPA's decisions.

In the Walter Rodney documents at the Huntley Collection in the London Metropolitan Archives I came across a handwritten draft of a military plan against Burnham's regime (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). The document, stretching over 15 pages, discusses the threats, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and objectives. It outlines an unfolding of the plan and its methods while including commentary in the last six pages. Its objective reads as follows: "By use of military force, as to disrupt the military, political, and economic organisations controlled by the regime, as to cause this regime's strangle hold in national life to loosen and allow the opportunity for progressive change" (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan').

From the outset, I encountered several issues when attempting to verify the document. The finding aid for the Huntley Collection at the LMA, available to the public, states that the late Jessica Huntley described the military plan as an "incomplete photocopy of a manuscript written in two hands". The aid points to one author as Walter Rodney, and the second is a friend of Rodney's, whose identity I keep anonymous, as he is still alive (LMA Finding Aid). While the document does indeed contain three different handwritings, I found no evidence of their authorship after comparing these samples of their handwritings in various archives.

To determine whether the document was associated with Rodney, I interviewed Eric Huntley, the widower of Jessica Huntley. The Huntleys were not only friends of Rodney but also supporters of the WPA. They often hosted him in London, whilst their publishing house Bogle-L'Ouverture published the first editions of *The Groundings with My Brothers* and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Eric Huntley confirmed that the document was found among Rodney's personal belongings in their West London home. "Walter was careless with his belongings", he sighed, recalling Rodney's many stays at their home in the 1970s (Interview with Huntley, 2023). Huntley did not know why Jessica had named the co-author of the document. He also suggested that the document's presence in the public archive was an administrative oversight from when documents were transferred from his home to the LMA in 2005.

In Guyana, none of the WPA members, leaders, or affiliates I spoke with appeared to be aware of the military plan's existence. However, one of Rodney's trusted associates quickly recognised one of the handwritings in the plan. Although the associate did not disclose the individual's name, they informed me that the co-author was a childhood friend and a member of the Guyana Defence Force. According to the associate, unbeknownst to the WPA at the time, Rodney had commissioned the co-author and other contacts in the army to draft a military plan (Interview with Anonymous, 2022). If this information is accurate, it suggests that Rodney's

role in the WPA security committee extended well beyond propaganda and the procurement of weapons. He also used the intelligence from his contacts within the armed forces to begin designing the blueprint for the planned overthrow of Burnham's dictatorship.

I still have doubts about the provenance of the plan, its authorship beyond the claim surrounding one specific handwriting, and its significance to Rodney. Ogunseye has questioned the document's authenticity, stating: "I know for a fact that the WPA security committee never drafted such a plan. Why would we have put such a thing in writing? If it fell into the hands of the PNC, we'd be in trouble" (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022). He suggested the plan might have been planted on Rodney by the PNC (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022). This raises the question of how Rodney could have left the country with such a document without it being intercepted. It is also plausible that Rodney might have disregarded the plan entirely. Moreover, given that the WPA leadership operated on a need-to-know basis and Rodney's risky role as a liaison with army personnel, he may not have considered the plan important enough to share with his comrades. The presence of multiple handwritings in the document suggests it is more a tentative draft than a definitive plan. Crucially, the plan was never actualised—neither Rodney nor the WPA launched an insurrection against the Burnham government.

I estimate that the 15-page document was written before the burning of Ministry of National Development in July 1979 as the building is listed as one of targets to "pursue absolutely" (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). Files from the Atlanta Archives indicate that Rodney stayed at Huntley's house in London on 30 May 1979, while on his way to a World Council of Churches meeting in Angola in June 1979 (Rodney, 1979b). Additionally, according to Huntley's recollections, Rodney also stayed in London in August 1978 on his way to Sweden, shortly after the July 1978 referendum campaign (Interview with Huntley, 2023). The timeframe supposes that the military plan was drafted sometime before the civil rebellion of the summer of 1979. While the draft discusses the possibility of readiness

to synchronise armed resistance with popular uprisings, its chronological sequence suggests more of a conspiracy rather than a mass insurrection akin to the events in Iran that Ogunseye (2022) mentioned (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan').

The military plan first anticipates "a lightning strike" executed by trained field forces in a single night at the designated military targets. Among the 24 targets categorised and labelled by importance, the Marine wing, Ogle distribution, GDF Headquarters (Camp Ayanganna) are identified and discussed as important military targets. Meanwhile, the Telecom switchboard, the Guyana Radio and Broadcasting Corporation, and all aircraft are highlighted as crucial communication targets. Additionally, the hit squad (government) and "seizure of key political figures" singled out as the primary political targets (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). The plan then anticipates a revolution characterised by "continuous disruption over the next 7 days" (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan'). This disruption would manifest through riots, looting, military attacks, and strikes aimed at paralysing the economy. Furthermore, a section of the armed forces would be encouraged to break from the regime adding to the pressure, compelling it to step down (LMA, 'Untitled photocopy of military plan').

Beyond the document, the Rodney Commission of Inquiry contains the only other direct reference to a military plan that I am aware of in the testimony of Robert Allan Gates. A former policeman, Gates was cross-examined while serving a prison sentence for fraud. The WARCOI deemed Gates' testimony credible and a central piece of its findings, as he identified the PNC officials allegedly responsible for plotting Rodney's assassination through Gregory Smith (WARCOI, 2016). Gates claimed to have been a PNC undercover police agent planted as Roopnaraine's bodyguard, with instructions to assassinate him. However, he refused to carry out this order, reportedly having developed a liking for the WPA leader. In his testimony, Gates

referred to what he called the "WPA plan" to overthrow Burnham that never came to fruition because of Rodney's murder. He recalls a discussion with Roopnaraine that took place in 1979.

> At one time, Dr. Roopnaraine discussed the logistics of "Plan Overthrow," where we considered first seizing Camp Ayanganna, taking control of all points of entry and exit into the country, and then overrunning the Office of the President or the official residence to arrest President L. F. S. Burnham, simultaneously….The plan also involved taking control of radio stations (WARCOI, Gates, 2014).

Similar to Gates's testimony, the alleged plan in Rodney's possession includes a discussion of similar targets, but it does not specify the order in which they would be conquered. Mr. Gates further claimed that, as part of the plan's unfolding, he accompanied Roopnaraine to Arnold Rampersaud's house on the Corentyne coast, where they retrieved a G3 semi-automatic rifle and ammunition for training sessions at a secluded beach. Gates trained Dr Roopnaraine on using the weapon, with Roopnaraine firing live rounds. Gates also stated that he accompanied Dr Roopnaraine on several evening trips to collect 7.62 ammunition from various locations in the city.

Nevertheless, there is suspicion about Gates's testimony regarding the WPA's approach to armed struggle. Jocelyn Dow (2022) and Ogunseye (2022) have told me it is difficult to believe that Roopnaraine, as a WPA leader, would risk divulging such damning information to his bodyguard, given the potential consequences. However, at the time, Gates's testimony was not contested by any WPA member who spoke in the days following, nor by Roopnaraine, who was present in the audience (WARCOI, Gates, 2014). This lack of challenge may be because Gates's testimony played a pivotal role in the commission's primary objective: uncovering who killed Rodney. Questions surrounding the WPA's activities were secondary to the inquiry's main focus.

If authentic, its content could offer valuable insights into the rationale underpinning Rodney's activism and preparations for armed struggle. For instance, the concept of a "lightning strike" in the alleged plan suggests that the WPA envisioned acts of violence and

sabotage being carried out on behalf of the masses, rather than relying on their direct participation. This approach would add weight to the strategic rationale that aligns with the WPA's burning of Ministry of National Development, which is their most violent act. But as of yet there is much greater work to be done in terms of its verification.

In conclusion, the above discussion on the military plan does not overshadow the central argument of this section: Rodney and the WPA's approach to armed struggle stood in stark contrast to Ogunseye's idealised representation. Rodney and the WPA's strategy failed to articulate a "socialism from-below" approach that relied on mass participation. Instead, their actions focused on accumulating weapons, logistical operations, military connections, and acts of arson at a time when the working class was largely inactive. This adventurist stance on armed struggle reflected the defeat of the civil rebellion, which had shifted the balance of class forces and left WPA activists isolated. Rodney's tragic death occurred during this period of isolation.

Upon his return from Zimbabwe, he was prepared to engage his army contacts despite the fact that the PNC had stationed an army vehicle outside his house to intimidate him (Roopnaraine, 2012; Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). "Don't let them make you a prisoner in your own house", he once told his wife (Interview with P. Rodney, 2022). On 13 June 1980, Rodney and his brother Donald went to acquire a radio transmitter from an ex-army officer, Gregory Smith, whom the PNC had planted on Rodney since 1978 (Zeilig, 2022). They did not suspect that Smith was a PNC informant. When Rodney activated the device in his car, it exploded and killed him.

Anti-dictatorial alliances and Rodney's democratic revolution

The unity between competing National Front proposals

A central challenge facing the WPA in its quest for state power involved determining the kind of alliance that could connect its revolutionary activists to the broader layers of the

working people, which had not adopted anti-racist and socialist politics. As a small political party, it required a strategy for raising its profile and mobilising a greater number of people against the PNC dictatorship while pulling reformists away from the racial politics carried out by the parties of Burnham and Cheddi Jagan. The WPA solutions to this issue often proved inadequate on both a theoretical and practical level. They suggested an opportunism characteristic of reformism rather than a genuine commitment to socialism from-below. While the solutions were not the fundamental cause of the collapse of anti-dictatorial unity, they failed to decrease the political isolation of the WPA, which ultimately led to Rodney's death.

The failure of the WPA and PPP to unite against the PNC was linked to the type of alliance both parties proposed in the late 1970s, which Rodney and the WPA referred to as the National Front (Rodney, 1980a). Between September and October 1979, Rodney played a major role in drafting the WPA's proposals for a *Government of National Unity and Reconstruction* in the event of the Burnham's downfall (Interview with Kwayana, 2022). The document directly responds to the PPP's proposal for National Patriotic Front of August 1977 (PPP, 1977; WPA, 1979b). Some remarks are necessary to address a few misconceptions surrounding these proposals as most observers have focused on the difference between them. They note that the WPA proposal put the removal of the PNC dictatorship as prerequisite for national unity while the PPP, toeing the line of critical support for cooperative socialism, sought a parliamentary power sharing agreement with Burnham's PNC (James, 1981; Lewis, 1998; Spinner, 2021; Zeilig, 2022; Interview with Hinds, 2023). WPA intellectuals have often contrasted the narrow-mindedness of the PPP's proposal, with its emphasis on socialism and nationalisation, against the more pro-democratic nature of its own proposal, which they claim had broader mass appeal (WPA, 1983; Roopnaraine, 2012). Although these interpretations are pertinent, they remain incomplete. Their focus on differences obscured the fact that both proposals similarly defended a class collaboration policy appealing to the Guyanese elite at the

expense of the worker's interests. The real division emerged in their appeal to different factions of the national bourgeoisie. The PPP's National Front proposal of August 1977 read as follows:

> What is now require[d] is a national solution based on the formation of a national patriotic front including all parties and groups which are progressive, anti-imperialism.…Such a front should bring about a revolutionary alliance of working class, the peasant farmers, the revolutionary intellectual, progressive businessmen and middle-strata (PPP, 1977, p. 29).

Under such guise, the PPP called for an anti-imperialist alliance with the Afro-Guyanese state bureaucracy that had come to power with the help of imperialism. Throughout 1976, it met with PNC to discuss this power sharing agreement (PPP, 1977). The proposal suggested that the party with the second highest number of votes (the PNC) would be entitled to nominate the president as an executive president, while the party with the majority of votes would accept the post of Prime Minister (Interview with Ramkarran, 2022; Interview with Teixeira, 2022). Jagan's party assumed that while the PNC had made progress towards socialism, it would capitulate to imperialist pressures and halt the nationalisation of foreign banks if it failed to include the PPP and unite the Guyanese people. However, negotiation broke down upon Burnham's refusal to cooperate (PPP, 1977).

The WPA adopted the idea of a broad class collaborationist National Front policy but envisioned it as an anti-dictatorial alliance against the PNC (WPA, 1978a, 1979d, 1979b). Rodney explained this during a speech in late 1979:

> The WPA has called for a Government of National Reconstruction and National Unity. Inevitably, the working people must play a leading role in such a government. Yet, it is proof of the maturity of our workers that they fully understand the need for patriotic compromise with other classes and social strata.…So, the vast majority of our people will surely rally around a programme which restores the economy through the participation of all. They will rally round a programme which restores democratic rights. One can sum up on the national question by saying that all classes in Guyana have an objective interest in unity (Rodney, 1981c, pp. 22–23).

The WPA and the PPP's proposal had nothing in common with the notion of working class leadership. By claiming that all classes shared a common interest, Rodney here contradicted

the fundamental Marxist assertion of the irreconcilable antagonism between wage-labour and capital.

Firstly, both proposals called for a long-term electoral alliance with the aim of bringing together a caretaker bourgeois government, united revolutionaries, reformist, and pro-capitalist parties. Where the PPP wanted an alliance with the Afro-Guyanese bureaucracy, the WPA wanted an alliance with the aspiring liberal bourgeoisie rather than the bourgeoisie itself (WPA, 1979b). In 1979, these included businessmen, large farmers, top civil servants, and barristers disgruntled with PNC's nationalisation and bureaucracy (Rodney, 1981c). They coalesced in small associations, groups, and parties such as Compass, the Citizens Committee, and the right-wing Liberator Party (WPA, 1983; Hinds, 1999). Secondly, the proposal meant sacrificing a socialist programme for one that adapted to the moods of these pro-capitalist factions, though these factions held no real influence in society as independent political forces. The alliance assumed that the Guyanese working masses were not ready for socialism, as its proposal read: "The WPA understands that because of the PNC's postures, many Guyanese believe that socialism is anti-democratic. This is one reason why we stress democracy" (WPA, 1979b). Thirdly, the WPA's proposal not only prioritised the return of democracy and free elections but also the restoration of the national economy in favour of private business. "The government must therefore recognise the legitimate role the private sector is to play in the restoration of the national economy" (WPA, 1979b, p. 11).

The WPA's proposal for a government of national unity distanced itself from socialism from-below as it relegated the questions of working class self-emancipation to a distant future. The revolutionary scenario that Rodney and his comrades anticipated and worked for was first and foremost the triumph of a democratic revolution and only thereafter of a socialist one. The WPA programme of March 1979 spoke of democracy as a prerequisite for socialism: "The victory of the broad democratic alliance and the restoration of democracy are the essential pre-

conditions for the implementation of an anti-imperialist, democratic and socialist-oriented programme" (WPA, 1979d, p. 15). The mass struggles against Burnham's dictatorship would not lead to the immediate destruction of the bureaucratic bourgeois state and expropriation of the capitalist class.

Thus far, this chapter has abstracted the WPA proposal from its reality to draw out the lack of consideration for proletarian self-emancipation. But this document only becomes comprehensible when placed in the social relations that tie it to the development of the anti-dictatorial struggle in Guyana. It was not a coincidence that the WPA's proposal, *Government of National Unity,* appeared in the decline of the civil rebellion. The document highlighted the widening gap between the WPA's aspirations—seeing itself as the leader of the masses—and its actual detachment from the working people, growing more pronounced as state repression gained the upper hand. Yet, the *Government of National Unity* proposal offers insight into a much more enduring story that contributed to the isolation of WPA: its breakdown in communication with the PPP prior to the civil rebellion.

A failed working relationship

The WPA's separate proposal for a national unity government symbolised its inability to find a consistent working relationship with the PPP despite their differences and respect for them. The outbreak of the civil rebellion had exposed their diverging class loyalties. The PPP's inactivity demonstrated its leadership's desire to remain loyal to the state bureaucracy of the Soviet Union, which had recognised Burnham as a socialist leader (Seecharan, 2023). Additionally, it catered to the Indian middle-class businessmen, religious leaders, and landlords within its ranks who sought change only through the ballot (Birbalsingh, 2007). In contrast, the WPA, despite lacking mass support, sought to organise the working class at their current level of consciousness and leverage the economic crisis to mobilise the masses against the state (Zeilig, 2022).

The WPA's proposal for unity, which satisfied the demands of the politically void liberal bourgeois factions, made unrealistic demands on the PPP (WPA, 1979a). It thereby put thousands of Guyanese followers of Jagan's reformism beyond its reach. Firstly, the WPA's concession to private business contradicted the PPP's insistence on maintaining a nationalised economy (WPA, 1983; Hinds, 1999, 2010). Secondly, the WPA proposal called for replacing the PNC minority rule with a Council of National Security, distributing 50 seats among political parties, labour and peasant organisations, and citizen organisations. This proposal allocated only nine seats to the PPP, the same number as the WPA, despite the WPA having a fraction of the PPP's membership (WPA, 1979b). The proposal oversimplified the complexities of building anti-dictatorial unity. The real challenge for the WPA was navigating the PPP's sectarian tendencies in a way that allowed it to connect with and appeal to the thousands of Guyanese who supported Jagan.

This tension was a far cry from the good working relationship that the WPA enjoyed earlier with the PPP around the Arnold Rampersaud campaign and the anti-referendum campaign. In 1977, the two parties met at the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union (CCWU) in Georgetown discuss their plans for unity. Rodney and Thomas spoke for the WPA, while Ralph Ramkkaran led for the PPP leadership (Interview with Ramkarran, 2022). Ramakkaran recalled:

> The WPA had come out with a program that excluded the PNC from any share of power. The PPP's view was that no matter how bad the PNC is or what they put the country through, they have the support of the African section of the population. However, a couple of months later, the WPA reversed course and included the PNC. As far as I remember, there was no tension or debate; we remained very friendly with one another up to the referendum (Interview with Ramkarran, 2022).

The WPA published a document supporting the National Front in January 1978, which did not oppose the idea of having the PNC participate in a unity government, hoping that the working class would reform the PNC from within (WPA, 1978a). However, the WPA appears

to have decisively resolved itself to remove the Burnham regime only after the referendum campaign of the summer of 1978 (*Dayclean*, 1978).

However, the National Patriotic Front discussions revealed a significant obstacle to building political unity: the WPA and the PPP had conflicting approaches to addressing the racial question, which divided the working class. The WPA suggested that the proposal should be used as a consultation among the people (Roopnaraine, 2012). However, as Roopnaraine explains, few National Front meetings were held because the PPP nullified the WPA's suggestion. "The PPP accepted the suggestion but did not conduct the consultation in the 'PPP communities'—read Indian—as they were already in step with the programme. So NPF meetings should be concentrated in the non-PPP communities—read African" (Roopnaraine, 2012).

The PPP counted on the passive unity between the masses to conform with its electoral strategy. "Cheddi Jagan never expected Afro-Guyanese people to join the PPP, he wanted them to organise separately against the PNC to build a community of interest", claimed Ramkarran (Interview with Ramkarran, 2022). The PPP only appreciated the WPA insofar as its activities aimed at sowing divisions within the support base of the PNC to win the next elections. The PPP imposed restrictions on the WPA's activities in the Indo-Guyanese region, which dampened its effort to build a multiracial party based on a unity in action. WPA leader Clive Thomas said, "We found that sort of reaction profoundly anti-democratic, even nauseating. We could never let it be known openly.…We ignored it [the PPP's restriction], in a way that minimised friction" (Interview with Thomas, 2022).

Organising across racial lines bought the WPA rank-and-file militants into conflict with PPP supporters (Interview with Ogunseye, 2022; Ramkarran, 2022; Thomas, 2022). Alli described one such incident in the Indo-Guyanese area of Canal Number 2, where the PPP Youth Organisation disrupted a meeting organised by the WPA Brigade. Despite the violent

interference, Alli and his comrades stood their ground before local villagers ultimately persuaded the PPP activists to leave. Years later, Alli discovered that the house where the meeting had been held was burned down (Interview with Alli, 2022). Another notable instance of tension occurred in Port Morant, Cheddi Jagan's birthplace, as the WPA again ventured into a PPP stronghold. Alli recounted the following:

> The split with PPP came around second half 1979, when we went to Port-Morant which is Cheddi's birthplace…We had a meeting where Walter and Rupert spoke, and thousands came out to hear them. The PPP thugs tried to break up this meeting, but the crowd stopped them from doing so (Interview with Alli, 2022).

The grassroots competition between the WPA and the PPP did not prevent the WPA from collaborating with the PPP before the civil rebellion. During the 1978-79 period, Cheddi Jagan and Walter Rodney met weekly at the GAWU's conference room on Regent Street. Although the PPP and the WPA worked together on the anti-referendum campaign against the PNC, the PPP's passive sectarianism after the referendum of 10 July frustrated the WPA class collaborationist policy (Ramkarran, 2022; Teixeira, 2022).

In the wake of the Jonestown massacre of November 1978, the WPA sought to bring together the groups which had participated in the anti-referendum campaign into the Council of National Safety (CNS). It thereby established a platform to denounce the PNC's corruption and collusion in the affair, where 914 followers of the Peoples Temple cult were forced into a mass suicide on Guyanese soil (Hinds, 1999). However, the ambition behind CNS differed from the anti-referendum as the WPA intended for it to evolve into a National Patriot Front-style organisation for the restoration of democracy. However, the project never came to fruition because the PPP withdrew from the alliance due to the presence of the right-wing Liberator Party in the CNS. The Liberator Party had annoyed the PPP by distributing an anti-communist leaflet during the referendum campaign (WPA, 1983). Another cause for frustration between PPP and other organisations in the referendum boycott campaign was its continued

participation in the parliament after the Burnham regime passed the referendum of 1978 (PPP, 1979).

Months later, in early 1979, the middle-class Citizen Committee organised a unity conference attended by the WPA, PPP, and other groups to discuss free and fair elections, civil liberties, and the government of national unity. However, the talks on the economic programme of the unity government broke down when the PPP "began to insist that the programme should contain nationalisation - an undertaking to complete the anti-imperialist phase", read the report (WPA, 1983). Thus, the stage was set for the relationship between the WPA and the PPP to suffer a breakdown in communication by July 1979 at the beginning of the civil rebellion. Ralph Ramkarran, who attended the regular meeting between WPA and PPP leaders, remembers their sudden end:

> The final meeting between the PPP and the WPA was held at the beginning period of what the WPA called the "civil rebellion"… At the meeting, neither Cheddi Jagan nor Walter Rodney were present. Before Jagan left to go abroad, he asked me to raise the issue of the upsurge in the WPA's activity to get a sense of what was on the agenda.… After the meeting, we congregated around our cars to depart, and I invited Dr Clive Thomas aside and asked him about the issue. He responded that the whole objective of the movement was to keep everyone guessing. I reported to the organisation that the PPP was not invited by the WPA to participate in the "civil rebellion".…The WPA had decided on a trajectory of struggle that was different from the PPP (Interview with Ramkarran, 2022)

The PPP ordered its members to stay away from the WPA, whom they suspected of engaging in armed struggle (Ramkarran, 2022; Teixeira, 2022). WPA leader Clive Thomas (2022) did not recall the meeting details but did not deny this version of events, which led to the isolation of the WPA. These frustrations over failed anti-dictatorial efforts were reflected in the WPA's proposal for a *Government of National Unity and Reconstruction*, which looked to build new political alliances.

The anti-referendum campaign as unity in action

If history possessed any fatalism, there would be no use paying attention to parties, programmes and the quality of their leaders. In Guyana, there might have existed a more sustainable way for the WPA to work with the PPP, despite its flaws. The anti-referendum

campaign of 1978 departed from the passive unity underlying the WPA's class collaborationist National Front policy (WPA, 1979b).

First, the anti-referendum campaign represented a coalition of the reformist PPP, trade unions, and religious and civil society organisations, united to address an immediate, well-defined problem (*Catholic Standard*, 1978a). The WPA-led Committee for the Defence of Democracy (CDD) embodies an alliance between the working class, peasants, and the oppressed, united over demands such as stopping the referendum and ensuring free elections, which were acceptable to all groups involved. It only error was to include small pro-capitalist groups like the Liberator Party (see CDD brochure). In contrast, the National Front proposal sought a long-term abstract alliance for a democratic bourgeois government, which led to divisions between groups. Secondly, the organisations within the anti-referendum campaign maintained their independence from each other and did not conceal their disagreements. The National Front proposal meant compromise with bourgeois class interest.

Thirdly, the campaign created a space for the WPA to engage in debates over strategy and tactics with the leaders of the PPP. By putting the question of unity before Jagan, the WPA sought to compel the PPP to move away from its preoccupation with electoral politics and to stand by its claim as the main opposition to Burnham in the streets and workplaces. Conversely, unity with the reformists would afford the WPA the opportunity to demonstrate to the masses that its methods and commitment to the struggle were superior to those of the PPP. The WPA managed to grow its credibility through the organisation of rallies, pickets, and bottom-house meetings, while securing the active participation of the PPP in the referendum boycott (*Catholic Standard*, 1978a; Hinds, 1999). The attempt to build a government of national unity shows that Rodney and the WPA never gained a full awareness of these distinctive advantages of the anti-referendum campaign over its national front/unity proposals. Therefore, the WPA

shifted away from the type of alliance that could unite the left around active collaboration on the streets, opting instead for a passive electoral unity as shown in its proposals.

The National Front and the WPA's opportunist foreign policy

The breakdown of communication with the PPP and the defeat of the 1979 rebellion left the WPA leadership vulnerable to influence of non-proletarian classes. On one side, Rodney dealt with army officers and disaffected lower ranking members such as Gregory Smith while meeting with the aspiring bourgeois groups like Compass and Barrister protesting PNC corruption (Interview with Dow, 2022; Ogunseye, 2022). In April 1980, during the lowest point of the working people's struggle, Rodney noticed signs of the state weakening due to the persistent alienation of these groups, as shown in his letter to his friends in Germany (Rodney, 1984). The U.S. State Department offered a different perspective. In August 1979 they reported on divisions within the army, and by May 1980 they described "prevailing political tranquillity within Guyana", citing unity in the armed forced as a contributing factor (American Embassy Georgetown 1979a, 1979c, 1980b).

Moreover, the WPA's proposal for a government of national unity expressed the isolation of the WPA on the international scene as it received no support from regimes it considered allies such as Grenada and Cuba, which also maintained a cordial relationship with Burnham's PNC (Andaiye, 2020; Zeilig, 2022). If the WPA approach to armed struggle hinted at adventurism, its practice of national unity sometimes turned to opportunism. However, both approaches found common ground in their desire to substitute the WPA for the self-activity of working people. Among all things, the proposal endowed Rodney with the confidence that he could convince the Americans of a viable alternative to Burnham's dictatorship. Thus, a class collaborationist policy was not simply about compromising to the local animosity toward socialism, it was also about appeasing the greatest of all imperial powers: the Americans.

Rodney met with U.S. ambassadors to Guyana at least three times: on 5 December 1979, 15 January 1980, and 24 April 1980 (American Embassy Georgetown 1979d, 1980a, 1980c). He went alone to the first and third meeting, and he attended the second with Roopnaraine in January 1980. Most leaders of the WPA were unaware of these meetings until recently (Interview with Dow, 2022; Ogunseye, 2022; Hinds, 2023). The telegram reports reveal Rodney's concern with how the Americans would react to the potential overthrow of Burnham, presumably fearing an anti-communist invasion akin to that which toppled the PPP's government in 1953 (American Embassy Georgetown 1979d, 1980a, 1980c). He attempted to convince the ambassador that WPA did not consider the United States the enemy:

> Walter Rodney and Rupert Roopnaraine claimed that U.S. policy in Guyana was supportive of the Burnham regime despite its increasing authoritarianism. They argued that the U.S. position was due to a mistaken belief that the only alternative to Burnham was the Moscow-oriented People's Progressive Party led by Cheddi Jagan. They maintained that a national unity caretaker government composed of all parties except the ruling PNC should hold free elections with outside observers. This, they argued, would be a viable alternative favoured by at least 70 percent of the electorate (American Embassy Georgetown, 1980a).

It is not clear on what information Rodney was acting upon to meet the Americans. He appears to have caught wind of the American disenchantment with Burnham's Cooperative Socialism (see American Embassy Georgetown, 1979b). One clue is found in a letter Rodney received from Cecil Shields, an ex-Corentyne teacher, during the rebellion of 1979. Shields, who taught at the University of Florida, relayed information from one of their graduate students who interned at the Central America desk at the U.S. State Department (Shields, no date). "The State Dept (U.S) see you as a credible alternative to the PNC", Sheilds asserted, "but have some problems with your 'black power' past and your 'Ultra-leftist' posturing" (Shields, no date). The ex-Corentyne teacher advised Rodney to appear more respectable to Americans. He encouraged Rodney to gather mass Afro-Guyanese support and some solidarity from the Indo-Guyanese community (Shields, no date). The WPA's organ, *Dayclean*, gradually shifted its tone towards the United States. Previously critical of American imperialism, the 9 May 1980, issue spoke of building a "healthy relationship with the U.S." (*Dayclean*, 1980). The National

Front was now a question of opportunist unity with imperialist powers against Burnham dictatorship. However, the Americans had little interest in supporting the WPA bid for state power as one commentator concluded: "Their ultimate socialist goal reflects Guyana's fundamental problem" (American Embassy Georgetown 1980a).

Rodney had personal reasons for meeting with Americans as he contemplated the prospect of his own death. In December 1979, Rodney had warned the U.S. "that the local political scene would deteriorate into violence within the next year. Whereas they abhorred terrorism, the WPA might be forced to resort to it" (American Embassy Georgetown, 1979d). In light of his commitment to remain in Guyana, he asked the American embassy to "assist his wife and children in obtaining permanent resident alien status in the U.S. in the event that he was killed" (American Embassy Georgetown, 1979d). Seven months later, on 13 June 1980, Rodney was dead.

Conclusion

If violence, as Marx once wrote in 1867, is the "midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one", then in Guyana, she was ill-equipped to deliver a democracy for the working people (Marx, 2013, p. 526). The assassination of Walter Rodney stood as a tragic testament to this stillborn future. His death represented not just the loss of a leader but the failure of a struggle that had briefly shone light on the potential of a multiracial movement of the working class and its allies against the dictatorship.

This chapter has sought to explain the WPA's incapacity to strategically withdraw during a period of heightened repression and the decline of the mass movement, missing the opportunity to regroup and re-engage in the struggle for state power at a more opportune time. It did so by highlighting the discrepancy between how the WPA perceived itself and how it acted at critical moments in the Guyanese class struggle to offer clarity on the James-Roopnaraine debate. A closer examination of its activities in the realms of armed resistance

and alliance-building reveals that the WPA deviated from its commitment to socialism from-below—a commitment that had been consistently demonstrated through its organisation of mass protests and strikes between 1974-79.

Its approach to armed struggle, which amounted to acts of sabotage carried out by a select few on behalf of the masses, reflected the impatience of an inexperienced political party that aspired to lead the movement but lacked the mass support behind it. Meanwhile, its approach to anti-dictatorial alliance-building revealed another side of the WPA's isolation: the danger of opportunism. The proposal of the *Government of National Unity* expressed its shortcomings in building a working relationship with the PPP, which was fundamental to rooting itself among the workers. More importantly, the WPA was prepared to sacrifice its emphasis on working class leadership for a class collaboration policy that would appease local businessmen and American imperialism through the formation of a bourgeois government. Nevertheless, the errors of Rodney and the WPA were those of a political party and leaders who refused to compromise with a dictatorship that preyed on the racial insecurities of the Guyanese people. It was Rodney's readiness to consider any means necessary against a regime that held a monopoly on violence that makes his final struggle in Guyana so heroic.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The prophet of self-emancipation and his prophesies

As this study draws to a close, it is crucial to consider why Rodney's life-geography matters for a world that remains sceptical about Marxism, yet desperately in need of it. Rodney's life and work affirm the universal significance and strength of his Marxism as an anti-capitalist theory and guide to action, capable of offering a genuine alternative for those oppressed by racism and imperialism. His political development—shaped by his involvement in liberation struggles across Africa and the Americas and his engagement with Third World socialism—teaches us that orthodox Marxism should not be confused with its Stalinist distortions. And if Rodney is to be commended for one thing, it is his ability to revise his previous stances by learning from new developments in the class struggle. The more he engaged with political movements in the Global South, the more he arrived at classical Marxist conclusions, recognising the self-emancipatory power of the working class as essential to the realisation of socialism.

In his account of Rodney's final years in Guyana, Eusi Kwayana effectively captures this aspect in his recollection of Rodney's first public lecture after joining the WPA:

> He launched into the theme of the self-emancipation of the working class and tried to give it a sense of its own being and potential power.…He told a tale, unknown till then in Guyana, of lions who went to view an art exhibition and were amazed at the [paintings] on canvas made by hunters and their glorifiers: A lion shook his head with resignation and was heard muttering, "If only lions could paint!" One has to assume that it was in order to help lions to learn to paint that he set out with energy to hold classes in political economy with groups of workers and other interested persons (Kwayana, 1988, p. 8).

Rodney's funeral procession was one of the most compelling testaments to his success in helping to raise the political consciousness of the working people. Held on 23 June 1980, it was the largest funeral Guyana had witnessed since the Enmore Martyrs of 1948, when five sugar workers were killed by the colonial police. WPA leader Karen Da Souza recalled it as "the most massive display of racial solidarity in the recent history of Guyana with over 30,000

people in attendance" (quoted in Zeilig, 2022, p. 315). Thousands of Guyanese people of all races and walks of life joined the 20-mile march from the intersection of the Afro-Guyanese town of Buxton and the Indo-Guyanese town of Annandale—a place that had come to symbolise multiracial unity during the 1979 rebellion—to Georgetown, where Rodney was laid to rest in Le Repentir Cemetery in the evening (Boukari-Yabara, 2010). Patrica Rodney led the March, thousands followed her chanting "Don't mourn, organise" and "fight back, fight back" whilst carrying a banner and placards bearing Rodney's face (Interview with Kwayana, 2022).

Contribution to knowledge and thematic synthesis of findings

This thesis sought to portray Walter Rodney as a brilliant revolutionary of the past century, offering novel analysis of his intellectual and activist contributions in the post-independence era in Africa and the Americas. It has resisted providing a hagiographic account of his life while celebrating his exceptional qualities as a theoretician, activist, and martyr. It has endeavoured to shed light on the originality and non-dogmatic character of his thinking, drawing out his unique contributions to Marxism whilst never losing sight of his weaknesses. It disclosed theoretical imperfections, misjudgements of political situations, and a sense of romanticism in his engagement in the anti-imperialist struggle. Yet, it conveyed the sincerity and relentlessness of Rodney's commitment to liberating the exploited and oppressed. Among all things, this thesis has strived to do justice to his role in the making of history (and geography), while capturing the dynamism of his life and thought.

In a rare lecture on Malcolm X in 1979, Rodney warned about the risk of upholding statements made by the African American icon at specific times as absolute truths, without considering the broader context of his political development. He told his audience:

> I would hate to be confronted with some statements that I wrote in 1960 because I would simply say that it's where I was at in 1960....I would like to say that since then I have moved in this direction because it is the nature of man and matter to be in constant motion (Rodney, 1979).

On similar ground, this thesis has shown that Rodney's political thought and activism can only be understood when we look at them in motion, paying close attention to their twists and turns, patterns and shifts across time and space. It is, therefore, convenient to restate its major innovation.

This thesis contributed to knowledge by examining the development of Rodney's Marxism across Africa and the Americas, incarnating a conflict between two irreconcilable forms of socialism. It demonstrated that a distinct pattern of changes in Rodney's political thought and activism arose from this conflict, marked by his shift towards socialism from-below through his engagement with socialism from-above. This shift found its most profound expression in his growing recognition of the revolutionary potential of the working class, which significantly influenced his thinking and activism during his later years in Guyana. However, the thesis revealed that this transformation remained incomplete as Rodney continued to adhere to certain aspects of top-down socialism.

This new framing of Rodney's life and work aimed to push the analysis of his Marxism in a new direction. It showed that a past overemphasis on the unorthodoxy of Rodney's Marxism led to an idealised and one-dimensional conception of his politics, conflating distortions of Marxism with its actual substance and reflecting a broader academic ambiguity about the meaning of Marxism. However, this thesis argued that the unique aspect of Rodney's life resided precisely in his ability to return to the orthodoxy of proletarian Marxism in an epoque of the Cold War and national liberation struggles where dominant forms of socialism identified elements of the petty bourgeoisie as the revolutionary agent. In doing so, it built on the work of Eusi Kwayana (1988) and, more recently, Zeilig (2022), whose biographies recognised Rodney's commitment to working-class self-emancipation from-below. This thesis introduced dialectical materialism as a method that could systematically trace and identify how this development unfolded and where it fell short.

The application of dialectical materialism offered methodological innovation to the study of Rodney's life-geography and more generally to biographical writing in human geography. It allowed this thesis to analyse Rodney's life and politics as a continuous process of change. This approach enabled the arrangement of extensive archival materials and oral histories into a coherent analysis, connecting developments in Rodney's thinking to the evolution of anti-imperialist struggles in Africa and the Americas. These efforts proved crucial in determining the material circumstances under which Rodney's Marxism changed and the moment at which this transformation occurred. Guided by the dialectical method of investigation, this thesis took a chronological approach to the analysis of Rodney's political development. However, it presents its findings thematically, as outlined in the conceptual framework, to more succinctly demonstrate the changes in Rodney's Marxism.

The transformation of Rodney's socialist politics manifested through three primary processes: the path to recognising working-class power and independence, developing a Marxist approach to race and class, and building a political party. The first process denotes that Rodney's life-geography can be read as a search for the class capable of leading the struggle for national liberation in the post-independence era. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal how Rodney found an agent of revolution outside the proletariat in his support for Black Power and Tanzanian state-led socialism. Chapter 5 also portrays Rodney as a staunch advocate of socialism from-above. Between 1967 and 1974, he identified the state-led bureaucratic petty bourgeoisie as the driving force for socialism, believing that underdevelopment prevented workers and peasants from developing the political confidence to govern. A recurring feature of Rodney's critique of TANU's socialist experiment was that it failed to implement the kind of socialist planning seen in Cuba and China. While he initially suggested Tanzania establish farming cooperatives in 1967, by the late 1970s, he remained critical of Ujamaa villagisation for not matching the Chinese model.

Rodney's support for state-led socialism was also evident in his idealised view of the Cuban Revolution, which seemingly blinded him to the repressive acts carried out by Castro against black people. As discussed in Chapter 4, Rodney's writings revealed that he saw Castro's Cuba during the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968-69 as a model society that had eradicated racism, poverty, and other ills associated with foreign domination—one to which the Black Power movements in the United States and Jamaica could aspire.

The chapters also focus on Rodney's engagement with Black Power during the global revolt of 1968. This period of activism demonstrated that the two poles of socialism—from-above and from-below—did not stand in rigid opposition but rather intermingled, creating a temporary yet powerful synthesis between Marxism, Third World guerrilla socialism, and Black Nationalism. In Jamaica, his activism and writings in 1968 portrayed the unemployed youths from the shanty towns as potential instigators of an armed uprising, resembling Fanon's lumpenproletariat or the Black Panthers' "Brothers on the Block" (Fanon, 1963; Bloom and Martin, 2013). However, for all its combativeness during the Rodney riots, the lumpenproletariat lacked organisational coherence and objective power to sustain a movement after Rodney's expulsion.

A key insight from these chapters was that, although Rodney viewed the working class as just one of many actors in Jamaica and Tanzania, he still managed to develop grassroots politics that instilled fear among the elites in both countries. Chapter 4 illustrated Rodney's grassroots engagement with marginalised groups, such as Rastafarians and unemployed youth in Jamaica, underscoring his belief in the self-activity of the black masses. This painted him as an insurgent architect, demonstrating how his intervention in Jamaica, and his subsequent expulsion, acted as a catalyst for rebellion, rooted in local class tensions that connected with the international revolts of 1968. Rodney emerged from this experience with a dialectical

utopian vision, convinced of a socialist future achievable through a Black Power guerrilla revolution.

Chapter 5 uncovered growing tensions between Rodney and TANU due to his non-conformist stance on the one-party state between 1969 and 1972. It highlighted his attempts to push Nyerere's regime further left, especially in foreign policy. Rodney advocated for the violent overthrow of African neo-colonial governments, urged Tanzania to align with socialist states, and supported Palestinian militancy—positions that clashed with TANU's policies. His association with Marxists on campus, who were critical of nationalisation and Ujamaa policies, further exposed the Tanzanian state's inconsistencies as it veered towards authoritarianism under the pressures of the Cold War and African liberation movements. Rodney's growing disenchantment with the Tanzanian state, which suppressed freedoms and showed little interest in sharing power with the working masses, led him to view the working class as a central organising force.

Chapter 6 explains this qualitative shift, stemming from his observations of the Tanzanian workers' struggles in the 1970s, which caught the attention of his USARF comrades. His intellectual work while travelling abroad after leaving Tanzania, particularly in the United States and Hamburg, offered insights into the strategic importance of the exploited class within the system. Chapters 6 and 7 further connected this understanding to his activism in Guyana as a full-time organiser of the WPA from 1976 to 1980. There, Rodney supported protests and strikes, recognising that the withdrawal of labour was the most potent weapon against Forbes Burnham's dictatorship.

The second process, Rodney's development of a Marxist analysis of race and class in Guyana, overlapped and conjoined with his appreciation for proletarian self-emancipation. Chapter 4 argued that Rodney's Black Power message was racially inclusive and grounded in Third World solidarity. However, he did not fully address the limitations of organising around

a single racial identity. Chapter 7 highlighted that he acknowledged class divisions within the black community. Rodney concluded that African liberation could no longer be solely about uniting Africans but needed to align with socialist principles and broader international class solidarity. He identified closely with the positions of guerrilla socialist movements like FRELIMO in Mozambique, which fought Portuguese colonialism.

Chapter 7 further argued that Rodney's leadership in the Black Power movement prepared him to develop a historical materialist understanding of racism in Guyana, making significant contributions to socialism from-below. Rodney demonstrated that changes in the conditions of capitalism, brought by the abolition of slavery and the decline of sugar exports from the Caribbean, acted as a breeding ground for the reproduction of racism in Guyana. He thereby identified racism under capitalism as an ideological tool of the bourgeoisie, serving to divide the working class. At the same time, his analysis of Guyanese history demonstrated how class struggle could overcome racism by uniting Indian and African workers, enabling them to recognise their shared interests in opposing capital.

The third process, Rodney's decision to build a revolutionary party as a means to unite a racially divided working class, figured among his major contributions to Marxism. Chapter 7 detailed how Rodney helped transform the WPA from a pressure group into a full-time organisation that played a pivotal role in uniting African and Indian workers during the 1979 rebellion. It represented the culmination of his emphasis on the importance of working-class self-activity combined with his thorough analysis of race and class in Guyana. Moreover, Rodney considers the party as a solution to address the pitfalls of spontaneous struggle and uneven consciousness that he discussed in relation to the struggles of Tanzanian and Guyanese workers, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7. He argued that while spontaneous struggles might reflect a growth in working class consciousness, they also often led to compromises with the

state. He believed that spontaneity could be organised beyond reformism through a disciplined political party composed of trained cadres recruited from and rooted among the workers.

At the same, this thesis found Rodney's shift to socialism from-below was often inconsistent. Throughout his life, Rodney continued to regard regimes like the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba as genuinely socialist, even though they denied workers democratic control, as mentioned in Chapter 6. He also viewed peasant-based guerrilla warfare as a viable path to socialism, highlighting his limitations in formulating socialism independent of the prevailing models during the Cold War.

Chapter 8 shows that Rodney and the WPA's strategy of armed struggle and anti-dictatorial alliances often substituted their actions for the self-activity of the working masses. This deviation from their commitment to socialism from-below was due to the WPA's isolation from the working class and mass movements, pressured by PNC onslaughts and armed forces. Rather than making a tactical retreat, Rodney and some WPA members called for increased militancy. Despite lacking mass support, they engaged in an armed conspiracy, taking significant risks to acquire weapons and equipment, while Rodney attempted to sow division within a largely united army. Conversely, in building anti-dictatorial alliances, Rodney and the WPA fell into opportunism. Their unrealistic proposal for a government of national unity revealed their shortcomings in forming a working relationship with the PPP. This failure to build unity kept the WPA away from the thousands of workers who followed Cheddi Jagan. More critically, the WPA was willing to sacrifice its stance on working class control of the economy for a policy of class collaboration that would appease local businessmen and American imperialism through a bourgeois government.

Despite these flaws, Rodney's emergence as an anti-dictatorial leader during the 1979 rebellion marked the pinnacle of his political transformation between 1968 and 1980. The findings from this thesis show that Rodney had a non-dogmatic application of Marxism to the

realities of the Global South that took him closer to the working class, the only class capable of achieving socialism from-below.

Reflections on Rodney's legacy from Guyana to Black Lives Matter and Palestine

In an interview in 1976, the year he became a WPA activist, Walter Rodney spoke with striking candour about the immense human cost of waging a battle for a socialist future. His remarks showed a profound awareness and sensitivity to the harsh realities of such a fight:

> Some of our finest comrades will fall, have fallen, in struggle, and we don't set about to get the best of our workers and revolutionaries killed just so that we can write poetry to celebrate them subsequently. When they are lost, they are lost; it's an irreparable loss and may in fact qualitatively affect the development of struggle in another phase (Rodney, 1976, pp. 125–126).

Spoken four years before his untimely demise, Rodney could not have known he was foreshadowing his own fate and that of the class struggle in Guyana. His death marked an irreparable loss, one that continued to haunt his comrades for decades. This loss was especially evident in the direction the WPA took in the years following his death. The WPA's shift away from revolutionary politics tragically demonstrated the need for an effective revolutionary party.

Between Rodney's murder in June 1980 and 1984, the WPA continued its struggle as an underground organisation. Despite Burnham's repression, it managed to become a national party, establishing branches across the country and implementing ideological training through party classes. The WPA developed a stronger cadre organisation than it had during Rodney's lifetime, to the point that many who became WPA leaders in the 1980s believed it only truly became a party after Rodney's death (Rasik, 2022; Mohamed, 2024). However, this phase of consolidation did not last long. Roopnaraine (2010) notes: "At its members' conference in April 1984, the WPA formally abandoned the Leninist form of organisation, dismantled the clandestine security units, and opted for the electoral path and the building of a mass party"

(Roopnaraine, 2010, p. 21). The entire WPA now envisioned its future as a reformist party that distanced itself from any revolutionary overthrow.

Two significant events reinforced the WPA's shift towards a reformist approach. First the American invasion of Grenada in October 1983 demoralised the WPA and the wider Caribbean left. The WPA had regarded the New Jewel Movement (NJM), which overthrew Gairy's dictatorship in 1979, as a genuine Marxist-Leninist organisation, despite its authoritarian tendencies (Roopnaraine, 2010). Its defeat led WPA leader Roopnaraine to conclude: "The experience of Grenada has delegitimised vanguardism and instructs that it is more imperative than ever to build alliances across differences" (Roopnaraine, 2010, p. 33). Consequently, the WPA began to identify as a "Rodneyite" rather than a Marxist-Leninist party, focusing on building a broad-based government in collaboration with the PPP and other parties (Kwayana, 2024). However, they broke away from Rodney's Marxist grassroots organising among the working people. A telling symbol of this rupture was perhaps the dismantling of the WPA brigade, the *Dayclean* distribution unit that Rodney had established with Desmond Alli (Interview with Alli, 2022).

The second event was the death of Burnham in 1985, which gave the WPA hope for an electoral breakthrough that year. Burnham's successor, Desmond Hoyte, introduced reforms that seemed to signal a departure from the dictator's tactic for rigging elections by abolishing overseas votes and votes by proxy (Premdas, 1992; Gopaul, 1997; Hinds, 2010). However, the 1985 elections still turned out as fraudulent as earlier ones, resulting in a larger majority for the PNC than in 1980. The WPA, joined with the PPP and others to form the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy, aiming to press the PNC towards more democratic governance.

Between 1986 and 1992, the Coalition worked to pressure the PNC to abandon its authoritarianism, lobbying overseas and drawing the attention of the United States with some success. In 1990, the Bush administration called for electoral reform after the Hoyte

government capitulated to the IMF's structural adjustment programme, known as the Economic Recovery Programme, which further dismantled Burnham's nationalisation policies (Premdas, 1992; Gopaul, 1997; Hinds, 2010). By 1992, under growing international pressure, the Hoyte government had implemented enough reforms to pave the way for Guyana's first free and fair elections. An independent observation commission, headed by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, was invited to the country to monitor the elections alongside the Commonwealth Secretariat (Premdas, 1992; Gopaul, 1997; Hinds, 2010).

The turn towards an electoral strategy rendered the WPA powerless in challenging racial divisions. In Guyana's first-ever democratic elections, the WPA performed much worse than expected, polling at less than 2 per cent and gaining only two seats in parliament (WPA, 1996; Ogunseye, 2022). "In 1992, we felt that we were going to do significantly well and gain a number of seats, but the racial polarisation wiped us out. It shocked us and everybody else that WPA did so poorly", recalled Ogunseye (2022). Far from promoting the anti-racist politics of the WPA, election campaigns galvanised existing racial divisions as leaders of the much larger PNC and PPP continued mobilising Africans and Indians against each other to win votes. Following the PPP's victories in Guyana's first free elections in 1992 and 1997, African PNC supporters attacked Indians, ransacked polling stations, and clashed with the police (Premdas, 1999; Andaiye, 2020).

Rodney's leadership in the 1970s showed that the real strength of the WPA as a political party lay not in the ballot box but in the streets and workplaces. It enjoyed support among working people as long as it led to collective action in these arenas. By contrast, electoral campaigns relied on the passive support of atomised voters shaped by centuries of racial oppression. The civil rebellion of 1979 demonstrated that resistance against the capitalist state requires more than just a positive message and slogans for unity, democracy, and socialism. It demanded a centralised yet democratic organisation, deeply rooted in the working class, that is

committed to supporting their creative struggle towards a new economic system. It required a revolutionary party that could harness their spontaneous struggles and encourage Africans and Indians to overcome their racial prejudices by uniting in strikes and protests. Although the WPA, as a newly formed political party in 1979, lacked the experience and numbers to shape events, later episodes of Guyana's class struggle would still call for the intervention of an organisation capable of advancing the militant cause.

In 1989, only nine years after Rodney's death, Guyana would experience a much larger strike wave than in 1979, which increased local pressures for the PNC to implement electoral reforms (Gopaul, 1997). The anti-budget strike of 1989 translated into a multiracial movement against the PNC's capitulation to the conditions of the IMF's structural adjustment programme, which was reflected in its budget announcement of a currency devaluation, causing inflation without pay rises. For seven weeks, bauxite and sugar workers sustained a strike that brought the economy to a standstill. Although the predominantly bauxite worker-led strike had the potential to topple the government, it ended in defeat largely because the PPP and GAWU opportunistically called it off, wanting a return to order in light of their electoral plans (Gopaul, 1997; Hinds, 1999). The WPA, which had by then dismantled the Leninist organisation it had built in the early 1980s, no longer had an active network of political-trained activists that could influence the struggle in any significant way.

In contrast, the financial burdens associated turn of the WPA into an electoral machine in preparation for the 1992 elections further weakened the party. It had to pause the publishing of *Dayclean*, sell its headquarters, and reduce its organisational capacity. A WPA document noted in 1996:

> There was a general lapse in party organisational activity for some time after 1992, due in part to decisions the party leadership was forced to make as a result of the large election debt and the shortage of funds needed to maintain the organisational machinery built up for the 1992 general elections (WPA, 1996, p. 1).

The electoral defeat also exposed the flaws in the WPA's plan for a government of national unity with the PPP. Once in power, Cheddi Jagan's PPP did not honour its power-sharing commitments, choosing instead to govern as an Indian-majority party. As noted by the scholar Premdas, the PPP "failed to put in place an inclusive cross-party government and engaged in dilatory tactics about constitutional reform" neglecting racial unity (Premdas, 1999, p. 135). Under subsequent corrupt PPP administrations, Guyana experienced deadly racial violence between 2002 and 2008, reminiscent of the 1960s (Andaiye, 2020).

In 2015, the WPA joined the PNC-APNU coalition (A Partnership for National Unity), which won the election that year. Rodney's former comrades, including Roopnaraine, now worked with the party responsible for his assassination, claiming it had reformed and was committed to national unity. However, there was no substantial evidence to support this. The PNC was led by David Granger, a former Burnham loyalist and army commander at the time of Rodney's death. The coalition enjoyed an unpopular reign, marred with corruption and scandal, over a racially divided country. It lasted only five years before giving way to another PPP government in 2020. Today, the WPA exists as a shadow of its former self with no influence. As Andaiye (2020 p. 94) observed, in the 2000s, it had become "a much smaller and weaker force, carrying out far less work in communities than before, [and] was seen as purely pro-African". It's in this tragic way that the experience of the WPA after Walter Rodney's death demonstrates the critical need for a revolutionary party that could build solidary among the working class.

Marxism, race and class in the age of Black Lives Matter

Alongside the idea of a revolutionary party, Rodney's insights into combating racial division in Guyana continue to resonate. They offer valuable perspectives not only for his homeland but also for understanding contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter. A major part of Rodney's writing and activism in Guyana insists upon the centrality of class

struggle for fighting racial division to unite wage-labour against capital. By fighting against the ruling class in the streets and the workplaces, African and Indian workers could realise their common interest and overcome their prejudices. Yet, as a Marxist, Rodney did not overlook racial differences, nor did he assume that racial unity would occur automatically. Instead, he believed that the class struggle would create favourable conditions for advancing an anti-racist argument. This was precisely one of the central purposes of the WPA as a political party, with a paper, full-time workers, and activist members. It is the conviction of this thesis that the lessons Rodney drew on, the real possibilities for achieving racial unity in Guyana, are equally relevant to societies facing divisions between black, brown, Asian, and white workers.

However, it remained unclear whether Rodney believed in this possibility himself. Rodney at times saw the Western working class as an aristocracy of labour reduced to impotency because it had been bought off by the super-profits its ruling class extracted from imperialism (Rodney, 1971, 2001, 2012). Yet, as Chapter 4 indicated, he was not always dismissive towards them. In 1969, Rodney had hopes that the Vietnam War and the Black Power movement could create the condition that would awaken white workers to join ranks with their black comrades (Rodney, no date). Chapter 7 mentioned that he went as far as to raise the question when he visited the United States in 1975 as to whether Black Marxists could see their future in a multiracial organisation (Rodney, 1975). However, he did not have a conclusive answer to that question, nor did he stay in the United States long enough to develop that answer. As the meticulous thinker he was, he likely would have subjected American society to a historical materialist analysis before drawing conclusions. In this respect, W E B Du Bois (1935) had already achieved something similar by analysing the Reconstruction period post-emancipation, in which he identified the potential for a revolutionary struggle that could unite blacks and poor whites (Taylor, 2008).

Although the possibilities for racial unity in the United States existed during Rodney's time, they were not as apparent as they are today. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of 2020, which erupted following the murder of George Floyd by the police, marked a turning point in this regard. In the United States, between 15 and 26 million people across 2,500 towns and cities participated in what might have been the largest movement in American history (Buchanan, Bui and Patel, 2020). It was the most profound example of interracial solidarity. Dana Fisher of the Brookings Institution noted that 54 per cent of the protesters in cities like New York, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C., were white people (Fischer, 2020). Moreover, the Black Lives Matter movement had significant international repercussions, with protests held in countries such as France, New Zealand, and Kenya. Britain, like the United States, witnessed its largest-ever anti-racist mobilisation, with demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of participants across 260 cities between June and July of 2020 (Sayed, 2022; Lebron, 2023). The BLM movement carried with it the real prospect for a multiracial movement that united black and white workers against racism and capitalism.

Rodney's Marxism is of vital importance in the wake of setbacks faced by Black Lives Matter because it introduces a dimension largely absent from the movement. His writings, particularly in praise of the multiracial strike in Guyana in 1979 discussed in Chapter 7, emphasise that an anti-racist strategy should be grounded in the strategic power of the working class to mount a successful challenge to the state. Rodney called for merging and mutually strengthening the fight against racism with the broader struggle of the working class against poverty and exploitation (Rodney, 1981). The Juneteenth 2020 longshoremen strike came remarkably close to providing this sharper focus to Black Lives Matter, as 1,000 dockworkers launched an eight-hour strike that turned into a rally in Oakland, where Angela Davis spoke (Kern, 2020). Nevertheless, it suggested an emerging potential: that the anti-racist struggle, when combined with more generalised strike action, could challenge the entire system.

Palestinian liberation, the working class, and internationalism

Rodney's emphasis on the power of the working class is particularly relevant to the Palestinian liberation struggle and the broader fight against imperialism in the Middle East and Africa. His experiences in Jamaica, Tanzania, and Guyana during the 1970s demonstrated his engagement with the movements and challenges faced by those living in the peripheral regions of capitalism. They advanced the idea that the working class in the Global South, although relatively small, could lead the struggle against imperialism due to its strategic position at the point of production, which provides it with more power than any other group (Rodney, 1976, 1981). Rodney (1978) particularly praised the ability of Tanzanian workers to initiate industrial disputes independently of their trade unions.

Recent scholarship by Anne Alexander (2022) has similarly explored this insight while examining the revival of the workers' movement through self-organisation during the Arab Spring throughout the 2010s. With reference to the movements in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010, and Sudan and Algeria in 2019, she argued:

> The intervention of organised workers also made a significant difference to the evolution of the revolutionary crisis itself, with high points of workers' struggle often coinciding with the opening of fractures in the state apparatus, such as the wave of strikes which erupted just before the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak in 2011 (Alexander, 2022, p. 237).

In another article, Alexander argues that the working class in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in Egypt, holds the key to the liberation of Palestine (Alexander, 2022). While acknowledging the importance of the struggle within historic Palestine, she contends that the small size of the Palestinian population limits its capacity to resist Israeli settler colonialism. In contrast, the Egyptian working class possesses much greater social weight and occupies a strategic position at the Suez Canal and Port Said. This positioning gives it the potential to disrupt both the Israeli and global economies by rising against its own dictators and forging stronger solidarity ties with Palestinians in the process (Alexander, 2022).

Alexander's analysis aligns well with Rodney's internationalist statement that "International solidarity grows out of struggle in different localities" (Rodney, 1971, p. 6). However, just as the struggle against racism requires constant effort, internationalism—though rooted in grassroots struggles uniting workers and the oppressed—must be continually fought for. Chapter 5 highlights how Rodney urged his Tanzanian comrades not to impose conditions on their support for Palestinian liberation. He understood hijacking as a weapon of the weak to reinstate the demand for a one-state solution, ignored by the West and opposed by Israel. Rodney (1970b) indeed supported the idea that Palestinian liberation could be realised with the advent of a democratic and secular state for all Arabs, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, based on the principles of socialism and equality. His stance still stands in direct opposition to most nation-states and even large sections of the political left today.

However, Rodney's opposition to a two-state solution put him on common ground with other intellectuals from the Global South, such as Palestinian thinker Edward Said and Pakistani socialist Eqbal Ahmed (Said, 1978; Barsamian, 2000). He also found alignment with one of the founders of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, Omar Barghouti, who stated, "Accepting the colonial settlers as equal citizens and full partners in building and developing a new shared society, free from all colonial subjugation and discrimination, as called for in the democratic state model, is the most magnanimous offer any indigenous population, oppressed for decades, can present to its oppressors" (Barghouti, 2009).

The genocidal war in Palestine has epitomised three decades of undermining the Oslo Agreement of 1992, making the emergence of a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one very unlikely (Hilāl, 2021). Rodney (1970a) opposed the two-state solution on the grounds that it avoided confronting the illegal existence of the Israeli settler state, which was based on the ethnic cleansing of 850,000 Palestinians in 1948. Moreover, it would legitimise the existence

of a racist colonial-settler state, whose military, funded by the United States and Western imperialist nations, poses a constant threat to Palestinians and the people of the Middle East.

Rodney's pro-Palestinian stance remains one of the most radical expressions of internationalism that stemmed from the era of national liberation struggles against imperialism in the Global South during the 1970s. It serves as a consistent reminder of the need for continued and stronger internationalism in support of Palestinian liberation today.

Future trajectory for research and impact

There are several avenues of research on Rodney and his engagement with socialism that warrant attention from contemporary scholars. First, a closer analysis of Rodney's final years in Guyana should be connected to a fuller account of what happened to the WPA after his death. While there have been insightful articles on the WPA's history, these are often written by former members of the organisation (Kwayana, 1988; Westmaas, 2004; Roopnaraine, 2012; Hinds, 2015). A comprehensive outsider account of the WPA's history is needed to draw lessons from its successes and failures. This is especially important as Guyanese historiography continues to produce biographies of leaders from the PPP and the PNC, while often neglecting those who, for a time, proposed creative solutions to end the racial divide that has plagued Guyanese history (Seecharan, 2023; Lewis, 2024). Second, although this thesis addressed Rodney's leap out of Black Power, it has not provided an exhaustive account. More empirical research based on archival material and interviews is needed to uncover Rodney's travels to the United States, and his connections with the African American diaspora in the context of ideological and tactical divisions within the Black Power movement.

Another suggestion addresses the field of geography, particularly regarding life geographies. While this thesis has focused on examining Rodney's place within the Marxist tradition, it also suggests that geographers should heed Camilla Hawthorne's call for a broader field of Black geographies. Hawthorne (2019) urges scholars "to centre those subjects, voices,

and experiences that have been systematically excluded from mainstream spaces of geographical inquiry", prompting us to consider how understandings of space, place, and power are shaped by issues of blackness and racism. Several works have addressed this need (Tyner, 2006; Sharp, 2019; Hodder, 2016; Murrey, 2018). Yet there remains a significant gap in uncovering and revisiting figures from the African diaspora and the Global South who engaged with Marxism both on the African continent and beyond (Al-Bulushi, 2024). Connecting Africa and its diaspora has not always been straightforward.

Patricia Daley and Amber Murrey (2022), in a recent article, highlight how imperialism has sustained a divide between Black geographies—a field stemming from the United States—and African geographies. This division has led to the marginalisation of Africa, often perceived as a space devoid of radical, anti-racist traditions of thought. They rightly advocate for a richer dialogue between these geographies, celebrating the intellectual traditions of scholars and activists who have shown a deep commitment to addressing colonialism, imperialism, and their legacies both on the continent and in the diaspora. Rodney's role in this celebration is significant, as he represents what C L R James described as the "nexus between Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States" uniting the oppressed across these geographies in their struggle against imperialism (James, 1980, p. 28). Daley and Murrey acknowledged Rodney's importance in their call for defiant scholarship, which draws upon his notion of the "guerrilla intellectual" (Rodney, 1990). Rodney, as the authors paraphrased, argued that "intellectuals need to work to transform the academy within their own 'orbit'—not to gain legitimacy but 'to occupy the terrain' in order to 'free the whole structure'" (Daley and Murrey-Ndewa, 2022, p. 160).

This mission is crucial for those seeking to challenge the Eurocentric biases that pervade higher education. Yet, when considering Rodney's life and work, it is essential to remember that his greatest impact stood outside the confines of academia. Rodney's true

contribution lay in his commitment to leaving the ivory tower to engage directly with the struggles of the working masses—the very people who create the histories and geographies that academics write about. Rodney articulated this commitment during his Black Power activism in Jamaica in 1968 against his soul-selling westernised colleagues at the UWI, where he declared, "The black intellectual, the black academic, must attach himself to the activity of the black masses" (Rodney, 2019). He meant here direct participation in the movement. This thesis ultimately suggests to radical academics that embracing the spirit of Rodney's recommendation could pave the way for more engaged, transformative scholarship that not only analyses the world, but works to change it.

A final word concerns the impact of this thesis. I intend to turn it into a monograph in the hope that it will inform a generation of thinkers and activists, especially those of colour, to examine the majority of Rodney's intellectual and activist contributions from the Global South. I will continue to support the efforts of the Walter Rodney Foundation to promote his legacy. The foundation hosts an annual symposium linking Rodney to contemporary social issues. It has also republished new editions of his major works, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (2019) and *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (2012), while publishing his Marxist writings on the Russian Revolution and essays (Rodney, 2018, 2022). I certainly intend to do my fair share by participating in podcasts and organising workshops and panels, among other activities. However, I remain fully aware that the real impact of my research will not ultimately be determined by my efforts. The significance of Rodney's politics will grow in proportion to the new radical working-class movements that emerge today.

A simple anecdote illustrates this. A year before Rodney convinced future WPA leader Roopnaraine to give up his lectureship at Cornell University and return to Guyana, Roopnaraine had travelled to Portugal amidst the Carnation Revolution. The then-young Indo-Guyanese lecturer described what he saw:

> [I] had been on the streets of Lisbon during the time of the Portuguese Revolution in 1974… In the summer of that year, they had the most progressive government in Portugal.…The book that was in all the bookshops in Lisbon was the Portuguese translation of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. It was the period when they were talking about the Africanization of the Revolution (Roopnaraine, quoted in Chung, 2012, p. 115).

That Rodney's book benefited from a Portuguese translation just two years after its original publication and gained significant prominence in Lisbon was no coincidence (Boukari-Yabara, 2010b). The Portuguese Revolution against the fascist dictatorship owed much to the successful anti-colonial wars led by guerrilla movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau from the early 1960s onwards. These wars severely weakened the Portuguese empire, paving the way for the military coup against Salazar's successor and, more importantly, the widespread mass protests and radical political change (Varela and Louçã, 2021). It was on this basis that the Portuguese Revolution in the metropole could acquire a dynamic of its own as the most powerful revolutionary process in Europe since the Second World War. Raquel Varela explains, "During those 19 months, hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike, hundreds of workplaces were occupied, sometimes for months, and perhaps almost 3 million people took part in demonstrations, occupations, and commissions" (Varela, 2019, p. 1).

The Portuguese people were changing the world and, in the process, changing themselves. They had come to detest fascism, colonialism, and all forms of oppression, and naturally, they sought to learn from those who spoke against them, such as Rodney. The multiracial Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 similarly inspired those who supported them. Among the hundreds of thousands of young people protesting from Minneapolis to New York City, London to Bristol, many showed a desire to uncover the voices of thinkers who stood up to imperialism, such as Frantz Fanon and Angela Davis, and, of course, Rodney. My thesis responds to this yearning for historical insight and radical thought. It is through movements like these that the lessons of Rodney's unwavering commitment to Marxism will continue to inspire and shape the struggles for justice and equality.

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Figures

Figure 1. Archival collections and sites

United States:

- **The Walter Rodney Papers and Collection, Atlanta Clark University:** Documents such as Rodney's correspondence, his CV, employment offers, teaching materials, notes, photographs, drafts of his published and unpublished writings, and pamphlets. It also includes documents related to movements and organisations.
- **The United States National Archives (USNA), Washington D.C.:** Files general records of the U.S. State Department. Digital telegrams on Rodney from the U.S. Embassy in Guyana. Political files on subversion in Jamaica. CIA report discussing Rodney in the Papers of Russell Holmes, a CIA archivist.
- **The Hilltop, Howard University, Washington D.C.:** Digital archive articles concerning Rodney.
- **Personal archives of former WPA leader and scholar Dr Nigel Westmaas**: Copies of WPA newssheet *Dayclean* (1979-80), and additional WPA documents.

UK:

- **London Metropolitan Archives (LMA)**: Collection includes a range of flyers, brochures, and pamphlets from the WPA and WPA Support Group UK, correspondence, documents, and newspaper articles on Rodney's final year in Guyana.
- **British Library, London**: Mimeographs Tanzanian English-speaking newspapers, *The Nationalist* and *The Standard* (1967-72).
- **Senate House Library, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICOMM) Special Collections, London**: Pamphlets and documents concerning Rodney or the WPA.
- **Personal archive of Anne Braithwaite of the WPA Support Group, London**: Pamphlets, documents, newspapers, and magazines concerning the WPA, PPP, and politics in Guyana.

Guyana:

- **Catholic Standard Office, Georgetown**: Editions of the *Catholic Standard* newspaper (1978-80).

Tanzania:

- **East Africana Collection, University of Dar es Salaam**: Tanzanian English-speaking newspapers, *The Nationalist* and *The Standard* (1967-72), student magazines *Cheche* and *Maji Maji*, conference reports, research documents, and Rodney's writings.

Figure 2. Interviews table

Full name	Location of interview	Main organisation	Occupation covered in this thesis	Relevant period & location in Rodney's life
Howard Fuller	Online	ALSC	Founder & leader	Tanzania, 1969-1974
Eric Huntley	London, United Kingdom	Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications	Friend and publisher	Guyana, 1974-1980
Horace Campbell	Email Correspondence	N/A	Friend of Walter Rodney	Guyana, 1974-1980
John Gimlette	London	N/A	Travel writer	Guyana, 1974-1980
Patricia Rodney	Atlanta	N/A	Wife of Walter Rodney, mother, activist & nurse	All locations, 1942-1980
Richard Small	Online	N/A	Jamaican student activist in London	Jamaica & London, 1960-1966
Rupert Lewis	Online	N/A	Author	All locations, 1942-1980
Nanda Gopaul	Georgetown, Guyana	NAACIE	Trade Union General Secretary with no political party association but friendly to WPA	Guyana, 1974-1980
Hamilton Green	Georgetown, Guyana	PNC	High ranking politician, Head of several ministries, including labour, & Burnham's Cousin	Guyana, 1974-1980
Norman McLean	Georgetown, Guyana	PNC	Major General of the Guyana Defence Force & Head of the joint (armed) services	Guyana, 1974-1980
Gail Teixeira	Georgetown, Guyana	PPP	Active and Personal Secretary to Cheddi Jagan	Guyana, 1974-1980
Ralph Ramkarran	Georgetown, Guyana	PPP	Central Committee (leadership)	Guyana, 1974-1980
Walter Bgoya	Dar es Salam, Tanzania	Tanzania Publishing House	Friend and publisher	Tanzania, 1966-67 & 1969-74

Frederick Kaijage	Dar es Salam, Tanzania	UDSM	Tanzania student of Rodney	Guyana, 1974-1980
Majorie Mbilinyi	Dar es Salam, Tanzania	UDSM	Academic colleague of Walter Rodney	Tanzania, 1966-67 & 1969-74
Ned Alpers	Dar es Salam, Tanzania	UDSM	Colleague & friend of Walter Rodney	Tanzania, 1966-67 & 1969-74
Herbert Wulf	Online	University of Hamburg	Acquaintance	Hamburg, 1980
Peter Lock	Online	University of Hamburg	Acquaintance	Hamburg, 1980
Ewart Thomas	Online	University of Michigan	Childhood friend	United States, 1972
Issa Shijvi	Dar es Salam, Tanzania	USARF	Student	Tanzania, 1966-67 & 1969-74
Ali Majeed	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Mineworker & trade unionist	Guyana, 1974-1980
Anonymous	Online	WPA	N/A	Guyana, 1974-1980
Clive Thomas	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Executive Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
David Hinds	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Desmond Alli	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	WPA brigade member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Eusi Kwayana	Atlanta, United States	WPA	Executive Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Maurice Odle	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Executive Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Stanley Humphrey	Linden, Guyana	WPA	Mineworker & trade unionist	Guyana, 1974-1980
Jocelyn Dow	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA affiliated	Businesswoman & activist	Guyana, 1974-1980

Tacuma Ogunseye	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Executive Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Vanda Rasik	Georgetown, Guyana	WPA	Member	Guyana, 1974-1980
Wazir Mohamed	Online	WPA	Mineworker & trade unionist	Guyana, 1974-1980