

The London School of Economics and Political Science

‘What we put in black and white’: George Padmore and the practice of anti-imperial politics

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis offers a new interpretation of the life and importance of George Padmore (1903-1959). Padmore was one of the most well-known ‘black communists’ in the 1930s. He became a major nexus for anti-colonial resistance in London between 1935-1957 and one of the foremost political thinkers behind the pan-African movement. Through an analysis of his writing and his networks this thesis argues that Padmore engaged in a permanent state of political activity, guided by a practice of ‘pragmatic anti-imperialism.’ By tracing his journalism in West African and West Indian colonies, it shows that Padmore’s influence was far more extensive than previously imagined. This study begins from the hypothesis that the pragmatism of Padmore’s politics can only be demonstrated by examining his whole life, and thus takes the form of a biography. Taking Padmore’s pragmatism as a starting point, the forms in which he was understood and labeled by others are fundamental to this study since they demonstrate the extent to which Padmore was willing to compromise and ‘play the game’ of imperial politics, and they show the boundaries of the field in which he operated. Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of race and non-violent resistance in anti-imperial politics in the first half of the twentieth century by focusing upon the role of a mobile, life-long activist from the diaspora who attacked the moral basis of late colonial rule from within.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
List of Figures	6
List of Abbreviations	7
Acknowledgements	8
A Note on Terminology	11
Introduction	13
Fitting the pieces together	
Chapter One	35
From Trinidad to the United States, 1903-1927	
Chapter Two	65
An Education: Pragmatism, betrayal, and friendship, 1929-1934	
Chapter Three	98
The most completely political Negro: Marxism, Pan-Africanism, and Padmore's re-establishment, 1935-1939	
Chapter Four	129
'The long, long night is over': A War of Opportunity?	
Chapter Five	158
'Playing the Russian Game': George Padmore and the labeling of African resistance as Soviet Propaganda, 1946-50	
Chapter Six	185
'The Chattering Negroes': the demands of leadership and the politics of friendship in the era of Padmore the 'outsider,' 1950-1956	
Chapter Seven	218
Ghana, Death, and the Afterlife, 1957-1959	
Conclusion	251
Appendix One: Newspaper and Journal articles by George Padmore	266
Bibliography	314

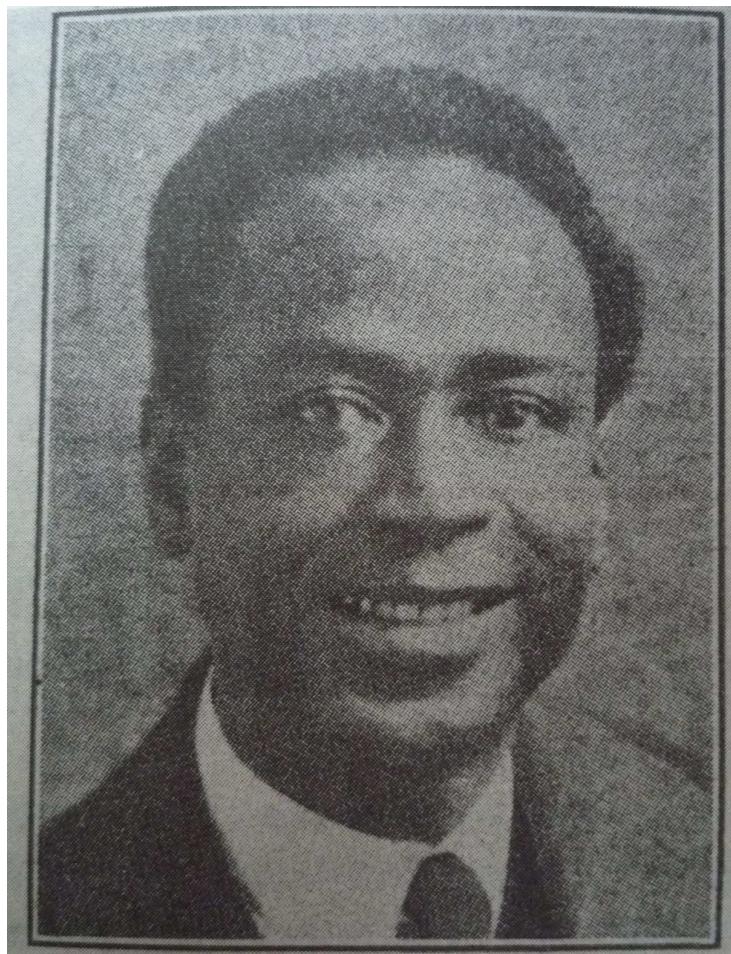


Figure 1: Headshot of George Padmore, circa 1942.
© Independent Labour Publications.

List of Figures

Figure 1: Headshot of George Padmore. <i>New Leader</i> , 27 June 1942. © Independent Labour Publications	5
Figure 2: Marriage of George Padmore and Julia Semper From George Padmore Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. Volume II.	49
Figure 3: Image used in many issues of the <i>Negro Worker</i> . From <i>Negro Worker</i> , vol 5, no. 6-7 (June-July 1933). © British Library Board Mic.A.17483	73
Figure 4: Padmore and Nkrumah in Ghana, date unknown. From George Padmore Research Library, Accra, Ghana. George Padmore Photo Album.	205
Figure 5: Padmore (standing, centre) at CPP rally in Togoland, date unknown. From George Padmore Research Library, Accra, Ghana. George Padmore Photo Album.	222
Figure 6: Dorothy Padmore and Ghana delegation with Padmore's ashes in London, 28 September 1959. From George Padmore Research Library, Accra, Ghana. George Padmore Photo Album.	236
Figure 7: Burial ceremony at Christiansborg Castle, Accra From George Padmore Research Library, Accra, Ghana. George Padmore Photo Album.	241

List of Abbreviations

AAPC	All-African People's Congress
ABB	African Blood Brotherhood
CIAS	Conference of Independent African States
CPP	Convention People's Party
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
IASB	International African Service Bureau
IAFA	International African Friends of Abyssinia
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ITUCNW	International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers
NMM	National Minority Movement
NWA	Negro Welfare Association
LAI	League Against Imperialism
LCP	League of Coloured Peoples

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A Note on Terminology

George Padmore was born in the British colony of Trinidad and, this thesis argues, was notorious as a political intellectual whose fundamental ideology was ‘anti-imperialism.’ His involvement with the movement known as Pan-Africanism, or with what is more recently called ‘black liberationist’ politics, is also a valuable way of describing his politics. Thus a brief word on the use of some of these terms in this thesis is necessary.

In their own note on terminology, Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose have provided a useful overview of the meaning of terms such as ‘empire,’ ‘imperialism,’ and ‘colonialism.’ They conclude that ‘at its heart, empire is about power;’ in which networks of trade, knowledge, migration and influence are created – often through force and domination.¹ Imperialism is ‘the process of empire building.’ Because imperialism is about influence, networks and power, it is possible that imperialism can exist without formal colonies; however, colonialism does not exist without imperialism.

The difference between colonialism and imperialism can be most usefully explained in this thesis with relation to George Padmore’s position regarding ‘coloured’ peoples. In this thesis ‘coloured’ will be used, as it was during Padmore’s lifetime, to refer to all peoples who were not of European extraction. Those who were not ‘white.’ The term ‘black’ is employed in this thesis as the current predominant term used to represent the abstract idea of a particular community of peoples who identify with the history or category of the ‘Negro,’ but also as Gates argues, is used to ‘signif[y] the difference between cultures and their possession of power.’² George Padmore argued, along with others at the time, that all black peoples were subjugated under a system of power relations. His ‘anti-imperialism’ thus articulated black liberation for all peoples of colour, whether living under formal colonial rule or not. His ‘anti-colonialism’ specifically referred to the demand for political independence from colonial governance. Padmore fought for the end of European colonial possession, but his ideology never stopped there. He envisioned an end to all forms of imperialism, since for him

¹ Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, 6.

² Gates, ‘Writing “Race” and the difference it makes,’ 6. See Stephens, “What is this *Black* in Black Diaspora?” for a useful analysis of some of the issues surrounding the use of this term. Stephens emphasizes Fanon’s idea of the ‘collective unconscious’ and of the colonial aspect of blackness.

imperialism was fundamentally exploitative. He was, therefore, both an anti-colonialist *and* an anti-imperialist.

‘Pan-Africanism’ refers historically to a conscious movement that began at the end of the nineteenth century among men and women of African descent and has embraced at particular times both abstract ideas of the cultural and ‘racial’ unity of all peoples of African descent, as well as a thrust towards the political unification of the African continent. This thesis capitalizes the term Pan-Africanism when referring to a specific movement (e.g. the Pan-Africanism of Garveyism, Du Bois, or the Pan-African Congresses), but uses the lower-case ‘pan-Africanism’ when referring to the general ideology that embraced any or all of the ideas listed above.³

³ See Walters, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora*, 324. Walters agrees with St Clair Drake that ‘the capitalization makes reference to a specific movement and the lowercase use of the terms illustrate the general phenomenon in the generic sense of its reference to the political or cultural characteristic of a social event.’ The definition of pan-Africanism is contentious, and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Introduction

Fitting the pieces together

George Padmore was an unlikely presence in the Press Office of Britain's Ministry of Information in 1942. A notorious anti-colonial activist, Padmore had been under surveillance by London's Metropolitan Police Special Branch for almost a decade, and his comrades in the Independent Labour Party speculated that his job at the office was a way for the government to keep an eye on him.¹ In fact, he was working there as a correspondent for several African-American newspapers. On this particular morning in 1942, Padmore sat down at a desk, pulled out a piece of headed paper for *International African Opinion* (his by then defunct collaboration with C.L.R. James), and scribbled a message to the infamous shipping heiress Nancy Cunard. He was working on a book with Cunard designed to provide a colonial perspective on the 1941 Atlantic Charter, and he wished to discuss some edits since, he wrote, 'One has to be careful what we put in black and white. They live forever and may be turned against us if we play into the hands of the reactionaries.'²

Padmore's concern for 'what we put in black and white' has been chosen for the title of this research because it points, metaphorically and in real terms, to the three major themes of this thesis: Padmore's pragmatism; his production of the printed word (in particular, journalism); and race. These themes are all interlinked. It is the primary contention of this thesis that George Padmore's persistent ideological stand against imperialism and for black unity was, nevertheless, not dogmatic but pragmatic in expression. Padmore was a life long strategic activist, a tactician; he could be flexible in his alliances and in how he represented issues to particular audiences, while never compromising the overall goal of ending imperial exploitation. This strategic focus is central to understanding why both his writing and his activism played such a wide and critical role in African and Caribbean anti-colonialism. Indeed, his writing and his activism were never distinct spheres. His writing was intended, quite literally, as 'praxis': that is, the *application* of ideas into practice. This political praxis manifested itself in Padmore's books and his extensive journalism, and in particular his

¹ Marika Sherwood interview with Don Bateman, 30 January, 1990. Notes in possession of Marika Sherwood.

² George Padmore to Nancy Cunard, undated. Nancy Cunard Papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, box 17, folder 10 (hereafter cited as Cunard MSS/17/10).

consideration for audience. Finally, Padmore worked to break down racial prejudice by exposing the social, political, and economic contours of that prejudice. The tensions of race were central to his personal experience and his political praxis, but always in complex ways that defy a singular linear narrative. A study of the life of George Padmore contributes to our understanding of the contradictions and complexities of black intellectual thinkers.

The boy who would become known as George Padmore entered the world on the cusp of a new century, into a colonized and racist society in Trinidad. He changed his name from Malcolm Nurse to George Padmore in order to avoid trouble after he joined the Communist Party in the United States. His rapid rise within the Communist Third International, or Comintern, in the late 1920s, and equally swift departure by the end of 1933 has come to represent, for historians, the attraction and subsequent disillusionment with European communism for many black radicals.³ After re-locating to London by 1935,⁴ he became a central figure in an inclusive form of anti-colonial organizing which, despite his own ideological position, resulted in cooperation with a number of individuals and organizations no matter their country of origin or political colour.

His home became a centre for visitors from the colonies seeking advice and/or access to British sympathizers such that upon arrival, the first question on people's lips was often 'How can I get in touch with George Padmore?'.⁵ C.L.R. James's own political methodology was similar in the 1960s when he was living in Washington, D.C. From his home, James advised young activists, intellectuals, and radicals and they would then go out and apply their ideological training to their own activism.⁶ This was a methodology of intellectual activism from 'behind the scenes.' This aspect of Padmore's work shows that his activism involved teaching and enabling. His praxis

³ For the most referenced work on this, see Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa Before World War II*.

⁴ Padmore's life was unsettled between 1933 and 1935, when he moved between a number of different locations in Paris and London. However, by the end of 1935 he was settled in London. For evidence of his movements see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 88. See also Padmore's address is stated as Chambre 24, 54 Route de Chatillon, Malakoff, Seine, France in George Padmore to Otto Theis, 1 May 1935. Theis MSS/13, box 13 folder 291. Finally, Padmore's address is stated as 32 Russell Square, London in George Padmore to Alain Locke, 17 December 1936. Locke MSS/Howard.

⁵ Sam Morris, 'My Tribute to the Late George Padmore,' *Accra Evening News* (hereafter cited as AEN), 3 October 1959. Marika Sherwood argues that Padmore's kitchen table 'should have become a museum exhibit' on the basis of Wright's claim that 'almost all the present day leaders of Black Africa' sat around it. Sherwood, 'George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah,' 164.

⁶ Bogues, 'C.L.R. James, Pan-Africanism and the black radical tradition,' 494.

was, primarily, pedagogical. Underpinning the demands, tactics, and alliances between anti-imperial activists was a constantly evolving debate about strategy and ideology. The politics of the Left, the solidarity of people like Fenner Brockway, Ethel Mannin, and his partner Dorothy Pizer (Padmore),⁷ were also critical to his work and his politics. He remained at the centre of these debates until an invitation from his close ‘comrade’ Kwame Nkrumah prompted him to move to Ghana in 1957 and engage directly in the initiation of a programme of African socialism in a country that held immense importance for the liberation of the rest of the continent. He died in September 1959, just before the major period of decolonization in Africa.

These themes – the strategy of the colonized; the prominence of writing as a tool of anti-colonial resistance; and the internal tensions within identity found amongst the black middle class – form the core of this study of Padmore. These themes hold important meaning for our understanding of the international communist movement, the history of ‘the Black Atlantic,’ and the idea of ‘pan-Africanism,’ as well as the ways in which each of these histories impacted upon imperial history. The stories of black radicals, the left, and anti-colonialism between 1900-1960 have sparked new interest in the last two decades. So what does Padmore’s life have to tell us about larger historical processes? Why is a study of George Padmore so relevant to these histories?

Pan-Africanism and Padmore Scholarship

Research on George Padmore and Pan-African leaders has seen a resurgence in the last decade. However, there is still no comprehensive biography of Padmore that brings together archives from all of the regions where his work appeared. Existing studies are often polemical and can serve to mythologize Padmore by pinning a definitive label on him either as a Marxist,⁸ a Pan-Africanist,⁹ or a father of African/Caribbean independence.¹⁰ Some authors have reacted against this, re-casting Padmore’s actions as the betrayal of Pan-Africanism.¹¹ Several recent studies have moved beyond the heroizing discourse to critically engage with particular aspects of Padmore’s work;

7

⁸ Tunteng, ‘George Padmore’s Impact on Africa,’ 33-44.

⁹ Richard Wright, ‘Foreword’ to Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or communism*, ii.

¹⁰ Teelucksingh, ‘The Immortal Batsman,’ 1-21.

¹¹ Trewhela, ‘The Death of Albert Nzula and the Silence of George Padmore,’ 49-64.

however, none have been able to consider Padmore's life as a whole. Thus the analysis of Padmore often consists of separate pieces of a man that have not been fitted together in order to construct a comprehensive examination of his ideas or his influence. As this thesis argues, Padmore manipulated a number of labels, and if one label should be applied to Padmore, it is that of a pragmatist.

In 1967, just eight years after Padmore's death, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* was published by James R. Hooker, a professor of African history at Michigan State University.¹² Hooker's study is structured as a chronological biography. It does not contain a central argument, nor any critical analysis of the context, influence, and shape of Padmore's ideas. Because Hooker did not have access to Soviet archives, there are several gaps and sweeping generalizations for the years 1929-1934, when Padmore was working for the Communist International. Four recent studies have significantly opened up this period of Padmore's life for research.¹³ These have helpfully pointed to new archival sources for Padmore's life, and have all argued convincingly for considering Padmore's life and work within a collaborative community of individuals and activists at the time. However, because these studies of Padmore were produced as parts of studies of collective action, further detail and clarification is needed on Padmore specifically.

Hooker's biography does not examine the writing Padmore produced, nor its influences and impacts. Carol Polsgrove has recently taken up Padmore's writing and framed it, as in the above studies, within a community of writers Padmore worked with including C.L.R. James, Richard Wright, and Peter Abrahams.¹⁴ Her research has been vital in filling in archival gaps in Padmore's life after he left the Communist Party, and in considering the importance of Padmore as a writer. In 1974, Rukudzo Murapa, a PhD student at Northern Illinois University, produced a thesis entitled *George Padmore's*

¹² Hooker was believed to be in cooperation with the CIA, and several of Padmore's friends refused to participate in his research. Hooker's CIA involvement is discussed in Lawrence, 'Academics: An Overview,' 81.

¹³ An ongoing research project with the Abo Akademi in Finland has examined archives in Moscow that outline the networks Padmore built with Africa while working in the Communist International Holger Weiss, 'Kweku Bankole Awooner Renner, Anglophone West African intellectuals and the Comintern connection: a tentative outline – Part 2'; Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*; Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*.

¹⁴ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*.

*Role in the African Liberation Movement.*¹⁵ Murapa interviewed a number of Padmore's friends and colleagues, and analyzed both his monographs as well as his newspaper and journal articles from the USA, Britain and Ghana. Using these sources, he traced the development of Padmore's 'political and socialist ideas' to demonstrate Padmore's Pan-African ideology and its influence on Africa. This work is a good example of the focus on Padmore's legacy as encompassing his activities after 1945, after he began to work with Kwame Nkrumah. While the study provides an extensive analysis of Padmore's political writing in his major monographs and newspaper articles, it denies the breadth of Padmore's activity by focusing only on Ghana. It also relies on the reader to extrapolate that Padmore's influence on Nkrumah also impacted on Africa because of Nkrumah's influence on Africa. It is a contention of this thesis that Padmore, through his journalism, had a much more direct impact on Africa than simply via influence over other key figures.

More recently, Rodney Worrell has analyzed Padmore's political and social thought.¹⁶ His thesis goes a long way in deepening our knowledge of Padmore's ideas. Worrell draws several similar conclusions to my own. He emphasizes Padmore's pragmatism while with the Comintern, in his propaganda for the *Negro Worker* and in his other publications. He concludes that 'Padmore was more a revolutionary pragmatist than a revolutionary theoretician.'¹⁷ While Chapter Six of this thesis makes a similar argument for Padmore as a tactician of Pan-Africanism rather than a theoretician, Worrell's argument regarding Padmore's Marxism-Leninism is, in one important way, incorrect. Worrell takes Padmore's aversion towards 'high-brow' intellectualism to mean that Padmore became a Marxist primarily because of its usefulness as an ideology for liberating black peoples. Thus in Worrell's analysis Marxism was always simply a 'vehicle' for Padmore's overall objective of black liberation rather than 'for the sake of ideology or to fulfill some intellectual desire.'¹⁸ Yet Padmore maintained, even in *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, that Leninism was the best explanation of the way imperialism functioned within monopoly capitalism. Imperialism, Padmore also

¹⁵ Murapa, 'Padmore's Role in the African Liberation Movement,' PhD. diss.

¹⁶ Worrell, 'George Padmore: Social and Political Thought,' PhD. diss.

¹⁷ Ibid, 334.

¹⁸ Ibid, 335.

insisted, was the root of racism. For Padmore, Marxism-Leninism was more than just a vehicle for black liberation, it *explained* the root of the black condition.¹⁹

Discussion of Padmore's work and writing usually appears in literature on pan-Africanism. This literature is particularly interesting since Padmore himself was one of the first authors of Pan-African history. As Azinna Nwafor noted, Padmore was therefore also a 'participant as historian.'²⁰ Padmore's *Pan-Africanism or Communism* was one of the first major attempts to write a comprehensive history and strategy for the movement that came to be known as Pan-Africanism. Subsequent attempts to describe the ideology have been contentious, ranging from a description of the ideology as 'chaotic and irrational,'²¹ to recent attempts to restore pan-Africanism's place in an Afro-centric history.²² One of the major problems with the literature of Pan-Africanism and that of the next section on Empire, is that they often do not 'speak to' each other. Rather, they are separate discourses that do not consider their role in shaping each others narrative. This thesis aims to bring these literatures together.

George Padmore and the Empire

Barbara Bush's work on imperialism (1999) was an important interjection into British imperial historiography since it repositioned the interwar period (Padmore's formative political years) as essential to imperial historiography. One of her arguments is that racism was fundamental to sustaining imperial power.²³ That Bush felt it necessary to dedicate her study to arguing this, in contradistinction to prevailing British imperial historiography, is a powerful argument for the continued need to include black radical intellectuals like Padmore prominently within the discourse. Indeed, in the last two years, two of the most prominent British historians of Empire, John Darwin and Ronald Hyam, have published major works that attempt to explain the features and themes of

¹⁹ For a summary of the Marxian tradition associated with Padmore see Apter, *Ghana in Transition*, xi.

²⁰ Nwafor, 'The Revolutionary as Historian: George Padmore and Pan-Africanism,' in Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, xxv.

²¹ Geiss and Keep, *The Pan-African Movement*, 5. Also Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900-1945*.

²² Poe, *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism*; Walters, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora*; Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: the idea and the movement, 1776-1991*; W.B. Ackah, *Pan-Africanism*.

²³ Bush, *Imperialism, Race, and Resistance*, 18.

the British Empire, but barely mention race. Both Darwin and Hyam's work rarely mention Africa or the Caribbean, and neither mentions Padmore.

Darwin's work aims to redress a view of the British Empire as a 'structure of global hegemony,' arguing instead that its contemporaries saw the British Empire not as a structure but as a system, whose contingent parts were constantly influencing the reevaluation of British imperial policy. It could be argued that the missing 'component' of Darwin's British system is race. Here Darwin's recent work is subject to the same criticism as that made against Sarah Stockwell's 2008 edited collection of essays, *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*.²⁴ By omitting this factor (or failing to separately treat it as John Marriott argues in Stockwell's case), these works ignore a key component of Empire that often supplied the logic for British actions and the ideological justification for its territorial, social, and economic occupation in the first place. Thus, for example, Darwin presents the exile of Seretse Khama, the kabaka of Buganda, as part of a British strategy to isolate the kingdom of Buganda and thus assist in the push for an East African Federation. No mention is made of the fact that Khama's banishment was publicly justified as a litigious and moral response to his interracial marriage. The racial implications of British imperial policy, including Khama's exile, were taken up by George Padmore. Bringing Padmore's analysis of British Empire into Darwin's argument widens the narrative to include a component of the British system that was viewed, by its subjects at least, as critical. The following questions, emanating from Darwin's argument, are important: Did Padmore, a colonial subject, see British imperial rule as a system, or a structure imposed unilaterally from London? If the British Empire was not viewed as monolithic, what implications did it have for anti-colonial organization? The answer to the latter was, for Padmore, the practice of a constant re-evaluation of strategy.

As Philippa Levine has pointed out, one of the most contentious debates in British imperial historiography continues to be: how much did the Empire matter to the British?²⁵ Catherine Hall's work to demonstrate the centrality of empire to British history has been very important here.²⁶ However despite the work of people like Hall,

²⁴ Marriott, review of 'The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives.'

²⁵ Levine, *The British Empire*, ix.

²⁶ Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

Padmore receives no mention in Hyam's latest book, which degrades as 'pseudo-Freudian' post-modernist historians who have argued that 'understanding the British empire' means acknowledging the subtle and often unconscious ways Empire permeated British life.²⁷ Hyam argues that because the average lower middle-class Briton did not consciously consider the origins of his or her tea and sugar on a daily basis, imperialism did not shape their lives nor have any real meaning. Yet it was Padmore's life work to illuminate to the British public exactly what was being executed in their name and for their supposed benefit. He understood that Empire functioned precisely upon what Hyam rejects as irrelevant: popular ignorance and complacency. From his first major work, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (1931), Padmore was writing an African history 'from below' that illuminated the class and racial connections of Empire well before George Shepperson and Thomas Price's 'landmark study' that was 'alive to [Empire's] international links.'²⁸

This argument about the extent to which the British Empire held import for British people is so contentious because it has implications for the analysis of anti-colonial resistance. For if the Empire did not matter to the average British citizen, then efforts like those of Padmore to resist that Empire mattered even less. Stephen Howe has outlined four features of anti-colonialism: the claim that national independence is the right of all people; the claim that struggles for national independence are interdependent; the assertion of the basic equality of Europe and non-European peoples and cultures; and a commitment to oppose the colonization of one's country since decolonization is a precondition for progress in colonies.²⁹ Howe argues that the presence of people like James and Padmore in leftist circles in Britain played an important role in forcing the British left to rethink their paternalism.³⁰ However, by studying the work of Padmore and James it is clear that another feature of anti-colonialism should be added to Howe's list. Anti-colonialism for Padmore, James and those in their International African Service Bureau, did not simply mean that decolonization would help bring progress to former colonies; they incessantly decried the hypocrisy of any claims, by the British left or otherwise, to imperial benevolence. They proclaimed the sinister nature of Empire and colonies. Theirs was more than

²⁷ See especially Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, 30-31.

²⁸ Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, 5.

²⁹ Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, 1-2.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 89.

pointing out the equality of all peoples; theirs was an indictment of the high crimes of imperialism.

In this sense, Padmore should be viewed as a rather unique figure in the history of the British Empire. As Lewis has shown, the British Empire functioned so long and so successfully because it harnessed an ideology of ‘liberal imperialism’.³¹ Under this ideology, the British Empire was believed to be engaged in a uniquely caring welfare project by which it protected the weak and improved the lives of ‘backward’ peoples through enlightened industrial, economic, social, and political practices. Critics of empire, for the most part, only criticized instances in which the Empire appeared to have, for an instant and in a specific place, strayed from the liberal model. Padmore, on the other hand, refused to accept any notion that the British Empire was a liberal empire. One of the best examples of Padmore’s effort to display the fallacy of a ‘liberal’ British Empire is found in one of his most frequently cited articles, written for the Independent Labour Party (ILP) newspaper, *New Leader*, in 1939, ‘The British Empire Is Worst Racket Yet Invented By Man.’ The article was a direct response to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s statement that: ‘If imperialism means a certain racial superiority, suppression of political and economic freedom of other peoples, exploitation of resources of other countries for the benefit of the imperialist countries then I say those are not characteristics of this country.’ This thesis will show that one of Padmore’s greatest preoccupations was in exposing every aspect of this statement. Britain’s purported lack of racism, protection of rights, and altruistic approach to Empire were, as Padmore began this article, ‘a piece of humbug’.³²

Padmore’s indictment of the crimes of imperialism also fit, in rather interesting ways, into the recent fascination in imperial historiography with the violence of empire and, particularly, decolonization.³³ Richard Gott’s recent emphasis on the violence present in the acquisition, subjugation, and maintenance of Britain’s empire, is an argument Padmore would have heartily agreed with.³⁴ As will be shown in Chapter Four, he rebuked his critics’ distaste for the use of ‘violent’ language by pointing out that

³¹ Lewis, ‘The British Empire and world history,’ 26-28.

³² Padmore, ‘The British Empire is the Worst Racket Yet Invented by Man,’ *New Leader*, 15 December 1939.

³³ For a review of the historiography on violence and Africa, see Lewis, ‘Nasty, brutish and in shorts,’ 201-223.

³⁴ Gott, *Britain’s empire: resistance, repression, and revolt*.

violence was at the very heart of empire. Yet Padmore lived by the pen. His closest ally in African decolonization was Nkrumah, who proudly negotiated self-government without violence. Padmore and Frantz Fanon were both arguably most famous for their passionate rhetoric; however, unlike Fanon, Padmore did not directly stake his support with violent resistance. There is an ambivalence to Padmore's position on the use of violence, which will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Historians are also now taking up an argument that Empire was more than its 'international links,' and that African independence cannot be reduced to 'a story with one plot line – the struggle for the nation.'³⁵ Indeed, historians of empire now argue that 'the seeds of transnationalism are imperial, rather than post-colonial.'³⁶ Padmore's ideology and alliances suggest that historians may need to place greater emphasis upon transnational anti-colonialism rather than 'anti-colonial nationalism.'³⁷ To date, this has largely been accomplished by literary historians.³⁸ Transnational histories are relevant to imperial history since they place emphasis upon a dialogue between peoples outside of state structures and borders that transcended national identity and moved beyond a reciprocal colonizer-colonized dialogue.

In Padmore's case, positioning his life as part of a story of transnational anti-imperial politics is not simply imposing the latest academic trend upon the historical past. As will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis, Padmore considered the importance of his life in transnational terms – he believed that what was most important about his life was his experience of two major transnational ideological movements of the twentieth century: communism and pan-Africanism. Political citizenship was never confined to the nation-state for Padmore. He displayed no strong national allegiances at any point in his life, yet remained highly political. This was undoubtedly the combination of his sense of 'citizenship' in a black diaspora, and partly his training within the international communist movement. Although Steven Vertovec defines transnationalism as the 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions

³⁵ Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 38.

³⁶ Grant, Levine and Trentmann, *Beyond Sovereignty*, 3.

³⁷ Levine, *The British Empire*, 168-183.

³⁸ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*; Stephens, *Black Empire*; Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos*.

across the borders of nation-states,’³⁹ Laura Winkiel’s deployment of the term is more apt. Winkiel uses the term to describe the work of black leaders such as Du Bois, Garvey, and Duse Mohamed Ali, since it ‘better denotes how colonization and the slave trade created nation-states composed of multinational populations who are situated both within and without a given territorially-bound nation.’⁴⁰ As a Trinidadian, Padmore was raised in a colony of transnational creation, and his work from New York, Moscow, Hamburg, Paris, London and Accra was engaged in exactly the manner Winkiel describes – both ‘within and without’ the territory of the nation.

Moreover, a study of George Padmore is particularly relevant for understanding transnational imperial networks precisely because of his tactical alliances – the discussions across his life-time with anti-imperial activists and black organizers of varying political stripes help illuminate the tensions and the atmosphere of debate in this vibrant community. Padmore reminds imperial historians that Empire, also, held within it this debate about the end goal of black liberation.

The ‘Black Atlantic’: The Black Radical Tradition and black identity

Indeed, the combination of Padmore’s transnational identity and ideas locates him firmly within a discourse now referred to as the Black Radical Tradition.⁴¹ This tradition began, it is argued, in the autonomous efforts of black organizations to fight modern Western subordination of black peoples in the era of slavery. It was, according to Cedric Robinson in his quintessential work, *Black Marxism*, ‘a specifically African response to oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era.’⁴² Selwyn Cudjoe’s study of 19th century West Indian writing identifies Padmore’s own ‘vigorous exposition’ as a successor to this 19th century tradition represented by works such as J.J. Thomas’s *Froudacity*.⁴³ Both Robinson and Bogues argue that part of the black radical tradition lay in their

³⁹ S. Vertovec, ‘Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, XXII (2) (March 1999), p. 447), quoted in Grant, et al, *Beyond Sovereignty*, 1. Sterling Johnson describes ‘transnational relations’ as ‘contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments.’ Johnson, *Black Globalism*, ix-x.

⁴⁰ Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos*, 162.

⁴¹ Rodney Worrell has recently argued that Padmore’s social and political thought should be firmly situated within this tradition. See Worrell, ‘George Padmore: Social and Political Thought,’ PhD diss.

⁴² Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 81.

⁴³ Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*, 210.

engagement with Western radical political ideas, followed by their critique of the ‘incompleteness’⁴⁴ of these ideas. For example, Padmore’s belief in black unity was based firmly in a concept of transnational solidarity rooted in his extension of Lenin’s position on imperialism, which regarded all black peoples as living under a form of colonialism. Robinson argues that for these black radicals, liberal and socialist critiques of fascism proved the ‘ambivalence, hypocrisies, and the impotence’ of these white European and American intellectuals who failed to make the link between fascism and colonialism.⁴⁵ Padmore’s own intellectual production both in his books and in particular his journalism, was a major contribution to this black radical tradition. His most forceful and consistent critiques, throughout his career, focused upon the hypocrisy and indeed the bankruptcy of all imperial apologetics.

In 1991 Stuart Hall argued that ‘it is to the diversity, not the homogeneity, of black experience that we must now give our undivided creative attention.’⁴⁶ The irony here is, of course, that Hall’s demand is relevant to a historical study of Padmore – a man who spent his life arguing for the unity of all black people. Indeed, early in his career he argued that ‘all black people are under a form of colonialism.’⁴⁷ Yet this is also perhaps a useful point of departure for placing Padmore’s black liberationist ideology: he maintained an ambivalent position regarding the singularity of the black experience. That is, while his books clearly demonstrate that he recognized the wide variation of black experiences, he usually argued that these experiences should inevitably bring them closer together in solidarity. His practical assessment of the situation implied that any differences that did exist should be placed in the background, since realizing the end of imperial exploitation required a united front – nothing could stand in the way of this end goal.

Still, Padmore’s work fits into the black radical tradition. His use of journalism echoes that of American anti-lynching campaigner Ida B. Wells in that it was ‘*critical practical activity* which confronts the ideas and practices of the old order’ and therefore are ‘representative of a stream of the black radical intellectual tradition in which activity

⁴⁴ Bogues, *Black Heretics*, 13.

⁴⁵ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 313.

⁴⁶ Stuart Hall, ‘What is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?’ in Gina Dent, ed. *Black Popular Culture* (Seattle: Bay, 1992), 30. Quoted in Stephens, ‘What is this *Black* in Black Diaspora?’, 27.

⁴⁷ ‘International African Opinion: A Review,’ *The People*, 3 September 1938.

and theoretical reflection merge into praxis.⁴⁸ However some scholars are now challenging the notion of black oneness and of pan-Africanism.⁴⁹ That tradition, they argue, also holds numerous variations among individuals and over time. For example, although Dominican Celestine Edwards gained a following among English liberal campaigners in the early 1890s because, like Padmore, he held an impressive and vast knowledge, his celebrity came from his ‘irresistible charm’ – something Padmore was known to forego if he believed the individual did not warrant it.⁵⁰ Had Padmore lived a few years more he would also surely have been confronted by Walter Rodney’s insistence that the role of the African historian was to speak to blacks, not whites.⁵¹ Padmore’s complicated consideration of audience (i.e. although his work was often purported to be for a white audience, it found its greatest readership in a black one), make his writing a fascinating case study in argument and intentionality.

The intentionality of his work holds one other very important association with black intellectualism. The anxiety of being black in a colonial society, so vividly described by Frantz Fanon,⁵² was central to Padmore’s pragmatism. It was pivotal to his strategic consideration, and the uneasiness of his ‘place’ in the world. Michelle Wright argues that Du Bois, Cesaire, Senghor, and Fanon all shared specific strategies of identity best understood through the trope of masking.⁵³ Although Padmore did not invoke this trope, his manipulation of multiple identities throughout his life (African, West Indian, communist, Pan-Africanist) should be read as a form of masking. Padmore’s remarkably proper appearance (to be discussed in Chapter One) should be seen in part as the personality of a man who led a very ordered existence⁵⁴ but also as a strategy of self-defence and of reputation. Padmore’s identification as an ‘outsider’ will be discussed at length in Chapter Six in relation to the Gold Coast independence movement. However the status of being an outsider applied not only to his position in the Gold Coast, but to his racial and social position in England, his political standpoint, and his reserved personal relations with many political comrades. In this respect,

⁴⁸ Bogue, *Black Heretics*, 48.

⁴⁹ Torres-Saillant, ‘One and Divisible,’ 12.

⁵⁰ Schneer, *London 1900*, 207.

⁵¹ Rodney, ‘African History in the Service of the Black Liberation,’ 67.

⁵² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82-108.

⁵³ Wright, *Becoming Black*, 16.

⁵⁴ James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 209.

Padmore's social life and his politics displayed the 'harmful and healing potential of Black self-consciousness.'⁵⁵

The study of the tensions found within identity have most frequently been associated with post-colonial studies. Scholars have worked to show how 'over time, and in a plurality of contested arenas, postcolonial strategies improvise multiple shifting identities.'⁵⁶ This study of Padmore shows that ideas of postcolonial identity can also be applied to the colonial experience. Achille Mbembe's description of the post-colonial subject as having 'a marked ability to manage not just a single identity for themselves but several, which are flexible enough for them to negotiate as and when required'⁵⁷ can also easily describe Padmore's varying identities.

This study tries to find a balance between the socio-cultural impacts of longing and belonging inherent in the life of an exile and an 'outsider' to the racial and political mainstream, with the immediate and direct impact of events on Padmore's thinking and actions. For example, his refusal to be conscripted during the war was the culmination of what he saw as the numerous refusals by authorities to be honest about British citizenship and thus his action was a firm rejection of the British practice of opportunistically defining colonial subjects as 'British' in the colonies and aliens in the United Kingdom.⁵⁸ Finally, this study will examine Padmore's identity in a similar manner to that of Vron Ware's study of white femininity and race; that is, it will concentrate not on what it meant to *be* a black man in that time and in that place, but on how Padmore was thought of and the extent to which he manipulated the idea of his blackness.⁵⁹

Writing a life: incorporating literatures into historical biography

⁵⁵ Wright, *Becoming Black*, 2.

⁵⁶ Werbner, 'Multiple identities, plural arenas' in Werbner and Ranger, eds. *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, 1.

⁵⁷ Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony,' 4-5.

⁵⁸ See for example Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*; Alexander and Halpern, eds. *Racializing Class, Classifying*.

⁵⁹ Ware focuses her study 'not on what it meant to *be* a white woman, but what it meant to be *thought of* as a white woman. Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, xiii.

Writing a historical biography requires the incorporation of numerous literatures that provide context to the specific life of an individual, including literature on the art of biographical writing. This is perhaps particularly true for a man whose life spanned so many geographical regions and the rich experiences of numerous ideological movements. The individual, theory, plus national political and social history, must all come together to inform this study of George Padmore.

This thesis has been informed by the regional histories of the Caribbean, the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain, and Africa. For example, literature that considers the West Indian labour revolts of the 1930s alongside politics in Britain, such as Nigel Bolland's *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean*, helped to assess Padmore's position with regard to these revolts.⁶⁰ Histories of British politics during the Second World War, as well as new studies such as Lizzie Collingham's *The Taste of War*, provided the necessary context for discerning Padmore's wartime experience in London.⁶¹ The work of Jean-Marie Allman and Richard Rathbone into the disputed politics of 1950s Ghana has also been integral.⁶² These sources both inform the context for Padmore's life, but also point to the ways in which a study of Padmore contributes to this historiography. For example, one of the contributions of this thesis is to argue that the labeling of Padmore as an 'outsider' in the Gold Coast in the 1950s provides new insight into how group identity functioned in the lead up to decolonization in the Gold Coast.

Despite his widespread presence in anti-imperial networks and acknowledged leadership of the Pan-African movement, Padmore tended to place other figures in the foreground of the movements he was involved with. He was, indeed, the man *behind* the scene (hence the absence of an autobiography or subsequent biographical work). Yet as Macola has recently shown, there is value in examining the individuals who did not occupy the most celebrated position in important historical movements. In his biography of Harry Nkumbula, Macola argues that too much attention has been given in African nationalist histories and African biography to the political 'winners' of inter-African nationalist contests during decolonization, and thus an unsatisfactory

⁶⁰ Also Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*.

⁶¹ Also Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain during the Second World War*; Kirkham and Thoms, eds. *War Culture*.

⁶² Also Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*.

interpretation of African nationalist movements has emerged.⁶³ The relative silence surrounding Padmore, compared to his numerous colleagues, is in part a symptom of Padmore's political strategy of harnessing the greater celebrity of people like Du Bois or Nkrumah. By studying a figure like Padmore, who did not occupy the spotlight, greater insight into the internal machinations of networks and, especially, *negotiations* among anti-colonial, anti-racist circles in Europe, America, and colonial territories can be illuminated.

Of course, writing about these individuals is intrinsically more difficult. Yet these stories are increasingly being taken up. Miles Ogborn's *Global Lives* recounts over forty individual stories in order to enliven British imperial history. He demonstrates that by focusing on individual lives, the much larger process of globalization can be mapped. Ogborn's attempt in this book to be 'true to the lives of historical subjects while understanding them as part of processes that they would have seen only partially' is an important methodological point which this biography also takes up, particularly in chapters five and six.⁶⁴ Linda Colley's 'global biography' of Elizabeth Marsh, an adventurous British woman who Colley reveals to have been shaped by the social and geographical changes of her time, demonstrates the potential for executing biography without the access to private diaries, letters, and papers available to most biographers.⁶⁵ Some attempt has been made in this biography of Padmore, however, to address the criticism that Colley's work did not deliver the expected emotional impact for readers. It does so by bringing Padmore to life through the personal stories and private comments that were available in archives.⁶⁶ Finally, the difficulty of writing a biography of certain individuals has, as Adam Fairclough speculates, not only been restricted by a lack of source material but sometimes also by the complexities of certain characters and the myths and images created around them.⁶⁷ Drayton's call to 'humanize the idea of the hero and liberate a larger human capacity for agency' by taking 'seriously how the hero's achievement is guided and limited by a community's

⁶³ Macola, *Liberal Nationalism in Central Africa*, 2-3.

⁶⁴ Miles Ogborn, 'Miles Ogborn on his book "Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550-1800,"' *Rorotoko* May 8, 2009. URL: http://www.rorotoko.com/index.php/article/miles_ogborn_book_interview_global_lives_britain_world_1550_1800.

⁶⁵ Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*.

⁶⁶ Stuart, review of *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh*.

⁶⁷ Fairclough, review of *Negro with a Hat*.

participation’⁶⁸ is precisely the logic for studying a person such as Padmore. Padmore’s experiences and his personality – both his strengths and his weaknesses – were in turn both shaped by, and shaping, a particular community in a particular historical moment. Only by considering all of these aspects can the historical life be better understood. Colin Grant’s recent biography of Marcus Garvey, which actually places Padmore prominently in the preface to the book,⁶⁹ is a good example of a biography that tackles the personality, the life, and the myths and image of one of the most important black figures of the twentieth century. Grant is particularly sensitive to how Garvey was *perceived*, as much as to Garvey himself. This technique thus subtly integrates into biography the kind of contextualization Macola urges.

Outline

This study begins from the hypothesis that the pragmatism of Padmore’s politics can only be demonstrated by examining his whole life, and thus takes the form of a biography. Taking Padmore’s pragmatism as a starting point, the forms in which he was understood and labeled by others, and the ways in which he represented himself to others at particular times, are fundamental to this study since they demonstrate the extent to which Padmore was willing to compromise and ‘play the game’ of imperial politics, and illustrate the boundaries of the field in which he operated. Throughout his life, Padmore was involved in a particular kind of self-representation. The fact that he constructed his appearance, his reputation, and his political ideology very consciously is a central aspect of his personality. Padmore traversed a number of different identities, something indicative of the colonial subject located outside the colony. All of these identities, both imposed and invited, unlock pieces of Padmore and more often, the situation in which he lived.

Padmore’s primary profession, as a journalist, is the least examined area of his life, and yet formed the bulk of his output (see Appendix 1) and acted as the conduit for both his ideas and his activism. His journalism was the means by which he established his name, refined his ideas, and promoted his fundamental belief in the solidarity of colonial and ‘subject’ peoples (Padmore’s experience in the US and Europe meant that

⁶⁸ Drayton, ‘The Problem of the Hero(ine) in Caribbean History,’ 29.

⁶⁹ Grant, *Negro with a Hat*, 2.

this included all coloured peoples). Von Eschen argues that through Padmore's journalism, he 'crafted a popular language for the [American black] international movement' in the 1940s and 'facilitated communication among anticolonial activists in the United States, Britain, the Caribbean,' and Africa.⁷⁰ However, her research was mainly confined to Padmore's writing in African American newspapers. By tracing his journalism in West African and West Indian colonies, this thesis will suggest that Padmore's influence was far more extensive than previously imagined. Through an analysis of his writing and his networks within the timeframe of each half-decade, this thesis will identify the principle of Padmore's politics as fundamentally anti-imperialist, but pragmatic in expression – what I will refer to as 'pragmatic anti-imperialism.'

The division of chapters is based upon significant shifts of emphasis in Padmore's work, either via a change in geographical locality (Chapters One and Seven), political orientation (Chapters Two and Three), major historical events (Chapters Four and Five), or energy and focus (Chapter Six). All of these shifts marked new phases for Padmore, but not in a linear progression. The point at which Padmore left his wife and child in the United States in 1929 and 'became' George Padmore is crucial. Yet, as will be emphasized in the first chapter and in the conclusion, no specific phase (or label) stands out as the mark that embodied his entire career.

The first chapter covers the period from Padmore's birth in Trinidad in 1903 up to his departure for the Soviet Union in December 1929. It argues that these years were a crucial stage in his political development that married together his Caribbean heritage with his search for a profession in the United States. His life in Trinidad and the United States are combined in this chapter to show that George Padmore was formed by a specific combination of both. Two questions are central to the chapter. Firstly, to what extent should we consider Padmore as part of a particular West Indian 'type'? Secondly, to what degree did the historical conditions Padmore experienced in Trinidad and the United States shape his racial and anti-colonial politics? In considering Padmore as a 'West Indian', the chapter both begins the project of examining the labels that have been applied to Padmore, and also introduces a theme that will be referred to in the last chapter of the thesis: that is, the extent to which the historical space a person

⁷⁰ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 13.

inhabits conditions their personal, social, and political decisions. It argues for a historical narrative that considers both the potency of historical forces, as well as the contingency of individual agency.

Chapter Two (1930-1934) redresses a serious gap in previous understandings of Padmore's work with the Comintern. This was an essential phase in his career, but has largely been shrouded in mystery and romantic myth. Several common threads that appear in Padmore's career are introduced in this chapter. His propensity for the day to day, behind the scenes, menial tasks of organization are evident in his 'leadership' of the ITUCNW. His emphasis upon collecting and transmitting knowledge became his primary task in these years and never faltered. His journalistic resumé, not only through his editorship of the *Negro Worker* but also through his logistical support to fledgling West African newspapers, was firmly established. In his first book, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, the peculiar variance between his books' intended audience (white) and the book's primary promotion (to a black audience) was evident. Finally, the relationship between the personal, and the political, is emphasized in this chapter in order to explain the public break between Padmore and the Comintern in 1934. The chapter explores this relationship by showing how personal insults were often taken as a communal affront, mediated through the tensions of race.

The third chapter (1935-1939) explores the tense period of the late 1930s, when fascism in Europe forced a new dynamic upon 'the left' in Britain and Padmore 're-established' himself as an anti-imperial activist outside the structures of the Comintern. It firmly establishes the major arguments of the thesis: Padmore's pragmatism, his overwhelming political focus, and the fluctuation of 'identities' attributed to Padmore. The chapter focuses upon considering Padmore's ideological positions either as a 'Marxist' or a 'pan-Africanist,' and it should be noted at the outset that while Padmore's ideas could be considered under other ideologies such as humanism, or anarchism, this should be a task for other scholars. This thesis has confined itself to considering the extent to which Padmore fits within the ideologies and labels that he himself identified with. It shows that Padmore articulated a particular kind of what has come to be acknowledged as pan-Africanism, which was specific to his historical place and time. This chapter also explores the importance of London as 'place', to which Padmore sought refuge and then, by 1935, chose to remain as a strategic locality for political work.

The fourth chapter (1940-1945) demonstrates the impact of the Second World War on anti-colonial resistance ‘at home.’ It argues that Padmore’s strategic considerations led by 1945 to a marked change in his political tactics. It does this by examining the dynamic interplay between hope and cynicism in Padmore’s analysis of post-war possibilities for black liberation, as well as in the development of Padmore as a professional journalist who used newspapers as an essential medium for articulating his political strategy. War-time conditions in an embattled London quickly changed Padmore’s working life. It is in this period that journalism truly became a profession for Padmore and a major political tool for informing black readers in the United States, the West Indies, and West Africa of their combined war effort, their material conditions during the war, and the opportunity afforded by their contributions and by Allied wartime promises to push for anti-racist, anti-colonial policies after the war. This opportunity would not, however, be realized automatically but required efficient organization and a vehement, daily commitment in order to be achieved.

In order to substantiate the argument made in the fourth chapter, that after 1945 Padmore began to shift his emphasis to non-violent lobbying and greater engagement with official, ‘high’ politics, the fifth chapter (1945-1950) examines Padmore’s criticisms of the new Labour Government in his books and his journalism. It is bracketed, of course, by the early stages of the Cold War and the impact this had upon the work of anti-colonial activists such as Padmore. His criticism of the Labour Government was both direct (in his argument that Labour leaders now in power were betraying their earlier positions on the colonies), and indirect (in his praise of the Soviet Union). Padmore’s contentious relationship with the Soviet Union has never been seriously examined. This thesis will begin to clarify the rationale behind Padmore’s shifting position towards his former ally. Padmore’s position meant that the Colonial and Foreign Office watched him carefully. This period, it is argued, was the height of Padmore’s influence in terms of geographical reach and notoriety. The chapter, then, examines the mutual distrust that existed between Padmore and the Labour Government.

The sixth chapter (1950-1956) examines the years in which ‘Africa’ took hold of Padmore’s life in new and complex ways. It focuses upon the numerous tensions and

contradictions in Padmore's friendships and political relations. It is, of all the chapters, the most personal. In this period Padmore questioned himself and his politics, and experienced the loss of several friendships that he interpreted as political betrayal. Although he publicly maintained a strong and confident voice, privately he questioned his place within the 'African' struggle and admitted to being an 'outsider' among African nationalists. The ideas surrounding this chapter are thus, in many ways, the climax of the tensions of identity in Padmore's life.⁷¹ The chapter argues that the personal trouble he experienced and his own labeling of himself as a 'hybrid' impacted his political decision-making. This chapter is the most concerted effort to try, as Tony Bogues has urged, not to place Padmore's thought into a clear linear pattern that does not allow for the 'ruptures nor contradictions, the fever and fret of the thinker.'⁷² Bogues argues that 'such smooth, settled patterns yield negligible results in the study of Africana thinkers, particularly those who have a complex engagement with the Western intellectual tradition.'⁷³

The final chapter (1957-1959) moves to Padmore's final resting place, in Africa. It argues that Padmore moved to Ghana at the end of 1957 in order to contribute to the realization of African socialism. Like Fanon, Padmore recognized that a clear path, goals, ideology and programme would be necessary following independence: the post-colonial project was just as important as the anti-colonial. However, his position as a West Indian with direct access to Nkrumah remained problematic, and the idea of Padmore as an 'outsider' lingered during his two years in Ghana. Power, the extent to which he could, should, and did wield it, was a dynamic that played itself out in a number of relationships Padmore had in Ghana. This dynamic forms a core theme in the chapter, since it is present both in his last years in life, and in the evaluation of his life after his death. The chapter concludes by examining Padmore's memorialization. In death, Padmore was memorialized primarily as an African. Thus his death represented the ultimate prodigal return of a member of the diaspora.⁷⁴

⁷¹ These tensions have been outlined by Schwarz in his chapter on Padmore. See Schwarz, 'George Padmore,' 146-148.

⁷² Bogues, *Black Heretics*, 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ For the importance of Ghana as a place of return for the diaspora, see Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, 28. Gaines highlights an article in the Trinidad paper, *The Beacon*, in which Padmore's visit to the Gold Coast in 1951 is discussed, as 'the resolution of a historical cycle of enslavement and impending freedom, exile and return.'

I want to conclude with a few words on sources. In outlining Padmore's ideas, this thesis displays a bias towards his writing in colonial newspapers. This was done in order to redress the predominant use by previous historians of his articles in African-American and British left newspapers. The time available has, unfortunately, not allowed for the kind of comparison that could be done in future between his articles in different regions. Also, contending with Padmore is also, in many ways, contending with the myth of Padmore. This is largely a result of the lack of archival material and the now limited number of potential interviewees from which to base a study of Padmore as a person. The dearth of personal correspondence, diaries, etc. makes it extremely difficult to distinguish Padmore's pragmatic public statements from his personal convictions about individuals, political parties, and organizations. How, then, do I distinguish what Padmore said in public, for particular purposes and particular audiences, and what he believed himself? The answer is, unfortunately, that I often could not.⁷⁵ This does not mean the study of Padmore is not worthwhile, but that it must be done with a certain amount of forgiveness, a willingness to allow some questions to remain unanswered while painstakingly trying to reconstruct a more accurate and detailed picture of the man. It means always striving to search and engage with the world Padmore inhabited and the influence he did wield. A study that examines the myths of Padmore is in no way an irreverent attempt to dethrone the man, but instead has been undertaken with the firm belief that accessing a truer account of his actions allows for a greater respect for what he achieved. Padmore, as flesh and blood, makes him that much more worthy of respect for what he accomplished.

⁷⁵ It should also be noted that I have not worked with German language sources for Padmore's time in Hamburg, and that my use of Comintern sources was limited largely to those in either English or French, with only a few Russian documents.

Chapter One

From Trinidad to the United States, 1903-1929

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing ‘thyself’ as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory...therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

Antonio Gramsci¹

Malcolm Evan Meredith Nurse was born to the son of a Barbadian slave in Arouca, Trinidad, in 1903.² Upon completion of his secondary school education, he took a job with the popular daily newspaper, the *Trinidad Guardian*. In 1924 he married Julia Semper, and embarked quickly thereafter for university in the United States in order to train for a profession and provide for his family. However, while in the United States he became involved with university politics and, eventually, the Communist Party of the USA. Having been recruited to the Soviet Union for work with the Communist International in 1929, he crossed the Atlantic for the first and only time, never to return to the West Indies, his wife nor his young daughter.

This chapter will attempt to identify an inventory of the ‘infinity of traces’ which were grafted onto Padmore in the first two and a half decades of his life. It will examine to what extent his early years in Trinidad and the United States shaped his worldview. It will show that his early life contained both continuities and patterns that would shape his future decisions, as well as radical departures. Male family members created a model of black power, dignity, and resistance which instilled in Padmore the confidence to object to the current imperial order. Trinidad’s class and racial structure, bound together by the legacy of slavery and the British ‘divide and rule’ colonial policy, formed the base through which he would interpret the imperial structures of oppression. Racial and class tensions in Trinidad after World War II, which Padmore observed in the strikes in Port of Spain in 1919 and the humiliating subordination his colleague’s were subjected to by their white editor on the *Trinidad Guardian*, exposed Padmore to

¹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* quoted in Said, *Orientalism*, 25.

² General Records Office, 1959, September, Pancras, vol 5d, page 307, no. 128. Padmore’s official death certificate states that he was 56 years old at the time of his death in 1959. This is the only remaining archival verification of his birth year. Determining the date of his birth is a good example of the ambiguities and lack of remaining archival detail on Padmore.

the frustrations of workers in the colony. The experience of American racism, combined with the political environment of the black American university and the awakening of black cultural and political life in the United States in the 1920s, charted a new path for George Padmore's life. Padmore's move to the Soviet Union at the end of 1929 was a decisive moment that radically changed the trajectory of his life.

1 A West Indian intellectual tradition

In 1968 George Padmore's childhood friend in Trinidad and later renowned intellectual, C.L.R. James, received a grant from the Louis M. Rabinowitz Foundation in New York City to write a biography of George Padmore. James had already published a summary of Padmore's life in *The Nation*, the newspaper of Trinidad's People's National Movement party which James was editing in 1960. However, he hoped in 1968 to take his writing on Padmore further than he had in 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore.' In setting out the purpose of this new study to his funder, James argued that 'in writing about the West Indian origins of George Padmore I am not writing merely the history of a remarkable individual. I shall be tracing the origins of a certain social type which has made a distinguished and not diverse mark upon the world in two spheres, politics and writing both prose and verse.'³ James set out in his memoir of Padmore to reclaim him as a West Indian; 'one of that remarkable body of West Indians who have played such a tremendous role in the emancipation of Africa.'⁴ The bulk of what James actually completed of this biography was included in a talk given in North London in 1976 and published in *At the Rendezvous of Victory*.⁵

James's list of 'remarkable West Indian men' categorized Padmore alongside Toussaint L'Ouverture, Henry Sylvester Williams, Aime Cesaire, Rene Maran, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, and Stokely Carmichael.⁶ James's comparisons were not, altogether, unwarranted. Padmore was born under the name Malcolm Nurse to a mother from Trinidad's black middle-class and a father from Barbados. Likewise, Henry Sylvester

³ Introduction to Memoirs of George Padmore, undated. C.L.R. James Papers, University of the West Indies St. Augustine (hereafter cited as James MSS/UWI), box 18, folder 347.

⁴ C.L.R. James to Victor Rabinowitz, 17 July 1968. James MSS/UWI, box 7, folder 194. James's list included Rene Maran, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Stokeley Carmichael, and Marcus Garvey.

⁵ James, 'George Padmore: Black Marxist Revolutionary,' in *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 251-263.

⁶ James, 'The Old World and the New,' and 'Presence of Blacks in the Caribbean and its Impact on Culture,' in *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 202-217; 218-235.

Williams, who organized the first Pan-African Conference in 1900, was born to Barbadian immigrant parents in the village of Arouca as well.⁷ James also traced part of his ancestry from Barbados, and both he and Eric Williams, the esteemed academic and first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, were all products of the same period in Trinidadian history. The work of recording the history of Africa and its descendants by these three men has been linked to a 19th Century literary tradition in Trinidad that includes J.J. Thomas's *Froudacity*.⁸ The Barbadian ancestry of James, Padmore and Sylvester Williams testifies to the remarkable internal migration within the West Indies. This border crossing gives some evidence that these men were shaped by the idea of movement and the ability to cross national boundaries. Claude McKay, whose verse so stirred the Harlem Renaissance, trod the path from the West Indies, to the United States, to the Soviet Union, to Africa, which Padmore would follow a decade later. Fanon and Padmore both came to greatest prominence in the 1950s, as they struggled to forge a path for African revolutionaries outside the rigid boundaries of the Cold War. Both spent their last years in Africa and died, at a relatively young age, two years apart. The remarkable predominance of West Indians in early 20th Century black resistance in the United States and Britain has provided fodder for a number of scholars of 20th Century African diasporic history. The fact that George Padmore on the surface fits so neatly into this group of intellectuals and activists therefore needs to be addressed.

C.L.R. James confessed in 1971 that he had been thinking for some time about why the Caribbean had produced so many important men who had contributed to the modern history of Western civilization. He wrote that 'I think I have some answer.'⁹ James's explanation for the radicalism of this group of West Indian men was rooted in the particular experience of a Caribbean middle-class migrant. The distinctly British education that was primarily the preserve of the 'colored' middle class instilled a particular conception of European thought that appeared to include these young West Indian men. Their radicalism was conceived in this particular social experience and then born out of the experience of migration: "we came abroad and found that neither the life we lived nor the things that we saw were in harmony with the things we had

⁷ Hooker, *Henry Sylvester Williams*, 3.

⁸ Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*, 365.

⁹ James, *At the Rendezvous*, 205.

read, and we automatically were and remained *against.*”¹⁰ Even Garvey, James explained, was ‘anti-establishment’ and although these men embraced varied political ideologies ‘without exception’ they were men in revolt. What James was describing was not simply their shock that despite being a British subject, they were not in practice granted the same rights and respect as white Englishmen. This shock was actually harnessed as a strategy in the interwar period not by men like James, Padmore, and Garvey but by those West Indians in Britain who supported Harold Moody’s League of Coloured Peoples, who fought racism by consistently emphasizing their ‘British’ national identity as defined by a notion of Victorian respectability.¹¹ Several scholars have emphasized the particular ways in which race and class intersected in Caribbean society to form national identity and social structure.¹² Rush has argued that the influence of a distinctly Victorian interpretation of Britishness did not apply to all West Indians: ‘what separated the Caribbean subjects who claimed British identity from those who rejected it...was not primarily their color or ethnicity, but their status (or status-goal) in society.’¹³

The ‘status-goal’ Rush identifies here is crucial. Class identification was one way in which men like Padmore and James would, once they had left Trinidad, to some extent transcend their middle-class background by rejecting Victorian ideas of national identity and ‘Britishness.’ Their life of political activism and intellectual exploration demonstrates that they were not naïve to the basic prejudices of an imperial civilization that constructed race and nation in particular ways as a strategy for power. There is also a clear sense that these men did not conceive of themselves as bound by racial or national identity. They could be ‘British,’ and ‘African,’ and ‘West Indian’ without exclusion. These blurred boundaries of race, class, and nation were, as James pointed out, a combined product of a particular experience of Caribbean social structure, and migration.

Recent literary scholarship has also attempted to articulate a common experience in the group of black intellectuals with which Padmore engaged – a common experience characterized not by diversity and internationalization. In his influential study of the

¹⁰ James, *At the Rendezvous*, 205.

¹¹ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 103-116.

¹² Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917-1945*.

¹³ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 9.

black diaspora in the interwar period, Brent Hayes Edwards describes the diasporic consciousness these men were articulating as an imagined transnational form of black nationality. Edwards focuses on difference as central to the ways in which Padmore and others invented a ‘black international.’¹⁴ More recently, Michelle Ann Stephens has taken this concept of transnational difference further to argue that in the ideas of West Indian radicals such as Marcus Garvey, Claude McKay, and C.L.R. James, the ‘inescapable hybridity of imperial history is revealed.’¹⁵ For Stephens, the discourse of these men commonly expressed the history of movement experienced by the black diaspora, creating global stories of their race that found expression through varied political forms and political bodies.

While Stephens’ notion of hybridity highlights the diversity of the colonial experience, ‘hybridity’ also incorrectly implies that this diversity can be transformed into one form. This study asks – can looking at one individual person change our understanding of the black diaspora in the 20th century? How does the crossing of individual boundaries, and the agency of a single person operating within a particular framework which has been described as emblematic, alter not just the fragment but the whole mirror? In this, it considers Putnam’s warning to ensure due consideration for the uniqueness of lives which, in microhistorical studies, are often treated as ‘explanatory variables.’¹⁶ What the life of George Padmore shows is that the agency available to these well-travelled black men allowed them to translate their common experiences into diverse forms of action that cannot be packaged into one hybrid type. This chapter thus engages with three notions: of hybridity, of commonality and difference, and of the extent to which Padmore’s origins can be transformed into a common type. It shows that the West Indian colonial experience created a common demand for dignity and freedom but that different strategies could be found to respond to the same injustices based on individual agency. Padmore’s youth in Trinidad formed a base which then could be translated in different ways based on the encounters he made in the United States. These encounters,

¹⁴ Edwards, ‘Inventing the Black International,’ in *Practice of Diaspora*, 241-305.

¹⁵ Stephens, *Black Empire*, 8.

¹⁶ Putnam, ‘To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World,’ 618.

in Padmore's case, set him on a path very different from the one originally chosen in colonial Trinidad.¹⁷

2 Growing up in Colonial Trinidad

2.1 *Ancestry and class*

The village of Arouca lies along the base of the Northern Range mountains, about 12 miles inland from Port of Spain. The town spread around the vast estate plantations that produced Trinidad's primary export, sugar. East Indian indentured labour began arriving on the island after 1845 in order to supplant the loss of African slave labour. During the second half of the 19th century the Aroucan demographic was infused with not only East Indian plantation labour, but a smaller number of Chinese, Portuguese, and Syrian immigrants who opened successful businesses in the District. In 1901 the village population stood at 1,947, and the total island population at 255,148.¹⁸ There was no practicing doctor resident in Arouca and, typical of most Trinidadian communities, the chief leadership in the town fell upon the parish priests and the headmaster of the local school. James Hubert Alphonso (Hubert) Nurse, an 'outstanding example of the self-made black'¹⁹ in Trinidad, was headmaster in the village of Arouca when Malcolm Nurse was born. Nurse (Padmore) was thus born into a home characterized by leadership, hard work, and good standing in the community. Malcolm Nurse bore the mark both of his father and of the West Indian middle class.

Hubert Nurse was appointed to the Arouca Church of England (E.C.) School in 1894, just one year after becoming qualified as a second class schoolmaster. He was promoted quickly to St. Mary's E.C. School in neighbouring Tacarigua, where he taught for eight years. After earning his first class qualification in 1900 by raising the standard of the school, he moved back to Arouca to become headmaster of the Arouca Roman Catholic School in 1902. In James's unfinished biography, he goes into some detail about the role of the headmaster in the local community in Trinidad. He pointed out

¹⁷ This point is also made by Schwarz, when he notes that Padmore's 'politics forced an abrupt separation from the modes of life which an aspiring colonial professional would have anticipated'. Schwarz, 'George Padmore' in Schwarz, ed. *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, 132.

¹⁸ Maharajh, *Arouca: A Trinidad Village and its People*, 181.

¹⁹ Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*, 92.

that the children of headmasters grew up in a household with an ‘atmosphere...of social intellectual and moral responsibility to a community.’²⁰ Yet James’s description of being reared in the home of a headmaster is more his own story than that of Malcolm Nurse: James’s father was a headmaster during his whole childhood while Padmore’s father stopped being a headmaster before Malcolm Nurse turned five years old. The career of Hubert Nurse took off after 1904, when he entered the civil service. In 1899, the colonial government introduced the study of agriculture into the curriculum of its schools. Hubert Nurse embraced this new curriculum and became an expert in the field: he served as Senior Instructor of agriculture at the Western Boys School in Port of Spain from 1904-1905, before becoming Superintendent of the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1906. He had built up such a name for himself that in 1908 he was sent to Grenada at the request of their government to conduct research on the cocoa and nutmeg plantations attacked by fungoid diseases.

Education, to be discussed further in the next section, was a fundamental feature which marked the West Indian middle class.²¹ The values of a Western-style education were indoctrinated into a Caribbean middle-class that owed their advancement largely to that education, and thus modeled an ideology of ‘respectability’ upon these Victorian values.²² One of the significant ways this ‘respectability’ manifested itself was in physical presentation. Much has been made of the dress and demeanor, meticulously maintained as that of a respectable gentleman, of many in the West Indian middle-class. Late in life, George Padmore’s friends and colleagues repeatedly described him in similar terms. Peter Abrahams described Padmore as ‘always neatly dressed, with crease-lines in his usually dark trousers and spotless white shirt under jacket and tie. His shoes always shone.’²³ James noted that Padmore ‘was a West Indian of the old school. Always everything in order.’²⁴ However, this comportment was also an indication of the strict, rigid boundaries of class. For James, there was a stifling ‘intolerable restriction’ of race and class to life in the West Indies.²⁵ The accommodations made to race and class by Trinidad’s middle-class displayed a complacency which James felt was important to Padmore’s subsequent rebellion.

²⁰ Introduction to Memoirs of George Padmore, undated. James MSS/UWI, box 18, folder 347.

²¹ For a succinct definition of class in Trinidad at the time see Singh, *Race and Class Struggles*, xix-xx.

²² Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 2.

²³ Abrahams, *The Black experience in the 20th century*, 36-8.

²⁴ James, *At the Rendezvous*, 254.

²⁵ James, ‘Notes on the life of George Padmore,’ 6.

In this sense, C.L.R. James seems to have admired the conviction of Padmore's father: he projected Padmore's home as one of educated, radical defiance. James described the home of Hubert Nurse as filled from floor to ceiling, on all four walls, with books: 'the only room of the kind I ever saw in Trinidad.'²⁶ What was critical for James was that Padmore's father left the Christian church and openly declared himself a Muslim. According to James, after a heated altercation on issues of science and agriculture with the head of the science department in Trinidad Nurse resigned his post and became a private tutor. The argument, however, was fuelled by deeper problems with Trinidadian society which led to Nurse becoming a Muslim. This act, C.L.R. James argued, was a way of 'defining his utter rejection of the regime to which he had always been opposed.'²⁷ James's version of Padmore's childhood thus placed him in the same middle-class background as James himself and of the 'West Indian intellectual', but also established Padmore's primary role model as distinctly radical. That knowledge was preeminent, and that open acts of defiance towards an unjust administration were honorable, were principles demonstrated to Malcolm Nurse through his father.

Padmore, however, appears to have retained a different memory of his childhood home. When asked in 1935 to describe himself to a prospective publishing agent, Padmore first categorized himself as 'the son of middle class intellectuals' – a description that sits well with James's thesis. However, Padmore imparts this label with a certain amount of contempt. In the 1930s, in the pages of *International African Opinion*, Padmore described his experience of the 'narrow limitations of West Indian middle class society' that failed to see the plight of the working class.²⁸ Years later, in the only written record Padmore ever made of his father, he supplemented the latter description by stating that he had been 'brought up in a stuffy mid-Victorian middle class home in which politics was anathema.'²⁹ Padmore's perception that politics were not a part of his home is absolutely critical in the context of how Padmore chose to live his life. In 1955 Padmore set himself out as, with respect to politics, 'certainly not my father's son.' He described his father as 'a scientist [who] had nothing but utter contempt for politicians, who he considered a breed hardly better than pick-pockets.' With this,

²⁶ Typed manuscript of the memoirs of George Padmore, undated. James MSS/UWI, box 18, folder 347.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ George Padmore, 'A Patriot Has Fallen,' *International African Opinion* 1, no. 5 (November 1938), 16.

²⁹ Padmore, 'Bribery and Corruption Among British Statesmen,' *AEN*, 2 March 1955.

however, Padmore ‘heartily disagree[d].’³⁰ Thus where James saw a defiant West Indian intellectual whose rejection of the religious establishment was a political act against ‘the regime’, Padmore recalled a stifling apolitical home that he had left behind. Padmore saw in his home some of the political complacency James described as part of Trinidad’s social order.

The young Malcolm Nurse grew up in an environment that instilled in him a sense of pride in the possibilities of the black colonial community. His father’s involvement in one of the first branches of the Pan-African Congress³¹, and his production of books are the most obvious ways Padmore emulated his father. By 1921, however, Hubert Nurse was suffering from prolonged illness from diabetes mellitus. He was working on a book about the natural history of the West Indies when he died in 1922 at the age of 50.³² Malcolm Nurse was not yet twenty years old.

2.2 *Education and the defining of racial boundaries*

Little is known of Malcolm Nurse’s own education beyond the research completed by James Hooker in the 1960s, who found Nurse’s school career to be ‘undistinguished’.³³ He attended the Tranquility Primary School in Port of Spain, before enrolling at St. Mary’s College of the Immaculate Conception, one of the top two prestigious secondary schools in the country.³⁴ After two years, Nurse transferred to Pamphylian High School and graduated from this school in 1918.³⁵ Pamphylian High School was a private secondary school started in 1907 as an alternative to the prestigious public schools that were often unaffordable or inaccessible because of social status requirements for a number of parents who wished their children to gain a secondary education. By 1915, the size of the school allowed for the lowering of fees and the provision of the Cambridge School Certificate examination.³⁶ Despite the lack of detail on Malcolm Nurse’s early years in school, a better picture of his education can be traced by looking

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Cudjoe, *Beyond Boundaries*, 366.

³² ‘Death of Mr Hubert Nurse,’ undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 2.

³³ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 3.

³⁴ Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*, 72-74.

³⁵ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 3.

³⁶ Campbell, *The Young Colonials*, 250-251.

at the school system in general in Trinidad and in particular at its capacity for promoting social mobility.

Firstly, the Trinidadian school system was quintessentially British. Eric Williams, in his autobiography *Inward Hunger*, notes that “‘Be British’ was the slogan not only of the Legislature but also of the school.”³⁷ The impulse to master the language of the colonizer, argues sociologist Ivar Oxaal, “laid the linguistic foundation for the communication of political ideas to mass audiences which reached such a high standard in the colony.”³⁸ The demand for Malcolm Nurse as a speaker once he arrived in the United States, and his reputation as a speaker on colonial issues once he moved to Britain, shows that his early education certainly had an impact on his future career both as a speaker and a writer.

While education was the primary means of mobility for the ‘coloured’ and black middle class in the 19th and early 20th century,³⁹ it remained the preserve of a select few. Indeed, before World War II, less than one percent of West Indian children attended secondary school.⁴⁰ It also often served to further stratify Trinidadian society along racial and rural/urban lines. Indeed, the education system in Trinidad was dictated by discrete divisions, manipulated by the colonial government in order to provide a modicum of education while maintaining the racial and social status quo.⁴¹ Hubert Nurse’s professional transformation into an agricultural expert highlights a key contemporary debate about the purpose and availability of education. Brereton has shown that agriculture was added to the curriculum in order to ensure that the children of estate workers and rural labourers did not desire to rise above their station and leave the rural areas.⁴²

This fact had racial implications as well. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the east Indian indentured labourers and their descendants who chose to remain in

³⁷ Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 33.

³⁸ Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race and Class in Trinidad*, 43.

³⁹ Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad*, 127.

⁴⁰ Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 25.

⁴¹ Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 22. He noted that ‘Instead of the school helping to obliterate the differences of race, religion and nationality inherent in the demographic structure of Trinidad, it helped to accentuate them.’

⁴² Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad*, 79.

the rural areas. In 1911, only one in 10 Indian boys and one in 14 Indian girls were in school. While over half of the overall school-age population were still not attending school, the proportion of Indians for which education was denied was significantly greater.⁴³ This division led Eric Williams to conclude that ‘Instead of the school helping to obliterate the differences of race, religion and nationality inherent in the demographic structure of Trinidad, it helped to accentuate them.’⁴⁴

Padmore’s racial politics became a key feature of his future work, and therefore his experience of race in Trinidad is critical to understanding his future allegiances and, in particular, his articulation of a black international. The pride of race in colonial Trinidad, and in particular the pride of a black middle class, held connotations specific to an island in which status was often closely linked to race, and distinctions of colour and origin often corresponded to a person’s status (i.e. the ‘coloured’ or ‘mixed’ population typically held a higher social position). For James, the fact that Padmore was *black* rather than ‘coloured,’ was crucially important.⁴⁵ The fact that he had grown up experiencing a distinguished black community, family, and model, prefigured Padmore’s own racial pride and the indignation in later life at being treated as a lesser race. James noted the importance of Malcolm Nurse’s mother’s maiden name, Symister, as a prominent black family in a unique Trinidadian village. Mr Symister, Malcolm Nurse’s grandfather, had been mayor of the town of Arima, a small town dominated economically, politically and socially by black men. This Trinidadian town was built on the cocoa industry, another major export crop in Trinidad.⁴⁶ Its mayor and Town Clerks occupied an unusual position of power for black men, but as town officials they were included in official functions at Government House.⁴⁷ When the young Malcolm Nurse spent his vacations in Arima with his mother’s family he therefore experienced a unique environment full of empowered black men. His racial education in Trinidad, both in and out of school, provides insight into the way in which he would have conceived of anti-colonial politics once he was outside Trinidad.

⁴³ For a good analysis of the relationship on the ground between those of African and Indian descent, see Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, 23.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 22.

⁴⁵ James, *Notes on the Life of George Padmore*, 46.

⁴⁶ Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*, 18. While sugar remained a cornerstone of Trinidadian society, in 1911 cocoa superseded sugar as the country’s main income.

⁴⁷ Typed manuscript of the memoirs of George Padmore. James MSS/UWI, box 17, folder 347.

Alongside James's insistence upon understanding Padmore as a *black* man from colonial Trinidad, it is important to consider also 'the need to speak of blackness as many things, not one, and as a phenomenon worthy of historical scrutiny in each of the differentiated sites and moments in which it occurs.'⁴⁸ Padmore, unlike James, did not speak of his 'blackness.' Nor did he leave a record of his personal reflections on the restrictions of his skin colour as George Lamming did. He would later speak of race in a clinical rather than a personal way. He wrote in books of the plight of the 'Negro worker' within a global imperial system. In his journalism, he promoted the achievements of cultural and political leaders and covered the numerous iterations of the 'colour bar' in Britain and its colonies. Although James's analysis is valuable for situating Padmore within a particular racial experience, in Padmore's case there is little evidence that he articulated his own racial experiences into a *personal* protest. Cesaire's Negritude was expressed in very personal ways in an attempt to articulate a common 'black soul' (the 'soul' giving individuality to a general experience). Garvey's black unity had its greatest expression in a communal demand for the restoration of dignity. Alternatively, Padmore inserted racism into a larger system, conceived and executed as a major component of imperialism. His future focus on Africa would be a manifestation of this understanding of the need to rectify racial injustice by restoring dignity where it was first stolen. Thus 'blackness' varied not only in skin tone, geographical locality, or moments. Its 'differentiated sites' should include the multiple ways in which individuals reinterpreted it outward into the political space of resistance as personal, communal, or finally as systemic, as Padmore did.

2.3 *Newspapers and Labour Unrest*

The avenues available for an aspiring, educated young black man in Trinidad following secondary school were limited. Here Hooker's remark that Padmore's secondary school career was 'undistinguished' is important, since it pointed Padmore towards the United States rather than Great Britain. The Island Scholarship to British universities numbered just three a year, and it was clear that his secondary school performance would not secure him a scholarship. He could either enter a profession in Trinidad at entry level, or pursue university at his own expense in the United States. Malcolm

⁴⁸ Torres-Saillant, 'One and Divisible,' 8. See also Wright, *Becoming Black*, 26.

Nurse did not immediately pursue higher education, but instead secured a job with the *Trinidad Guardian*, a daily newspaper that was ‘regarded as the most powerful voice of White ruling class interests in the colony.’⁴⁹ He was charged with reporting the shipping news for the paper. This consisted of a daily report of steamer and schooner movements, the ship’s contents, destination, and a list of passengers arriving and departing the island. This work gave him an awareness of the vitality of a port to the flow of goods as well as the flow of information – knowledge he would utilize later to spread his own literature.

In the years that he would have been working for the newspaper, the column increased in size from taking up less than a quarter of a single broadsheet in 1919-1920 to requiring half a page by 1922.⁵⁰ The increase after 1921 indicates the economic recovery on the island after an initial post-war economic depression. This depression had created labour unrest in the colony and in 1919, like many parts of the colonial empire, Trinidad erupted in strikes across the island.⁵¹ The *Trinidad Guardian* covered the unrest with little sympathy for the workers. An article printed in early January 1920 argued that it was a ‘fallacy’ to believe that the worker’s ‘audacious demand’ for increased wages would bring industrial and economic development to the island.⁵² However, in 1920 the editor believed that Trinidad had little to be worried about when it came to this industrial unrest, since ‘Trinidad is an agrarian society’ and would remain so since prices for these commodities remained high. What the editor did not acknowledge, however, was the fact that this ‘agrarian society,’ after the end of indentured labour in November 1918, was simultaneously facing the loss of stability from a crucial portion of its estate workers. The editor’s stated confidence therefore did not prevent the paper from underhanded attempts to keep East Indian labour on the estates. East Indian labour unrest was singled out in the paper through numerous stories

⁴⁹ Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State*, 17. Padmore’s work for the paper is confirmed in a clipping of the Obituary for Edward J. Partridge, no date, no paper. George Padmore collection. The Alma Jordan Library, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter cited as Padmore MSS/UWI), vol. 1.

⁵⁰ The paper claimed to hold the largest net sales on the island. *Trinidad Guardian*, 1 January 1920.

⁵¹ Singh, *Race and Class Struggles*, 14-20.

⁵² ‘Retrospect and Forecast,’ *Trinidad Guardian*, January 1 & 4, 1920.

of the ‘criminal’ activities of East Indian workers.⁵³ These stories were only run with reference to East Indian labourers.

Thus Malcolm Nurse began his journalistic career in a period when racial and class conflict were at a high point and when changes in the colonial economic structure, including the growth of the oil industry, were challenging conventional imperial governance. Indeed, James argued that Padmore’s observation of the subordination and humiliation his black colleagues on the *Trinidad Guardian* were subjected to by their white editor, were part of what inspired Padmore to seek a future outside Trinidad. Indeed, James has argued that Padmore’s observation of the subordination and humiliation his black colleagues on the *Guardian* were subjected to were part of what inspired Padmore to seek a future outside Trinidad.⁵⁴ While his ‘utter contempt’ for Edward J. Partridge, ‘one of the most arrogant agents of British imperialism,’⁵⁵ did not appear in print while he worked for the paper, these years were an invaluable education that would provide the base for a career spent using journalism to highlight race and labour issues across the colonial world.

2.4 *Marriage*

Like his education, his marriage was a mark of his family’s place in Trinidadian society. The cost alone of a wedding was a mitigating factor for a significant percentage of the population. In 1911, 73 of every 100 males and 64 of every 100 females were unmarried.⁵⁶ Marriage was thus a mark of Malcolm Nurse’s status and indicated his intentions to pursue a middle class existence. A marriage of this kind would require a good, professional income with which a family could be raised and a respectable home provided. It was partly with this intention that he left for Harlem at the end of 1924 to pursue a university degree in a good profession.⁵⁷

⁵³ For example, see ‘East Indian Striker Convicted,’ *Trinidad Guardian*, Jan 1, 1920; ‘Wounding in the Harbour – East Indian Remanded,’ and ‘Alleged Unlawful Possession, East Indian Barber Arrested,’ *Trinidad Guardian*, 13 January 1920.

⁵⁴ James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore,’ 5.

⁵⁵ Handwritten notes beside Obituary for Edward J. Partridge. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁵⁶ Williams, *Inward Hunger*, 18.

⁵⁷ For a good description of the role of education in social mobility and West Indian respectability, see Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 22-46.



Figure 2: Marriage of George Padmore and Julia Semper (both seated)

This is not to imply that Malcolm Nurse did not also pursue further education for intellectual reasons. Nor is it to imply that there was no affection in the marriage – the fact that Padmore maintained contact with Julia Semper for decades after their separation and included her in his will, shows that he did not take lightly his commitment to her.⁵⁸ Malcolm Nurse's marriage to Julia Semper is important, rather, from a biographical perspective since, firstly, it demonstrates his early vision of what would be important for his life and secondly, it stands as one of the critical 'traces' which, though often ignored, remained a part of his life.

3 USA – Radicalization of a West Indian

Lamming wrote that 'I think America played some part in the wisdom which Nkrumah acknowledged as Padmore's gift to the most tempestuous continent at sea.'⁵⁹ Indeed,

⁵⁸ Last Will and Testament of George Padmore, 30 June 1951. George Padmore Letters, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter referred to as Padmore MSS/Schomburg/MG 624).

⁵⁹ Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile*, 155.

Padmore's move to the United States, this chapter argues, was a critical juncture in his life. What Padmore experienced while in the United States propelled him into politics and activism and stands as a critical trace upon his life that marked him as different from a number of West Indian intellectuals whom James identified. Contrary to James and Lamming, Padmore moved to the United States to train for a profession, not to be a writer. His first experience outside Trinidad was not within the bounds of the 'mother country.' These were an important sign of the difference between Padmore and men like James and Lamming, which will be discussed in Chapter Six. His radicalism was shaped by his experience of race in America, and of the influence of the Communist Party in the regions he inhabited. His goal of training for a profession at a university, and his subsequent involvement with student politics, thrust him in the direction of direct activism rather than solitary intellectualism.

3.1 From family life to student politics: Fisk and Howard Universities

Malcolm Nurse arrived in New York City on the SS Mayaro, on 29 December, 1924.⁶⁰ His stated destination was Nashville Tennessee, although he did not enroll at Fisk University in Nashville until the autumn term, 1925. After arriving in the United States, Nurse's focus seems to have remained upon all the necessary steps required to achieve a post-secondary education and build a home for his family. However while at Fisk, and certainly by the time he moved to New York at the end of 1927 and began commuting to Howard University in Washington, DC, politics absorbed much of his energy and focus. His university career provided the experience in student politics and the networks to alter his life away from a standard professional career and towards radical politics.

Upon his arrival, Nurse went to Harlem and took a course in sociology at Columbia University.⁶¹ In a letter home he mentioned several companions from the West Indies, including his good friend Cyril Olivierre, who would later be his companion at Howard and whom Padmore remained in correspondence with throughout the 1930s and 1940s. By the summer of 1925, he had taken work with the Hudson River Day Line, a

⁶⁰ Ellis Island Record Collection, http://www.ellisisland.org/search/matchMore.asp?LNM=NURSE&PLNM=NURSE&last_kind=0&RF=619&kind=exact&offset=350&dwpdone=1. Accessed 1 April 2009.

⁶¹ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 5.

steamship company that ran a daily passenger service from Albany to New York. It is not clear what his work entailed, although by September 1925 he did find time to write a letter to his sister in-law en route from Albany. In his letter to Sybil Semper, he noted that the year of study would require roughly \$250, but he only had about \$100 upon entering. The decision to begin at Fisk was thus, financially, a leap of faith. Yet his determined idealism led him to believe that ‘the greatest asset to youth is COURAGE, in capital letters.’⁶² The young Malcolm Nurse also stated clearly his purpose in undertaking study in the United States and the vision he had for his future:

I am determined not to let any obstruction keep me back for Jules and Blyden are to be provided for later on. Sybil, my greatest ambition in life can be summed up in a HOME – a real happy, beautiful, ideal home – not merely wood and paint. I bought a splendid book on home-furnishing and decorating some nights ago at a second-book store in Albany and its pages have done much to keep the fire burning. Live up! dearest. *A good family foundation will do much to make the future happy and comfortable for all.*⁶³

Several key insights come out of this passage. Firstly, while it may be that his determination to provide for his wife and family would have met an approving audience in his sister in-law, it seems likely that he did put considerable thought into the kind of home he wanted and the means required to achieve it. The shift that Malcolm Nurse’s priorities would take over the next three years is therefore even more intriguing. Yet the letter also points to an explanation for this future shift. His ambition for a happy home and family was not merely a selfish desire, but was actually rooted in a belief that this was a means of serving the greater good. Thus while his *modus operandi* may have shifted after 1929, his intentions could be seen to be consistent.

In moving to the United States in 1925, Malcolm Nurse not only stepped into the vibrant political and cultural environment of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro, but also the increasingly radical environment of the country’s black colleges and universities.⁶⁴ Kevin Gaines characterized these universities as ‘hybrid diasporic settings’ where black activists could ‘articulate the emergence of a modern political community defined by self-determination and freedom.’⁶⁵ Malcolm Nurse’s time at Fisk and Howard universities respectively, sets his experience apart from fellow West

⁶² George Padmore to Sybil Semper, September 15, 1925. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 2.

⁶³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁶⁴ King, ‘African Students in Negro American Colleges,’ 16-30.

⁶⁵ Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, 33.

Indians such as McKay, James, and Williams. It is therefore possible to contend that this period in his life was an important factor in setting him on a path more reminiscent of student organizational politics than the intellectual pursuits of these other West Indians. When Malcolm Nurse arrived in October 1925, Fisk University had recently experienced a student strike – one of a wave of student strikes at black colleges which objected to the ‘conservatism and white philanthropic control’ present in a number of colleges.⁶⁶ Nurse became involved at the school through the student newspaper, the *Fisk Herald*. He also made a name for himself as a debater, and because of his activities in the school, was the representative speaker for Fisk University at the Tennessee Conference of the Student Volunteer Movement.⁶⁷

Padmore kept one textbook ‘to remind me of my undergraduate days at Fisk University.’ *Literature of the World: An Introductory Study* stands rather alone on the shelf of his personal library in Accra; old, frayed, and marked extensively compared to the other books, it is surrounded by books on history and politics. Yet this book of collected fiction seems to have inspired Padmore. Inside the cover he made a note of ‘what a delightful course it was’ and thanked his teacher, Professor Lillian Corkin. The text surveyed literature from most regions of the world, and every section of the book is marked extensively. However his notes in the text show that what he was most drawn to were the political implications of the literature. He made special note in the section on French literature of Rene Maran as ‘the Negro’ who ‘won the Goncourt Prize for literature in 1922.’ In the section on Russian literature, he seems to have been most taken with Dostoyevsky (he made a note to read *The Idiot*) and especially with Tolstoy’s political transformation and his description of the peasantry and Russian life in *Anna Karenina*. Padmore thus felt himself drawn in a particular political direction through this course on world literature.

The first published writing attributed to Malcolm Nurse, outside of the student paper at Fisk, appeared in the *New York World* on 4 October 1926, in the form of a letter to the editor protesting the exploitative practice of stamp selling in Harlem. While Nurse’s objection to the stamp selling machines arose from his own personal concerns (he wrote to Julia that when she didn’t hear from him, it was because it was difficult to find

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 36.

⁶⁷ ‘Dr. Wilder Will Address Students,’ *Nashville Banner*, 1926. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

postage for a stamp)⁶⁸, he does link his concern to the issue of poverty in Harlem and the advantage given to those who could afford to buy more stamps at a cheaper rate.⁶⁹ Although Nurse's financial situation became a serious threat to his education, he was increasingly aware that his own problems were only a small part of issues with larger forces at play. While lamenting in the spring of 1926 the possibility of being removed from Fisk if he did not pay his bills more regularly, he declared to Julia that they should 'keep heart, [for] nations are having their problems much as individuals.'⁷⁰ His year at Fisk had thus been a difficult but informative one, and his engagement with journalism and student politics only increased after this.

Little has survived from Malcolm Nurse's second year at Fisk. Although Julia Nurse joined him at some point after the summer of 1926, there is no record of her arrival in New York in the Ellis Island records. She had, however, definitely arrived in New York by March 1927 since she received a birthday card from her mother.⁷¹ Once Nurse left Fisk sometime in 1927, evidence of his activities increase since he was now stationed in New York and Washington where newspapers and, in particular, Communist party activity were strong. Malcolm Nurse had experienced the radicalizing space of a southern black university – now he was to become immersed in the progressive environment of Harlem and of Howard University in Washington.

At Howard, Nurse made connections with several individuals whom he remained in correspondence with in the 1930s and 1940s, and who would form an integral link in his chain of networks from Europe, across to the United States and Africa. He became close with one of his professors, Dr. Ralph Bunche, who Padmore reconnected with in 1936 when Bunche was in London and involved with Padmore and James in founding the International African Service Bureau (see Chapter 3). Padmore's previous friendship with Cyril Olivierre also grew while at Howard, now that they were both students there. Olivierre was president of the campus Garvey Club,⁷² and Nurse became secretary of the International Anti-Imperialistic Youth League. The pair organized a protest against a campus event where British Ambassador Sir Esme Howard was the principal guest.

⁶⁸ Malcolm Nurse to Julia Nurse, 12 March 1926. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 2.

⁶⁹ 'The People's Forum,' *New York World*, 4 October, 1926. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁷⁰ Malcolm Nurse to Julia Nurse, 12 March, 1926. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 2.

⁷¹ Birthday card 'Mother Nurse' to Mrs Julie Nurse, 17 March 1927. *Ibid.*

⁷² Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 7.

Alain LeRoy Locke, a Rhodes scholar and one of Nurse's professors who he continued to correspond with over the next two decades, spoke at the event on the topic of the 'significance of the international mind.'⁷³ Several interesting points can be drawn from this incident. Firstly, Locke's speech resonated clearly with the development at this very moment of Padmore's own 'international mind,' as demonstrated in his letter to Julia discussed above. Secondly, the significance of Padmore's involvement in this protest becomes even richer since the protest was not just against Esme as an 'imperialist' but also because he was accused of playing a part in the deportation of Marcus Garvey. In this protest then, Nurse displayed his penchant for political pragmatism by protesting against a British ambassador for deporting a man whose ideas and politics he was openly hostile towards both at the time and in later years.⁷⁴ For example, in an article in the newspaper *Labour Unity* in 1929 Padmore called Garvey a 'black imposter' who had 'exploit[ed] the gullible workers of his race for his own interest.'⁷⁵

Thirdly, this event also raises the issue of naming for Nurse/Padmore, since this is one of the first recorded occasions in which he used George Padmore as his *nom de guerre*. Hooker argues that by 1928 'at the latest,' Padmore had adopted his *nom de guerre* 'when engaged in party business;' however, it seems that in 1928 he used the name intermittently to protect himself from political activities that posed a threat to his enrolment in school, rather than simply on party business. While he used the name for the protest against Esme, he did not use a *nom de guerre* in 1928 when campaigning at Howard University for the Communist Party during the U.S. election season. During mock presidential elections at Howard, the school newspaper declared 'one of the most attractive' speeches during the event to be from Malcolm Nurse, who 'rebuked the policies of the Socialists, the Democrats and the Republicans and made a strong plea in behalf of the Communist Party.'⁷⁶ In this case, he chose to use his Trinidadian name,

⁷³ 'Sir Esme Addresses Howard U Meeting: Ignores Propaganda by "Anti-Imperialistic" Youths Which Officials Repudiate,' *The Hilltop*, undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol 1.

⁷⁴ 'With the Negro Workers,' *Labour Unity*, 17 August, 1929. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol 1. See Chapter 3 for discussion of the confrontation between Padmore and Garvey in 1930s London.

⁷⁵ Padmore, 'With the Negro Workers,' *Labour Unity*, 17 August, 1929. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol 1.

⁷⁶ Roy S. Wynn, 'Straw Ballot Taken by Howard Students,' *The Hilltop*, no date. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol 1.

even while ‘declar[ing] himself a radical’ and associating himself with the Communist Party.⁷⁷

Padmore’s time at Fisk and Howard University thus provided a radicalizing space in which a young Trinidadian man, experienced in the prejudices inherent in colonial society, could transform his early experiences into active student politics. It was an opportunity to use both his writing and speaking skills, crafted in the ‘British’ education system in Trinidad, to denounce imperial power structures as part of contemporary American political life. Through these educational institutions Padmore began to be immersed deeper in political activism and party politics. The transformation from the home and family oriented Malcolm Nurse to George Padmore the political radical, had begun.

3.2 Party Activity and the Birth of Journalism as part of Padmore’s Program

In Malcolm Nurse’s case, it was not just the dynamic space of the university that transformed his politics, but also the effect of the politicized space he inhabited in New York after leaving Fisk in 1927. In New York Nurse was drawn into the circle of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) and, specifically, its efforts to revive the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC). The allure of the Communist Party for many young black men and women at the time was, as Hobsbawm has noted, the fact that ‘Nobody else in sight offered both to interpret the world and to change it.’⁷⁸ As a member of the ANLC Padmore led mass demonstrations, and participated in party conventions and union meetings.⁷⁹ Most importantly, his skills were also utilized as a journalist. No longer reporting shipping news for a conservative colonial newspaper, Padmore began to use this medium as a major tool in articulating his views on society and their political implications. His journalism in this period is useful for two reasons: firstly, it linked him to a number of other predominant West Indians (thus returning to James’s concern); and secondly, it provides the first examples of several characteristics that would remain typical of his journalistic career.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 55-56 quoted in Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*, 44.

⁷⁹ For example, in the winter of 1929 Padmore spoke in a closed meeting at the American convention of the Communist Party about the difficulties faced by the Party. ‘Meeting with Negro Delegates.’ RGASPI 495/155/67.

Hooker claims that Nurse/Padmore was under party discipline from mid-1927.⁸⁰ By August 1928 he had been nominated as a member of the re-organized National Negro Committee of the Communist Party of the USA (under the name of Comrade Padmore).⁸¹ It was on this committee that Padmore interacted directly with some of the first leaders in African American communism such as Cyril Briggs, Richard B. Moore, Otto Huiswoud, and James W. Ford – men who would all be involved later in denouncing him in the American communist press when he was expelled in 1934. Otto Huiswoud was the first black charter member of the CPUSA, who was assigned by the Party to work in the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). West Indian Cyril Briggs founded the ABB and, while theoretically remaining separate from the Party, the organization was often associated with Bolshevism and communism. The ABB had been at the forefront of opposing Garveyism and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the first half of the decade. The ABB folded, however, when the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) was founded in 1925.⁸²

The ANLC, however, had difficulty living up to its expectations. Mark Solomon's work on black American communism during this period shows that the organization was hampered from the beginning by its direct association with the Communist Party and, in particular, its open policy to white communists. In addition, it had little success in building broad based community interracial councils and its paper, *The Negro Champion*, always struggled.⁸³ In 1928, an attempt was made to revive the Congress, with a relocation of headquarters from Chicago to Harlem. This was the point at which Padmore became involved with the Congress. In a heated debate in August 1928 over the position of the ANLC in the Party's work, Padmore was nominated as the District Organizer for the ANLC.⁸⁴ The ANLC quickly began using Padmore's writing talent by assigning him to craft a proposal for a rent strike in the *Negro Champion*, in support of its activities with Harlem residents. While his activity with the party included

⁸⁰ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 6.

⁸¹ 'Minutes of the First Meeting, Re-organized Negro Committee (National)', 14 August, 1928. Files of the CPUSA in the Comintern Archives, 1919-1943, microfilm, Library of Congress, Washington D.C. (hereafter cited as CPUSA MSS/LOC), reel 104, delo 1366.

⁸² Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 29.

⁸³ Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 52-67.

⁸⁴ 'Minutes of the National Sub-Committee of the CEC on Negro Work,' 17 August, 1928. CPUSA MSS/LOC, reel 104, delo 1366.

touring as a speaker and other agitational activity (the *Daily Worker* holds accounts of Padmore traveling by 1929 to give speeches at conventions), it was his journalistic skills which formed the basis of his involvement with the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA).⁸⁵ He began regularly publishing articles in *The Negro Champion* after the spring of 1928 and by September, was nominated as assistant editor of the paper.⁸⁶

Padmore's brief journalistic career in New York is crucial since it demonstrates that, from an early stage, Padmore's journalism was foundational to his agitational work. His articles in the *Negro Champion* and the *Daily Worker* were often rousing calls to the New Negro and Negro Youth to take *action* against the exploitation of all blacks: American, African, and West Indian. In June 1928, two articles were published by George Padmore in the *Negro Champion*: one a review of a booklet for the West African Students Union in London by Ladipo Solanke, the other an obituary for a young West Indian named Eugene Corbie, who had been a prominent figure in American student life.⁸⁷ In order to establish the tone of Padmore's writing, it is worth quoting from his articles in the *Negro Champion* at length.

The time has come for Negro youth, students and workers...to take a more definite and active interest in world problems...We have seen our brothers massacred on foreign battlefields in defence of the very imperialist social order that today crushes them to earth...Let us join with the masses of the rising colonial peoples and militant class conscious workers to struggle for the establishment of a free and equitable world order.⁸⁸

The New Negro has to realize that the salvation and emancipation of any oppressed group can only be achieved by those who in the face of great odds have the courage to raise the standard of revolt. For he who dares to be free, must himself strike a blow for freedom.⁸⁹

These excerpts contain a forceful statement of the responsibility of African-Americans to take positive action against imperialism and oppression. It was a call for the New Negro movement to be more than a social and cultural revolution in American terms,

⁸⁵ 'Workers Center Gala Opening is Celebrated Here,' undated; 'Sending Labor Jury to Charlotte Trial: Picket Two "Jim Crow" Hotels,' *Daily Worker* 2 September 1929. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁸⁶ 'Minutes of Meeting of the National Negro Committee,' 7 September, 1928. CPUSA MSS/Tamiment, reel 104, delo 1366.

⁸⁷ Padmore, 'African Nationalist Movement, Students Demand Country's Freedom,' 20 June 1928; Padmore, 'Tribute to a Young Leader,' *Negro Champion*, undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁸⁸ George Padmore, 'Awakened Negro Youth,' *Negro Champion*, 1928. Ibid.

⁸⁹ Padmore, 'Great Negro Revolutionists,' *Negro Champion*, 22 June 1928. Ibid.

and instead to recognize also the connection between the situation of the Negro in America, and the global system of imperialism.

Thus Padmore's early writing for these newspapers displayed one of the key characteristics of his future journalism: a keen awareness of audience which dictated, to a certain extent, the subject matter and style of writing. In June 1928 he claims to have written an article for the *West Indian Times and American Review*, which reported on a meeting of British West Indian war veterans. It was an objective reporting of events, containing no obvious praise or criticism. But on 23 June Padmore published a subsequent article in the *Negro Champion* decrying the inability of these veterans to see how their present status was a direct result of the colonial oppression which, by fighting for Britain in the last war, they had actually helped to perpetuate. The article ended by demanding that 'every New Negro should raise his voice in protesting against the policy of militarizing black men.'⁹⁰ Clearly reflecting the different audiences the articles were written for, the first article shied away from editorializing events; while the second, written for a communist newspaper, politicized the meeting in a manner not deemed appropriate for the audience of the *West Indian Times*.

Padmore's articles between 1928 and 1929 also display the evolution of Malcolm Nurse into the communist George Padmore.⁹¹ Articles in the first half of 1928 were written for the *Negro Champion* and often focused upon events or individuals in the African diaspora, with some class consciousness displayed but a greater emphasis placed upon anti-imperialism and Negro unity.⁹² However, by late 1928 his articles ran with titles allied much more concretely to the communist movement, such as 'Heroic Soviet Saviors,' 'An Appeal to Negro Workers,' and 'Russian Culture Attracts Americans.'⁹³ In late 1928 and 1929, he also began publishing under the name George Padmore in *The Daily Worker*, with articles that urged black and white unity and the Communist Party as the protector of black interests.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ For Padmore's emphasis upon class at this time, see Worrell, *George Padmore: Social and Political Thought*, 74-75.

⁹² 'Youth in Military Camps,' *Negro Champion*, 8 August 1928. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁹³ Padmore, 'Heroic Soviet Saviors,' *Negro Champion*, 8 August 1928; 'An Appeal to Negro Workers,' *Negro Champion*, 17 November 1928; 'Russian Culture Attracts Americans,' *Negro Champion*, 1928. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁹⁴ 'Negro Workers Should Join Workers Party,' *The Daily Worker* September 1928; 'Labor Bureaucrats and Negro Worker,' *Daily Worker*, 3 January 1929. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

The ways in which Padmore chose to represent himself at this time are also interesting. Although Padmore was a student throughout his time in the United States, he was billed as a speaker at party events and conventions as a ‘Negro worker.’⁹⁵ Subsequent chapters will examine his continued use of this title, as well as his representation as an ‘African.’ It is not clear whether Padmore viewed himself as a worker rather than a student, since he was required to be employed more often than not in order to make ends meet and pay for tuition. But the shifting representations of his own identity are actually critical to understanding the kind of person George Padmore was: his identity combined a genuine identification with oppressed groups of people, with a pragmatic approach to politics and the role of audience.

While the labels of ‘African’ and ‘worker’ would have been more expedient and popularly recognized for officials and the general public, it was as a journalist and a West Indian that the emerging George Padmore most accurately fit a particular label. In the decade before Padmore arrived in the USA, at least three well-known West Indians had developed and utilized the press to advance their own fight for black rights. As mentioned above, Cyril Briggs, a native of the Caribbean island of Nevis, had worked as a journalist for the *Amsterdam News* before founding his own journal, *The Crusader*. Claude McKay wrote for and edited the prestigious *Liberator* in the early 1920s, and Marcus Garvey sponsored the *Negro World*. All these papers rose out of the black American movement and were influenced by each other in a number of ways. George Padmore fit into this journalistic tradition of a number of West Indians. His journalism has often been seen as a means of survival, of earning some income for himself. Even when scholars have recognized that his articles performed an important function in building a black international,⁹⁶ they have still been unable to show his own belief that his journalism was part of his political work. Yet as has already been demonstrated above, Padmore’s journalism in *The Daily Worker* and *The Negro Champion* were actually a key part of his work for the Communist Party, and their contents included impassioned calls to action which represented his current ideology.

⁹⁵ ‘Workers Center Gala Opening is Celebrated Here,’ no newspaper title, undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁹⁶ Polsgrove, ‘George Padmore’s use of Periodicals to Build a Movement,’ in Baptiste and Lewis, eds. *George Padmore*, 97-104.

Like Briggs, McKay, and Garvey then, Padmore utilized the black radical press as a means of propagating his message. This message included a demand for unity and a call to action for the black population. It was also, sometimes, engaged directly with his West Indian predecessors. Contained in the personal papers kept by Julia Nurse are two typed, unpublished articles: one a review of his professor, Alain Leroy Locke's, *The New Negro* (which included a section on Claude McKay); the other an article about Marcus Garvey that appears to have been written for the *Negro Worker*. The article on Garvey is a communist critique of Garvey as a capitalist, whose tactics were well-meaning but delusional. Although it concluded that Garvey was 'the most loud-mouthed demagogue in his race' who 'is certainly going from bad to worse', it opened by admitting that Garveyism had also 'done much to arouse the consciousness of the Negro masses in America and other parts of the world.'⁹⁷ While differing 'on several occasions on programs and methods of tactics,' Padmore noted that the communists stepped back when Garvey was suffering in prison in the United States. This tactic would later be carried through by Padmore himself when, James argued, Padmore marked his disdain for the Communist Party and the Soviet Union's policies towards colonial peoples but never openly attacked the Soviets for fear of how it would be used by the British to their advantage.⁹⁸

The article on McKay offers a glimpse of Padmore rarely seen after he left the United States. He used emotive language in his writing that showed his reaction to the way in which McKay's poetry could describe his own homeland. But it was, in the end, McKay's 'true revolutionary character' that drew Padmore to McKay's writing – not his ability to recall the West Indies. Padmore noted that although McKay had originally intended to receive an education in scientific farming and return to his native Jamaica to work with the peasants on the island, he was 'too revolutionary a soul to be disciplined by the formal life of a college.'⁹⁹ In this observation Padmore seems to be writing a little of himself into the article, contending that the revolutionary spirit was incompatible with the professional path set out for most West Indians which proscribed post-secondary education overseas followed by a respectable career in the Caribbean. It was the spirit of radicalism in both Garvey and McKay which attracted Padmore, and it

⁹⁷ Padmore, 'Garveyism Exposed,' undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

⁹⁸ James, *Notes on the Life of George Padmore*, 13.

⁹⁹ 'A Jamaican Poet,' undated. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

was this spirit which moved all three men to leave their respective West Indian island behind them and become international.

Although he originally entered the United States to gain a degree and build a prosperous home for his new family, his participation in the radicalizing space of African American universities at the time, and the attraction of the CPUSA as a party that appeared to be actively considering the condition of black people in the world and which personally embraced his talents, won over his allegiance.

Conclusion

George Padmore grew up in an environment that instilled in him a sense of pride in the possibilities of the black colonial community. A British education, coupled with a racial structure that embodied levels of inequality and a culture of unacknowledged difference, imbued him with the distinctly schizophrenic colonial experience of Trinidad. While his stint as a shipping news reporter for the *Trinidad Guardian* increased Padmore's awareness of the degrading conditions inherent within colonial rule in the Caribbean, it is clear that his greatest inspiration to move directly into a life of political work occurred in the United States. There he received his first taste of party politics and gained greater experience both of running a newspaper and in writing for one.

Padmore came out of the West Indies and this shaped him in profound ways that conform to a certain type – a highly educated, articulate group of young men who were racially and socially aware. They then used their skills to fight the injustice they saw in the treatment of colonials and, particularly, the Negro race. The mastery of newspapers as an effective communication tool is probably the most important way in which Padmore linked, both historically and via contemporary dialogue, with his fellow West Indian emigrants. His own mastery of journalism while in the United States became a thread traversing the rest of his career. His leadership in this area led to his position as editor of the *Negro World* from Hamburg, followed by editorship of the British Independent Labour Party's journal, *Left*, in the 1940s, and through to his use of articles in Gold Coast newspapers to build Kwame Nkrumah's programme in the 1950s.

James's memorialization of Padmore serves to contextualize a man who so rarely wrote about his 'self' or his politics. His search for Padmore 'the West Indian' is an important part of the process of creating a historical narrative of Padmore. On the other hand, James writes about Padmore's childhood, family and racial experience in ways Padmore did not himself ever publicly or privately (as far as can be ascertained) express. Factually then, we should be careful to read James's description of Padmore with some caution. We cannot look for Padmore only in the West Indies or in James's definition of a West Indian man. The colonial experience Padmore shared with fellow West Indians and other colonials formed only the possibility of a common end rather than a hybrid imperial history. Padmore's profound political commitment to activism distinguished him from most of the 'remarkable West Indian men' whom James listed. This difference, this all-consuming commitment to an active political life, was evident firstly in the fact that Padmore left the West Indies in order to train for a *profession* – not as an intellectual pursuit. Secondly, this difference was forged through his training in student politics at black American universities and with the CPUSA. 'George Padmore,' therefore, was formed both by the West Indies and by the United States. These two experiences combined to create the person who sailed for the Soviet Union in 1929 and committed the rest of his life to political activism.

The fact that James never completed his biography of Padmore is crucial to this analysis. He rightly sought an explanation for Padmore's achievements in the legacy of his geographical and familial history.¹⁰⁰ Yet even in James's explanations for these 'remarkable West Indian men' discussed above, it seems that he felt a final account of Padmore had eluded him. There are at least two explanations for this. Firstly, Padmore's story was, in many ways, also James's history. There is a sense in James's search for an explanation of Padmore as a West Indian type that he cannot extricate himself from this story. Indeed, in the 1980s James stated that if he worked on the biography any longer it would have to be classed as an autobiography.¹⁰¹ Secondly, Padmore's archival record is so limited. James's files for the Padmore biography are

¹⁰⁰ Leonard Cassuto has termed this methodology the 'secret self' biography that predominated for most of the 20th Century. Cassuto, 'The Silhouette and the Secret Self,' 1249-1261.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Schwarz, 'George Padmore,' in Schwarz, ed. *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, 133. Schwarz shares a certain warning of James's tributes to Padmore as being 'pardonably excessive.' Schwarz, 'George Padmore,' 134.

littered with failed attempts he made to gather documentation on Padmore's movements.

Even today, understanding Padmore requires significant speculation – particularly when it comes to Padmore and the West Indies. Thus creating the ‘inventory’ that Gramsci suggests is not possible. This does not mean that it is impossible to construct a narrative of Padmore and the Caribbean. James’s struggle to create a historical record of Padmore as a West Indian was ultimately based upon an intuitive sense that he understood Padmore because of their shared history and because so many men of the period seemed to conform to this history of criticism and action. It is not pure fiction; neither does it conform to an evidentiary historicity based upon scientific methodology. Michel Trouillot’s work, *Silencing the Past*, suggests that it is necessary to break down the dichotomy between ‘history’ and ‘fiction’ to uncover a wider understanding of historical moments and persons.¹⁰² This can be done, he argues, by identifying different moments of silence in the process of historical production, and then employ them in different ways to construct a new narrative. James’s instinct that he knew and understood a significant part of Padmore because he understood what had shaped him, ultimately could not be made conclusive. Yet as Trouillot would suggest, it is in the ‘narrative constructions’ of the ‘sociohistorical process’ that certain elements of Padmore’s history can actually be revealed. The lack of archival material means that Padmore’s relationship to the West Indies and his position within the pantheon of West Indian intellectuals still relies on James to fill in the archival ‘silences’ with an intuitive analysis based on his own historical experiences that gives life to Padmore’s context.

In the scrapbook now housed at the University of the West Indies, there is an empty page where a photograph used to sit. The inscription at the top of the page, written in Padmore’s handwriting reads, ‘School children during lunch hour, Trinidad, BWI, Coterie Club.’ Beneath the stained space where the photo used to lie, is a written declaration attributed to George Padmore, Washington, DC, 1928: ‘To these children of the proletariat I have dedicated my life.’¹⁰³ This dedication marks the commitment of Padmore to revolutionary struggle rather than to his own personal home and family. It means that when faced with a decision to pursue anti-imperial work with the

¹⁰² Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 1-30.

¹⁰³ ‘School children during lunch hour,’ 1928. Padmore MSS/UWI, vol. 1.

Communist International, or to remain on the other side of the Atlantic with his wife and daughter, Malcolm Nurse chose to permanently embrace the identity of George Padmore.

The moniker of George Padmore had originally been used for expediency - as a means of protecting himself from the difficulties inherent in associating oneself with communism. Yet upon leaving North America, he permanently became George Padmore. If the name was adopted to protect him from trouble with the authorities, why not change it back when he left the communist movement in 1934? Perhaps the best explanation is that this new name was how he had now established himself – he was a well-known anti-imperialist as George Padmore and while no longer a communist, he was not going to stop the work he had begun. Yet naming is incredibly symbolic and meaningful, and a change of name, rather than just a moniker used in professional life, marks a determined shift in his life. He could not go back to Malcolm Nurse because he had left Malcolm Nurse behind. Malcolm Nurse was Trinidad, a wife and family, and a profession suitably attuned to West Indian middle-class society. George Padmore was now a revolutionary.

Chapter 2

An Education: Pragmatism, betrayal, and friendship, 1929-1934

When once a Negro's eyes are opened they refuse to shut again.¹

The youth of today are waking up. *We who are old* must encourage and stimulate them to hold up their heads as equal of all.²

George Padmore was aged only 30 years old when he made the above remark to an African colleague that he was 'old.' It illustrates the way that this period, in which he gathered immense experience, also matured and aged him. Historians have viewed the four years Padmore spent with the Communist Party in Europe as formative: for his political ideology, his organizational skills, and his networks.³ His first book, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, set out a basic political philosophy that he generally adhered to for the rest of his career. His work in Hamburg organizing the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) gave him the experience required to create disciplined political organizations in the future and contacts that he would maintain once he left the Communist Party. The importance of this period in Padmore's life is undisputed. Yet the lack of Russian sources in past work, and the exotic image of a black man in Soviet Russia and Weimar Germany, has led to an idealized, sometimes inaccurate picture of Padmore's life in this period. Thus while chapter three deals in detail with Padmore's political ideology, this chapter will provide a clearer picture of Padmore's movements, his achievements, and the events which led to his departure from the Comintern in 1933. It addresses two major questions: how did Padmore's leadership contribute to the development of black transnationalism through the ITUCNW, and why did he relinquish leadership of the ITUCNW and leave the CP at the end of 1933?

With regard to Padmore's departure from the Comintern, scholars have often taken their cue from Hooker, who accepted at face value Padmore's own public explanation for why he left the Party.⁴ This explanation attributes his split to the change in Comintern

¹ George Padmore to Comrades, 7 March 1933. Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (hereafter cited as RGASPI), 534/3/895, item 1-3.

² George Padmore to Ladipo Solanke, 21 February 1934, quoted in H. Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 77.

³ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 101-102.

⁴ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 31.

policy away from Third Period sectarianism and towards a Popular Front policy.⁵ This period, some argue, began in 1933 despite its official instatement as policy at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935, and thus fits with Padmore's own timeline.⁶ Yet Pennybacker's recent research has come closest to identifying the underlying tensions that led to Padmore's departure. She argues that while in Hamburg in 1932 Padmore 'suffered from a spiraling pattern of frustration with Comintern arrangements or their absence.'⁷ This chapter will support and take further Pennybacker's claim using extensive evidence that traces his growing disillusionment to a climactic confrontation in 1933 that Pennybacker was unable to achieve in her work on Padmore in the 1930s. Padmore's supposed ideological path, from communism to Pan-Africanism, was never as definitive as either Padmore or his interpreters have sometimes professed. Understanding that path, therefore, must include the numerous twists and turns in Padmore's interpretation of political events, of his comrades and of their personal and political allegiances.

Padmore's break with the Communist Party at the end of 1933 was a result of mounting frustration rather than any definitive announcement to disband the ITUCNW. His frustration grew out of the lack of solidarity shown by organizations that were supposed to work in cooperation with the ITUCNW, such as the International Seamen's Union and the League Against Imperialism. Underpinning this dissatisfaction was racial tension. This chapter will trace that racial tension, shedding new light on both the personal and the political controversies that would shape Padmore's future ideology and strategy.

1 Joining the ranks in Moscow: Distinguishing Padmore's initial tasks from his future leadership

The ITUCNW was formed from a 'Resolution of the Executive Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions' on 31 July 1928, and based upon decisions and resolutions adopted at the Fourth RILU Congress in March and April 1928.⁸ The first

⁵ Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 187; Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 261; Brown, *Kenyatta*, 171; Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, 85.

⁶ Susan Campbell, "'Black Bolsheviks' and Recognition of African-America's Right to Self-Determination,' 442.

⁷ Pennybacker, *Scottsboro to Munich*, 76. See also pages 79 and 86.

⁸ 'Resolution of the Exec Bureau of the RILU on the Org of the ITUCNW,' undated. RGASPI 534/3/359, item 2.

recorded meeting occurred in Moscow on 1 December 1928 with James Ford, Harry Haywood, and three other comrades in attendance.⁹ Padmore joined the organization in December 1929 and in his first year developed his organizational skills, gained access to resources which furthered his ‘education,’ and made new contacts among white and black comrades. However, in 1930 he was still just one of several figures in the movement.

The treatment of Padmore’s ‘leadership’ of the Negro Bureau of the Comintern during his tenure with the party in Europe from late 1929-1934 has differed among historians. Broad studies not specific to Padmore usually paint him as the leader of the ITUCNW from his arrival in the Soviet Union in 1930, until his expulsion in 1934.¹⁰ However, more specific studies, especially the most recent work by Makalani using Soviet archives, mention Padmore as one of many figures involved in the establishment of the Comintern’s Negro Bureau and its 1930 Hamburg Congress.¹¹ The leaders of the ANLC, in particular, played a major role in the early years of the ITUCNW. In its first year of existence, and indeed in its very creation, James Ford was pivotal. Harry Haywood, who was already in Moscow in December 1929, was one of the first to ‘size up’ Padmore as essentially ‘a pragmatist.’¹² Otto Huiswoud’s reports on his trip to the West Indies for the ANLC were shelved in the files of the ITUCNW.¹³ Thus when it was determined that a comrade was required in Moscow to replace Ford when he returned to America at the end of 1929, it was natural that they would look to a young, promising comrade in the ANLC.

Since much of the correspondence between party members was intentionally cryptic and void of detail in order to evade the censors, there is no definitive statement as to why Padmore was sent to Moscow. Makalani has most recently reiterated Hooker’s claim that Padmore left for Moscow with no intention of a permanent move (since Padmore stated to a Trinidadian friend that he would return to Howard in October).¹⁴ However,

⁹ ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the ITUCNW,’ 1 December 1928. RGASPI 534/3/359, item 19-20.

¹⁰ See for example Hutchinson, *Blacks and Reds*, 147. Also Brown, *Kenyatta*, 164-166.

¹¹ Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II*, 133; Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 60; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 157-186.

¹² Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 661-662.

¹³ O.E. Huiswoud, ‘Report on the UNIA Convention – August 1929.’ RGASPI 495/155/78, item 121-122. For more on Huiswoud see Campbell, “Black Bolsheviks,” 457-459; Van Eckevort, ‘Otto Huiswoud: Political Praxis and anti-Imperialism.’

¹⁴ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 14; Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 158.

since there is no record of Padmore in Europe before late December 1929, this was likely not the case.¹⁵ The best evidence implies that Padmore was selected to fill a gap in personnel after Ford returned to America in December 1929.¹⁶ Padmore was suited to the position, according to Huiswoud, because of his education and his experience with writing. Huiswoud did have some reservations about Padmore's organizational capacity, but felt that 'being close to the scene in Moscow and under the supervision of comrades who have experience in practical work, he will overcome some of his shortcomings and will be able to aid the work as required.'¹⁷ Writing from America upon his return in December 1929, Ford gave explicit directions for the next period of work to the newly appointed Secretary, George Slavin, and hoped that in Padmore's imminent arrival Slavin would find 'a good, energetic and capable comrade.'¹⁸

Padmore attended his first official meeting in Moscow on 8 January, 1930.¹⁹ The bulk of Comintern work in Africa at this time focused upon the growth and improvement of South African trade unions, and Padmore was quickly brought into this work. At a meeting on 12 January he was part of a team charged with drafting a letter to the South African party outlining the present conditions in South Africa and the party's immediate tasks.²⁰ The directive sent by Padmore and Slavin reiterated part of the line drafted in 1928 by South African James La Guma and American Communist Harry Haywood, who was then studying at the Lenin School in Moscow.²¹ Haywood and La Guma emphasized the landless status of the 'native' majority as the major component of the imperialist character of the South African situation, and prioritized the demand for a 'Native Republic' first, with a 'Workers and Peasants Republic' to follow.²² Padmore

¹⁵ Makalani does however note that Hooker was incorrect in stating that Padmore was at the Hamburg conference. Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom*, 259. The evidence in Moscow supports this claim. 'Report on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress,' 14 November 1929. RGASPI 534/3/450, item 50-52; Weiss, 'The Road to Hamburg and Beyond – Part 2,' 2; Padmore to Kenyatta, 1932. RGASPI 534/6/23, item 77-78.

¹⁶ Padmore to Comrades in South Africa, 10 January 1930. RGASPI 534/6/25, item 1.

¹⁷ Otto Huiswoud to James Ford, 14 November 1929. CPUSA MSS/LOC, reel 130, delo 1685-1689.

¹⁸ James Ford to George Slavin, 23 December 1929. RGASPI 534/3/450, item 89-90.

¹⁹ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat, 8 January 1930. RGASPI 495/155/83, item 19-21.

²⁰ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat, 12 January 1930. RGASPI 495/155/83, item 36. Padmore also co-wrote with George Slavin the 'Resolution for Strengthening and Extending Trade Union Work in South Africa,' 27 March 1930. RGASPI 534/6/25, item 2-3.

²¹ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 300. Robinson points out that Haywood was particularly influential in bringing about a change in the Comintern position from black people as part of the overall class struggle, towards black people as a 'national question' in America.

²² Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 237-239.

and Slavin's 1930 directive also prioritized 'a native republic of South Africa'.²³ Not yet the main theorist for the ITUCNW, Padmore's early work (and his subsequent correspondence with South African comrades in 1931), was in several ways the application of Haywood's pioneering years in Moscow as an early African-American student who sought to formulate a 'correct' line for Comintern policy to the Negro Question.

Although Hooker claims that Padmore was sent to Vienna in early 1930, correspondence and minutes of meetings²⁴ place him in Moscow from January to April 1930. As will be shown in the next section, it is possible that Padmore was in Vienna in 1931, rather than 1930. In addition to acting as primary correspondent to the South African Party, Padmore immediately began editorship of the *Negro Worker*,²⁵ as well as cooperation with the National Minority Movement (NMM) in England for the International Negro Conference planned for July in London. However, Padmore's role in planning the Hamburg conference was diminished after 9 April when he left Moscow for a tour of Africa in order to recruit delegates to the conference.²⁶ Padmore arrived in Bathurst – the only major stop on his tour that can be verified by documentation – from England on 26 April, on a visa for travel in West Africa granted by the British Consul at Berlin.²⁷ He quickly made contact with trade unionist E.F. Small, and published an article in Small's newspaper, *The Gambia Outlook*, after he believed that he had been subjected to unfair interrogation by colonial officials because of the Russian visa in his passport.²⁸ In this article Padmore made the case for a convergence of interest between colonial officials and business, and this link became a thread woven throughout Padmore's journalism for the next three decades (see Chapter 3). What is important about this article is that rather than writing it as an individual complaint, Padmore applied his personal experience to the structural problems of imperialism. The bullying and intimidation Padmore personally experienced at the hands of Gambian officials was

²³ 'Trade Union Work in South Africa,' 27 March 1930. RGASPI 534/6/25, item 2-3.

²⁴ Padmore is on record as attending meetings of the Profintern, 29 March-23 April, 1930. See RGASPI 534/3/512, item 2.

²⁵ *Negro Worker* 3, no. 4 (15 March 1930). RGASPI 495/155/92, items 7-23.

²⁶ George Padmore to Comrades, Berlin, 30 June 1930. RGASPI 534/3/546, item 61.

²⁷ Government House, Bathurst Gambia to Sir Vernon Kell, 17 June 1930. Gambia Archives, No S131 – 4/38, item 39. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

²⁸ The *Gambia Outlook*'s readership was largely made up of colonial administrators and native intelligentsia. However, Small reprinted parts of the *Negro Worker* in his paper. See Langley, 'The Gambia Section of the National Congress of British West Africa,' 384-385.

a result of ‘the high-handed methods adopted by the Imperialists and their Agents.’²⁹ His denunciation of these methods was described not as a personal affront, but as ‘against the native populations in West Africa.’ As with Padmore’s interpretation of the events leading to his departure from the Party in 1933, to be discussed below, his own treatment was represented as indicative of a larger prejudice marked by racial distinctions. The personal was the political.

Apparently having been unsuccessful in his attempt to visit Senegal,³⁰ Padmore left Bathurst for Sierra Leone on 29 April. The Governor at Bathurst wrote to MI5 informing them of the presence of Malcolm Nurse, concluding that since Nurse held ‘very advanced anti-imperialistic views...it would probably be just as well that he should not be granted facilities for visiting the British West African Colonies in the future.’³¹ Nurse was reported to have passed through Bathurst on the 13 of June on his way back to England, accompanied by Nigerian trade unionist Frank Macauley. This trip in 1930 was likely Padmore’s only trip to Africa before he traveled to the Gold Coast in 1951. It is quite possible that Padmore did make another trip to Africa – there are several holes in the documentation of his whereabouts over the 1930s – but given that MI5 was now aware of Malcolm Nurse and his passport number, it is unlikely that he ever entered with this passport. Until further evidence is unearthed, the ‘secret visits to South Africa and Congo,’³² claims to have been in West Africa in 1931,³³ and the smuggling of sixty ‘potential radicals’ out of Africa to form ‘the first Negro cadre’³⁴ must remain rumour.

Unfortunately for the ITUCNW conference, once Padmore left Moscow ‘there was very little, in fact no organizational direction from the centre.’³⁵ In London, the NMM

²⁹ ‘Extract from *The Gambia Outlook and Senegambian Reporter* vol 6, no. 17. Some Observations on Gambia,’ 17 June 1930. Gambia Archives, No S131 – 4/38, ‘Nurse – Malcolm Ivan.’ In possession of Marika Sherwood.

³⁰ Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 249.

³¹ Government House, Bathurst Gambia to Sir Vernon Kell, 17 June 1930. Gambia Archives, No S131 – 4/38, item 39. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

³² Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 16.

³³ See Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 299, footnote 13. In a letter to Arnold Ward at the end of 1931 Padmore stated that ‘only last year I was in Africa’, implying thus that he was not in Africa during 1931. Padmore to Ward 17 December 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 109-110.

³⁴ Ottley, *No Green Pastures*, 66.

³⁵ ‘The International Conference of Negro Workers,’ 29 July 1930. RGASPI 495/155/87, item 243-251.

decided to approach the Labour Government for permission to hold the conference³⁶ – permission that was swiftly denied – and the conference was forced to move location from London to Hamburg. The decision to move the conference to Hamburg was taken from Moscow at a meeting of the Negro Bureau on 29 May.³⁷ George Slavin was charged with drafting the resolutions for the conference, based upon a set of issues identified by William Wilson in January 1930,³⁸ and Ford was responsible for drafting the initial recruitment memoranda.³⁹ Thus while it was later agreed that organization from Moscow fell apart after Padmore's departure, crediting him with complete control over the conference is inaccurate.⁴⁰

The resolutions of the Hamburg Conference have been well documented by Wilson.⁴¹ Less well known is Padmore's personal experience. This experience provides an early example of the challenges Padmore faced in securing support from his German comrades. Padmore arrived in Hamburg via London and then Berlin. En route, he assisted a group of four West African delegates who had not received the latest news of the conference relocation. Once he and these delegates reached Berlin, material aid was 'categorically refused' from an 'openly hostile' comrade.⁴² Padmore appealed to the League Against Imperialism (LAI) in Berlin, who provided some assistance but were unable to help financially because 'the Negro Conference is a Profintern affair.' With no facilitation forthcoming from German communist organizations, Padmore appealed to Moscow. The four delegates, having received no money for food after one week in Berlin, were 'entirely demoralized and are demanding to be sent back home.'⁴³ The seriousness of the situation was brought home by one delegate who reported that 'if Comrade Padmore had not been [in Berlin] it would have been worse. As it is one comrade from Gambia got sick and had to go back. He was suffering from dysentery through want of malnutrition [sic], and when a man has nothing to eat, it is something to be reckoned with.'⁴⁴ This frustrating interaction between Padmore and his German

³⁶ J.A. Mahon to ITUCNW, 7 April 1930. RGASPI 534/7/48, item 91.

³⁷ Minutes of Meeting of the ITUCNW of RILU, 29 May 1930. RGASPI 495/155/83, item 96.

³⁸ 'Some significant features of the coming Negro Workers' Conference,' 20 January 1930. RGASPI 495/155/87, item 28-31.

³⁹ 'On the International Conference of Negro Workers,' 25 November 1929. RGASPI 534/3/450, item 37.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 184.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 184.

⁴² Telegram George Padmore to Comrades, Berlin, 30 June 1930. RGASPI: 534/3/546, item 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ 'RILU Executive Board Meeting, Statement of Mush,' 5 July 1930. RGASPI 534/3/490, item 27.

comrades became a feature of his work after he moved to Hamburg at the end of 1931. Although Padmore did not explicitly blame the hostility on racism, Ford's final conclusions on the success of the conference made it clear that those in attendance saw it that way.⁴⁵

The side-lining of 'Negro work' was the fundamental reason Padmore gave for leaving the Party in 1933, and the treatment he received from organizations in Germany affiliated to the Comintern before the 1930 conference was the first major instance of what was politely called, the 'underestimation' of Negro work. The conference was thus both his first major experience of the lack of support given to the ITUCNW by its European colleagues, and an early example of leadership. However, this was not his defining moment. It was Ford who played a significant role in the initial promotion of the conference, and Padmore's absence from Europe from April to June meant that he was not involved in many of the final preparations for the conference. Padmore's decisive role came later, when he took over the work of the ITUCNW in Hamburg at the end of 1931 and spread the resolutions of the conference across the black diaspora as the manifesto of the ITUCNW.

⁴⁵ RILU Executive Bureau Meeting, 5 August 1930. RGASPI 534/3/490, item 4-20.



Figure 3: Image used in many issues of the *Negro Worker* © British Library Board Mic.A.17483

2 Image is everything: Padmore's careful cultivation of a reputation

It is the argument of this dissertation that sensitivity to presentation, image, and appearance were central aspects of Padmore's pragmatism. Two examples from Padmore's time in Moscow support this claim. First, Padmore showed great concern for the branding of the *Negro Worker*. He took care in ensuring the bulletin looked professional, and that it maintained consistent and attractive imagery that would interest its readers. He insisted on improving the quality of the paper used 'by way of colour and stiffness', the use of the sketch of a black man breaking chains as the consistent image (see Figure 3), and the inclusion of a short statement to readers inside the cover of each issue which Padmore drafted.⁴⁶ The image on the cover of the *Negro Worker* was then also applied to all ITUCNW pamphlets in order 'to establish familiarity among the workers for our literature.'⁴⁷

⁴⁶ George Padmore to James Ford, 17 March 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 46.

⁴⁷ George Padmore to James Ford, 25 February 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 45. See also 'Negro Workers and the Imperialist War,' RGASPI 534/3/669, item 47-54.

Second, in Moscow Padmore displayed a remarkable sensitivity to what Nancy Cunard later identified as ‘keeping his own counsel.’⁴⁸ Despite his recollection to Cunard of the friendliness and kind manner of Russians toward him,⁴⁹ he was still a novelty. Y. Berger, a Jewish comrade who met Padmore several times between 1930 and 1932, described the anticipation of his first encounter with Padmore: ‘once my comrades seized an opportunity to tell me of a great piece of news, which had clearly made a great impression on them, that is, they introduced me to a real Negro who was to take part in the meetings.’⁵⁰ This sense that Padmore was on show, under observation as a ‘real Negro’ was first suggested by James in his *Notes on the Life of George Padmore*.⁵¹ Its effects were evident in Padmore’s behaviour in Moscow. Berger’s impression of Padmore was that he was ‘very lively and very interested in the different problems’ but ‘he was also, as I immediately noticed, less talkative than some of the other Negroes. He tried to be patient and understand correctly what was told him and before saying anything one saw that he weighed his words carefully.’⁵² The thoughtfulness and even hesitancy described here by Berger is evidence of Padmore’s careful weighing of words and reading of each situation.

This was characteristic of Padmore, but had a specific origin during his years in the Soviet Union. As Berger got to know Padmore, he sensed that he was only seeing one side of him: ‘George, who was very self controlled in meetings and private conversations with me, was most forceful and energetic in his discussions with...Indian students and other people of his own age.’ The impression Berger had of Padmore in Moscow was that ‘he was a very reserved man. When something concerning certain directives or resolutions of Moscow was not to his liking he hesitated to speak about it openly or to express his own ideas about it. Generally speaking, he was not very talkative and was quite reserved. He avoided entering any open conflicts.’ The hesitation to openly criticize Moscow decisions was a function partly of Padmore’s position in Moscow as an outsider, but likely also a strategy of self-preservation in a precarious political atmosphere. As James noted, Padmore ‘knew the political crises

⁴⁸ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS, 17/10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ ‘Remembrances of George Padmore.’ James MSS/UWI, box 23, folder 440.

⁵¹ James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore,’ 15-16.

⁵² ‘Remembrances of George Padmore.’ James MSS/UWI, box 23, folder 440. The stereotype of the ‘talkative Negro’ is a complicated one, which will be discussed in Chapter Six when Padmore also mentions it.

and conflicts raging around him...but he kept studiously aloof and did his work.⁵³ Yet this reserved attitude and hesitancy to criticize was not apparent in Padmore's correspondence later during his time in Hamburg. Padmore wrote vehemently and passionately at times – both against white comrades and black – if he felt an individual was incorrect in their opinion or their actions. The key language in Berger's reflection is Padmore's *self control* in meetings, his 'general' *reserved* manner, and the fact that he did not enter *open* conflicts. For Berger it was not that Padmore was without criticism, Berger saw that Padmore 'was not blind,' but it was that he withheld *his own ideas* from public debate. Thoughtful and *intentional* in his words and actions, Padmore assessed the political climate in Moscow and distinguished himself from other black comrades for leadership.

3 Stimulating the interest of the proletariat: Writing and promoting *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*

If the Hamburg conference and Padmore's tour of Africa were the initial points of contact for a man developing both his partnership with the revolutionary international and with the wider black diaspora, and his time in Hamburg was the decisive moment of leadership, then the time in between was most distinctively marked by the publication of *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*. While *Negro Toilers* has acquired mythic status in the corpus of Padmore as the work that set out his career as a revolutionary leader of the black world,⁵⁴ it was originally intended as just one of several pamphlets commissioned by the RILU in 1930 to support its surge in 'Negro work.'⁵⁵ The fact that this pamphlet was commissioned for a metropolitan audience and prepared by Padmore in three weeks makes its success across Africa, the Caribbean, and America a remarkable achievement. It also, however, sets out the even more remarkable pattern of Padmore's writing that will be traced throughout this thesis: while almost all of Padmore's books were written for a white audience, the marketing and appeal of the book was largely for a black one.⁵⁶

⁵³ James, 'Notes on the Life of George Padmore,' 16.

⁵⁴ Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism from Within*, 102-3.

⁵⁵ 'Negro Committee, RILU to the Secretariat,' 15 July 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 81.

⁵⁶ Letter Padmore to J.A. Mahon, 3 August 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 131. Von Eschen also notes that Padmore's intended audience was white workers. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 13.

Padmore actually wrote *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* during his first few months in Moscow at the beginning of 1930.⁵⁷ The book was an attempt ‘to raise some of the most important economic and political problems so that the white workers will have more than a sentimental interest in the Negro toiling masses.’⁵⁸ However the pamphlet languished without publication for almost a year before Padmore wrote a distressed letter to the secretary-general of the Profintern, A. Lozovsky, pointing out that the negligence surrounding publication of pamphlets which had been laboured upon and paid for was an unacceptable example of the failings surrounding ‘Negro work’.⁵⁹ Lozovsky promptly cabled London directing Mahon to ‘publish pamphlet Padmore immediately.’⁶⁰

Since its initial drafting, Padmore had only been further convinced of the need for a pamphlet explaining the situation of colonial labourers to British workers. Padmore told Mahon that in May he had lectured to a British delegation of the Friends of the Soviet Union and was ‘surpris[ed]’ to find that ‘[f]or them forced labour exists in Liberia and other places, but not in British Africa.’ This revelation reinforced the importance of the work he and organizations like the Minority Movement were engaged in, since ‘we cannot hope to rally the metropolitan workers to support the colonial struggles until they first realise the conditions under which they live and their common class interests with them.’⁶¹ Yet Padmore could only work with the resources he had at his disposal in the dissemination of the pamphlet, and for this reason he promoted its sale largely to the black audience he had contact with. Any new correspondence Padmore undertook in 1932 usually included several copies of the Negro Worker along with a sample of *The Life and Struggles*, in the hope of further sales.

The binary between a white and black audience was present in the structure of the book itself. While the first four chapters highlighted the power of resistance by the black masses in the past and its potential for the future, the last two chapters had a markedly different tone. Chapter Five focused on the revolutionary model of the Soviet Union as ‘the only country that knows no oppression, knows no exploitation, has no imperialist

⁵⁷ As recently as 2009 Carol Polsgrove claimed that Padmore was in Africa in the spring of 1931 gathering information for the pamphlet. Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 2.

⁵⁸ Letter Padmore to H. Rathbone, 28 December 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 178.

⁵⁹ ‘Negro Committee, RILU to the Secretariat,’ 15 July 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 81.

⁶⁰ Telegram Losovsky to Mahon, 91 Grays Inn Road. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 117.

⁶¹ Padmore to Mahon, 3 July 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 131.

aims,⁶² (a claim Padmore would develop further fifteen years later in *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire*). The final chapter included a directive, unsurprisingly titled ‘What is to be Done’, that is obviously directed at a European audience. While the book was thus disjointed, the double audience Padmore cultivated stems from the argument in this book and, indeed, in most of his future work: that is, the underlying problem of the *system* of imperialism and the *conscious* and *intended* policies of imperialist governments towards their colonies.⁶³ For Padmore, both audiences required an understanding of this fact: blacks so that they could appreciate their own importance and attack the system effectively, and whites so that they would no longer deny their role in black enslavement and use their power from the centre to challenge the primary beneficiaries of imperialism.

The most important idea contained in *Negro Toilers* was Padmore’s argument that, whether officially under imperialism or not, the condition of all black workers was the same.⁶⁴ This was a crucial articulation of black transnationalism that placed imperialism at the centre of the black experience.⁶⁵ The language of enslavement was utilized by Padmore to describe black labour wherever it may be: in Africa; the West Indies; Latin America; and the United States. Using government reports, decrees, and publications such as the British government aligned journal *West Africa*, Padmore transposed the colonial logic from one of development to one of oppression. The breadth of the book is impressive for its small size; Padmore not only outlined the central fact of *labour* as the means of exploitation in each of the four regions, he also revisited each geographical area to proclaim instances of popular revolt, its violent and aggressive suppression, and the will of the masses to continue to fight. His emphasis upon the violence of imperialism remained a central aspect of his writing up to and including his position on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya (see Chapter Six).

In its breadth, its double audience, its source material, and its focus on the systemic oppression of imperialism and its violence, *Negro Toilers* set the standard for all of Padmore’s future monographs. The subsequent banning of the book also marked a

⁶² Padmore, *Life and Struggles*, 111.

⁶³ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 3 for a repetition of this claim by Padmore, via his collaboration with James in *International African Opinion*.

theme for Padmore's monographs (see Chapter 5). However, contrary to Pennybacker's verdict that the banning of Padmore's publications would have been frustrating for him,⁶⁶ new evidence suggests that he embraced this challenge since 'it makes the book a better seller when the workers know that it has been censored.'⁶⁷ Despite its delayed publication and bans on the book in South and West Africa, it has become one of the most frequently referenced works in descriptions of Padmore, far surpassing its birth as a pamphlet composed in less than a month.

4 'It is the small things that count': Taking over the ITUCNW in Hamburg

Outside Padmore's efforts to publish *Negro Toilers*, very little of his work during 1931 survives in archives. Although Padmore was never registered as a lecturer, he worked with students and instructors from the University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in order to produce reports on local conditions in different territories inhabited by people from the African diaspora.⁶⁸ The lack of documentation on Padmore in this period suggests that Hooker's claim that Padmore was moved to Vienna, and was distanced from the movement, may apply to parts of early 1931 only. However, in October 1931 James Ford, who had been stationed in Hamburg since the conference and tasked with distributing all ITUCNW propaganda and developing connections with Negro seamen, returned to the United States to provide leadership to a mounting CPUSA strike campaign.⁶⁹ A replacement was required in Hamburg. Padmore again replaced Ford,⁷⁰ and in the intense propaganda work and correspondence with Africans and West Indians from Hamburg, Padmore's influence flowered. It is in this period, from October 1931 to his arrest in February 1933, that he truly built up a network across the black diaspora and initiated practices that became hallmarks of his career. These included the encouragement of an indigenous press in Africa, the lobbying of British MPs to raise colonial issues in the House of Commons, and an ambivalent relationship with West Indians in Britain.

⁶⁶ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 75.

⁶⁷ Padmore to J.T. Marks, Johannesburg, 17 May 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 86.

⁶⁸ Mukherji, 'The Anti-colonial Imagination,' Chapter Three, 32-33.

⁶⁹ See RGASPI 534/3/668 for extensive communication between Padmore and Ford while Ford was in Hamburg and about his departure.

⁷⁰ Padmore to Otto Huiswood, 16 Nov 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 98.

While Ford was a thorough and diligent report-writer, Padmore found upon his arrival in Hamburg that Ford's list of correspondents and his dispensation of propaganda material was not to Padmore's own standard.⁷¹ He set to work following up on all Ford's contacts and trying to use these to build a much larger contact list by approaching and responding to interested parties in Accra, Chicago, Johannesburg, Lagos, British Cameroons, Pretoria, Durban, Monrovia, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Buffalo, Minneapolis, Kansas City, Kingston, Port of Spain, St. Lucia, Belize, and Lisbon.⁷² It is in these initial few months that Padmore first connected with Arnold Ward of the Negro Welfare Association in London,⁷³ Kolli Selleh Tamba of Liberia,⁷⁴ R. Benjamin Wuta-Ofei in the Gold Coast,⁷⁵ and Sierra Leonian I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, who was then leading the African Workers Union of Nigeria.⁷⁶ These men became frequent correspondents over the next two years and, in the case of Wallace-Johnson, the collaboration lasted throughout the 1930s. Arnold Ward became a particularly close correspondent throughout Padmore's time in Hamburg – he even became an intermediary for letters from Padmore's mother.⁷⁷

Wuta-Ofei, editor of the *Gold Coast Spectator*, approached Padmore in December 1931 to ask for his help in purchasing a printing press in order to start a paper 'in the interest of negro workers'.⁷⁸ Padmore's aid to Wuta-Ofei in securing a press, and his assistance to another newspaper, the *Liberia Pioneer*, in arranging advertising and transmitting photographs that helped make the paper 'a reality'⁷⁹ are two early instances of Padmore's support of African newspapers. The logic for this support was based upon a belief that only through knowledge and awareness of the imperial system could African resistance succeed. Wuta-Ofei emphasized in his correspondence with Padmore the need for education since 'you must know something of the whiteman and his ways so as to beat him at his game.' Padmore echoed Wuta-Ofei's advice when he reminded a

⁷¹ Padmore to Comrade Wolton, 23 February 1932. RGASPI 534/3/754, item 126-128; Padmore to Secretariat, 16 November 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 92-93.

⁷² See RGASPI 534/7/74 and 534/3/756 for Padmore's meticulous correspondence with organizations across the United States and the West Indies. These items provide substance to the general claims to Padmore's extensive contacts while with the ITUCNW.

⁷³ Padmore to Ward, 25 November 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 164.

⁷⁴ Kolli Selleh Tamba to Padmore, 10 January 1932 and 30 April 1932. RGASPI 534/7/74, item 36 and 60.

⁷⁵ R. Benjamin Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, 29 December 1931. RGASPI 534/7/74, item 30.

⁷⁶ Wallace-Johnson to G. Padmore, 17 December 1931. RGASPI 534/7/74, item 29.

⁷⁷ Arnold Ward to Padmore, 30 May 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 100-101.

⁷⁸ Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, 29 December 1931. RGASPI 534/7/74, item 30.

⁷⁹ Editor in Chief, *Liberia Pioneer* to Padmore, 25 July 1932. RGASPI 534/3/756, item 42-43.

Nigerian comrade that ‘in order to fight the imperialists we must know their tactics and maneuvers.’ He advised the eager Nigerian that ‘in order to fight imperialism you must study the imperialists. This knowledge your leaders don’t have. And until you get this equipment you will always be made footballs of Downing Street.’⁸⁰

There was a common paradox between ‘radical’ and ‘official’ politics in Padmore’s strategy, which became evident in this period. In 1931 he told a South African comrade that ‘the success of the revolutionary movement depends not so much upon “High politics” than upon the everyday work. It is the small things that count.’⁸¹ However, in his newspaper articles to Gold Coast nationalists during the first half of the 1950s, as in his letters above to ‘study the imperialists,’ Padmore encouraged awareness of the politics of the imperialists and admitted a ‘fascination’ for the ‘dirty game of party politics.’⁸² The contrast between Padmore’s political tactics in the 1930s and the 1950s will be developed in subsequent chapters. What is important here is that Padmore’s work in Hamburg in 1932 embodied the balance between the menial tasks of organization, and the promotion of knowledge about imperial strategy.

There was a distinct difference between studying imperial government, however, and placidly bowing to metropolitan power with grand hopes of advancing the black race through loyalty to the empire. This, for Padmore in 1932, was the ‘negro bourgeoisie’ and, specifically, Harold Moody and the League of Coloured Peoples (LCP). In December 1931 Arnold Ward reported attending a meeting organized by Moody in which Baron Olivier, former Governor of Jamaica, addressed the audience and told of ‘the grand things they done for the Negroes in Jamaica it was disquieting to listen to But these are the tipe of Negroes we have hear [sic].’⁸³ Padmore responded that these men were

merely bootlickers of the white imperialists. They all hope to become lawyers and doctors and share in the exploitation of the Negro workers in Africa and the West Indies. These people lack guts. They are too goddam respectable to fight for their rights and try to mislead the workers in the belief that the British imperialists will give them freedom by sending petitions to the king.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Padmore to J. Calba-Bright, 1932. RGASPI 534/6/23, item 71.

⁸¹ Padmore to John Gomas, Capetown, 12 February 1931. RGASPI 534/6/25, item 42-44.

⁸² ‘Bribery and Corruption Among British Statesmen,’ AEN, 2 March 1955.

⁸³ Arnold Ward to George Padmore, 9 December 1931. RGASPI 534/7/50, item 182.

⁸⁴ George Padmore to Arnold Ward, 25 November 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 164.

Padmore reassured Ward that as soon as the ITUCNW and its affiliates began to show that they represented a strong alternative to the outrages of the LCP, they would win people to their cause.

The leadership of West Indians in Britain was particularly disheartening for Padmore. He declared that ‘the tragedy of the situation is that West Indians are the most loyal slaves in the British Empire.’⁸⁵ In the early 1930s, Padmore contended with two West Indian leaders who challenged the leadership of the ITUCNW: A.A. Cipriani of Trinidad, and Marcus Garvey. Of Cipriani, Padmore declared him a ‘faker’ after he undertook a tour of Britain ‘to beg the Secretary of State to vote a law which has been recently passed in the Legislative Council granting divorce’ at the tax payers expense. This was a direct insult to ‘the poverty of our countrymen’ who needed Cipriani to ‘demand food and cloths and shelter’ rather than an appeal against divorce.⁸⁶

While Cipriani’s appeal was disappointing, Garvey was a much larger force to contend with. In the United States and in Britain, the affiliates of the ITUCNW were challenged by those who saw Garvey as ‘the Honorable Marcus Garvey,’ a man who ‘cause[d] the other races to respect us as a people.’⁸⁷ After the *Negro Worker* printed an article against Garvey, William Brown in Liverpool reported the steady loss of Jamaican support for their movement such that Brown could not even give the bulletin away.⁸⁸ Padmore received several notes in 1932 and 1933 praising the *Negro Worker*, but the only criticism came from those who objected to articles on Garvey. Padmore was not the first, nor the last, black communist to criticize Garvey and the black workers who supported him. These letters to the *Negro Worker* should be understood within the context of a much larger and longer debate about the ‘false consciousness’ of black workers who supported Garvey; the protest of these correspondents serves to give even wider credence to Claudrena Harold’s argument that American based black communists like A. Philip Randolph, W.A. Domingo, Richard Moore and Cyril Briggs, ‘underestimate[d] the intelligence of working-class women and men, disregard[ed] their ability to discern and respond accordingly to the [Garvey] movement’s programmatic

⁸⁵ George Padmore to Vivian Henry, May 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 124.

⁸⁶ George Padmore to Arnold Ward, 27 February 1932. RGASPI 534/3/754, item 140.

⁸⁷ H.H. Kendal, British Guiana to Editor, *Negro Worker*, undated. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 21-23.

⁸⁸ William Brown to George Padmore, 28 August 1932. RGASPI 534/3/756, item 80-82.

weaknesses, and denie[d] the existence of any substantive agency on their part.⁸⁹ The strong letter from a British Guaianan to the *Negro Worker* quoted above, put his demands plainly to the editor: ‘Stop talking bunk and give us something better than him.’

Padmore rose to this demand by trying to directly connect trade union organizations in the West Indies, Latin America, and Africa. He gathered stories of conditions in the colonies for the *Negro Worker*, and ensured that the bulletin reached as wide an audience as possible. The logistical work required to distribute a bulletin that was frequently picked up by censors and which, in cases where it did reach its recipients, could often endanger their status with the authorities, was immense. Correspondence for the period Padmore was in Hamburg is full of letters informing of the receipt or lack thereof of the bulletin.⁹⁰ Often organizations and individuals sent updates of new addresses if another was compromised.⁹¹ Keeping track of all these constantly changing addresses required significant attention to detail, and an awareness that people’s lives could be endangered if mistakes were made. The clandestine nature of the work also required the development of techniques for resisting the suppression of literature. For example, in June 1932 Padmore received word that the *Negro Worker* had been banned in Trinidad, and that a similar action had been taken in Nigeria. He wrote to Reginald Bridgeman, the leader of the LAI in England, who was then able to get ILP Member of Parliament James Maxton to raise the issue in the House of Commons. Although Maxton’s demand was unsuccessful Padmore thanked him by sending him a copy of *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*.⁹² This collaboration between Padmore and a British Member of Parliament is the earliest example of a practice that Padmore would repeat once he moved to London and faced the suppression of a number of his books in Africa.

By the end of 1932, Padmore could boast a vast network of individuals and organizations across Africa, the United States, the West Indies, Britain, and to a lesser extent, Latin America. The day-to-day logistical work of ensuring that propaganda

⁸⁹ Harold, *The Rise and Fall of the Garvey Movement in the Urban*, 5.

⁹⁰ See correspondence in RGASPI 534/3/754, 534/3/755, 534/3/756.

⁹¹ See for example John Gomas to Padmore, 4 November 1932. RGASPI 534/3/756, item 97-98.

⁹² George Padmore to Reginald Bridgeman, 2 June 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 110. Also see items 147 and 156.

reached its intended recipients, and that interested individuals remained safe and supported, demonstrated a commitment to the menial tasks of organization required for a career of political resistance. In his delegate photo taken at the World Congress of International Red Aid in November 1932, Padmore was snapped in a thick dark overcoat, crisp white shirt and black tie, with a face rounder than in his wedding photo of eight years previous. His head is held high, looking directly into the camera with confidence.⁹³ This confidence, however, hid mounting frustration and tension with a movement that was not supporting Padmore's work as he expected.

5 Recruitment and Rejection: a mutual break

The recruitment of black workers to Moscow was one of Padmore's most well known responsibilities while working for the Comintern.⁹⁴ As will be shown, Padmore's pragmatic approach to this task, and his comrades' unwillingness to embrace these recruits was seen by Padmore as a refusal to honour their pledge to support the development of 'Negro work'. At the root of this tension was mutual racial distrust.

As early as December 1931, Padmore was confronted with two incidents that would replay themselves in the lead up to his departure from the Party: the office of the ITUCNW was ransacked and material confiscated,⁹⁵ and the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH), the supposed ally of the ITUCNW, refused to honor its commitment to set up sections in Africa. The latter was of particular importance since it left a recruit 'victimized,'⁹⁶ and vulnerable in Liverpool. Following the ISH's public statement that they intended to start branches in cities such as Johannesburg and Freetown, Padmore took the initiative himself to recruit a Sierra Leonean seaman by the name of Foster-Jones to start up a section in Freetown.⁹⁷ Foster-Jones disembarked his ship at Liverpool on the assumption that he would be assisted. When Padmore approached the ISH to bring Foster-Jones to Hamburg for meetings before sending him

⁹³ 'World Congress of International Red Aid, Questionnaire for Delegates,' 5 December 1932. RGASPI 539/1/36, item 27-28.

⁹⁴ Festus Eribo, *In Search of Greatness*, 43.

⁹⁵ Padmore to African Section, Oriental Institute Leningrad, 5 December 1931. RGASPI 534/3/754, item 21.

⁹⁶ Padmore to Thomson, 16 November 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 157-158.

⁹⁷ There is an E. Forster-Jones listed on the Editorial Board of the *Negro Worker* 1, no. 12 (December 1931) – 2, no. 8 (August 1932).

off to Sierra Leone, the reply was that the ISH could not fund the work of the ITUCNW. Since the ISH had already publicly committed to setting up sections in Africa and were now rescinding, Padmore bluntly accused the ISH of insincerity: ‘you write that the Negro Committee is asking the ISH for money. This is false and you know it is so.’⁹⁸

While the reversal of the ISH should be seen as another case that contributed to Padmore’s mounting frustration with his European comrades, the incident is important in one other respect with regard to Padmore’s eventual departure from the Party: his reputation. In a letter written in January 1932 to Fred Thomson of the Seamen’s Minority Movement in England, Padmore confided that since the ISH withdrew their promise, it was Padmore who was left ‘the very unpleasant situation of saving my own personal prestige before these Negro comrades as I was the one who maintained communications with them.’⁹⁹ Indignant, Padmore appealed to Moscow and declared to another comrade that if the ISH continued to rescind on their stated objective of building a relationship with Negro seamen, it was Padmore’s ability to be effective, not the ISH, that would be harmed. This combination of reputation and personal initiative in Padmore’s work for the ITUCNW would become a key factor in the grievances of both parties in 1933.

The conflict over Comrade Jones was the first of several frustrated attempts by Padmore to facilitate material support to African comrades. In June 1932, Padmore complained that the LAI had once again disappointed African seamen after failing to respond to a large seamen’s society from Sierra Leone that Padmore had referred to the LAI.¹⁰⁰ This escalated the broken promises that disheartened the hopeful Africans. Tension also mounted over Padmore’s attempts to bring Kolli-Selleh Tamba from Liberia and Jomo Kenyatta from England to Moscow. Tamba was one of the most promising leadership recruits to approach the ITUCNW. He was successful in starting up a branch in Monrovia and had begun touring the surrounding regions to recruit Liberian workers to the organization. But the success of Tamba’s organization was put in jeopardy when, in June 1932, the *Negro Worker* published an article by Tamba in which he not only attacked the Firestone Company and the system of taxation, but also accused the

⁹⁸ Padmore to Comrade Adolf, 10 December 1931. RGASPI 534/3/668, item 106-107.

⁹⁹ Padmore to Fred Thomson, 6 January 1932. RGASPI 534/3/754, item 27-30.

¹⁰⁰ Padmore to LAI, 5 June 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 119.

‘official class’ of being ‘chronically apathetic.’¹⁰¹ In August Tamba asked Padmore to print as soon as possible an ‘Apology’ in the bulletin since he was being persecuted for what he had written and there was a mass exodus from the organization.¹⁰² He also asked Padmore to send him an automatic pistol ‘in order to be able to protect my life.’¹⁰³ Padmore forwarded the letter to Red Aid, and also appealed to the League to help get Tamba to Europe, noting that the situation with Tamba ‘is serious and if we fail to get him out at once it is possible that our whole movement there might suffer a great blow.’¹⁰⁴ No further record of Tamba has been found, but it is clear that in this case Padmore was confronted with the gravity of the consequences for Africans of their work with the Comintern.

Padmore had also been trying to arrange for Kenyatta to receive further education in Moscow since the beginning of 1932, but by May found that the decision was still delayed. Exasperated, Padmore wrote to a German comrade that the indecision on sending Kenyatta showed that ‘we are too proud. We are waiting for 100% Bolsheviks to come out of Central Africa. No, comrades, it is our task to get hold of the raw people, and send them back 100% Bolsheviks.’¹⁰⁵ Padmore believed that education – even bourgeois education – was an end in itself, arguing that ‘even if they learn to read and write in a bourgeois school, - they still know. The alphabet is the same. It is leftism to think that we can wait until the socialist revolution until we can start to liquidate illiteracy.’¹⁰⁶ Padmore’s pragmatic approach in this instance was still ultimately aimed at a socialist revolution, and he clearly identified himself within the ‘we’ of the communist movement. However, the eradication of illiteracy in Africa and ultimately the advancement of education among his race was for Padmore a step towards that revolution, rather than a result of it. Socialism, for Padmore, could only be the end goal if it liberated blacks from the political, social, and economic backwardness they faced from a racist, imperialist world system; if the socialist movement could not itself be free of such racist hypocrisy, then it was of no use.

¹⁰¹ K. Tamba, ‘Liberia and the Labour Problem’ *Negro Worker* 2, no. 6 (June 1932), 5-8.

¹⁰² Tamba to Padmore, 19 August 1932. RGASPI 534/3/756, item 75.

¹⁰³ Tamba to Padmore, undated. RGASPI 534/3/756, item 108-109.

¹⁰⁴ Padmore to Comrades, 14 September 1932. RGASPI 542/1/54, item 92.

¹⁰⁵ Padmore to Hans, 11 May 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 70.

¹⁰⁶ Padmore to Everett L. Beone, 1 April 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 1-2.

Padmore's insistence that the CP needed to be more pragmatic and embrace Negro bourgeois elements in order to make any gains put him into conflict with the Party, and was eventually cited as one of the main causes for his expulsion.¹⁰⁷ But if Padmore was frustrated by Moscow's skepticism of the students he recommended for recruitment, he was also privately concerned by some of the alliances Kenyatta appeared to be making with English liberals like the Quakers. The Quakers' 'goody-goody patronizing attitude' was not effective because they were 'so closely bound up with the whole system of capitalism which enslaves us that they are unable to organize and lead a fight in our interest.'¹⁰⁸ In mid-1932, Padmore passionately criticized Kenyatta for making 'an ass and a laughing stock of yourself...Don't you realize that these white so-called friends of Africa are just a bunch of frauds who are out to make jack-asses out of you while the imperialists are enslaving your nation?'¹⁰⁹

Twice in the letter Padmore declared his right to criticize Kenyatta's naiveté, self-consciously noting that while he was not a native of the land Kenyatta was fighting for, he had just as much right to criticize: 'for I am flesh and blood of mother Africa, fighting for freedom, and cannot remain silent while you are monkeying around with these fakirs in London.'¹¹⁰ This belief that Padmore was 'flesh and blood of mother Africa' was reiterated several times by Padmore in his correspondence with Africans – in some instances he even claimed to *be* West African.¹¹¹ Padmore's identification as an African was at times opportunist; that is, when it would help encourage new recruits into the movement. However it could also be, as is obvious in his letters to Kenyatta, a deep identification with Africa that drove his work. In June Kenyatta replied to Padmore, declaring that he had broken with the Quakers and that Padmore had been misinformed as to some of Kenyatta's activities. He concluded by thanking Padmore for his honest letter: 'I appreciate your frankness, because that is how one could understand one another [sic].'¹¹² Kenyatta and Padmore interacted on equal terms, and could be blunt with each other while maintaining an understanding of unity. This was

¹⁰⁷ 'Statement of the International Control Commission,' 20 March 1931. RGASPI 495/261/4718.

¹⁰⁸ Padmore to Arnold Ward, 25 November 1931. RGASPI 534/6/18, item 164.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Padmore to Comrade Kenyatta, 1932. RGASPI 534/6/23, item 77-78.

¹¹¹ Padmore to Peter M. Koinange, 3 April 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 8.; Padmore to E.T. Williams, Editor 'Liberian Patriot,' 1932. RGASPI 534/6/23, item 70.

¹¹² Kenyatta to Padmore, 9 June 1932. RGASPI 534/7/74, item 64-65.

not the case with the German and English comrades Padmore worked with, where the inter-racial insecurity inherent in a racist society underlay each interaction.

Padmore expressed frustration on several occasions at the defensiveness with which his criticisms were received from white comrades. In June 1932, still trying to deal with Jones' case, Padmore refused to bow to what he believed were some overly sensitive comrades unable to take criticism. In reply to a letter from the LAI in Berlin, Padmore stated that 'We are very sorry that we offended your sensibility. But since we feel that our remarks are justified we have no apologies to offer.' He argued that his reference to the 'dilatory fashion' in which the League was conducting work 'has no aspersion to your activities in general....But it does have a relation to the League's attitude towards Negro work. ...We are not children, comrades. And you should have no reason to be so sensitive about our criticism.'¹¹³ In demanding that the LAI not be 'so sensitive,' Padmore was demanding a relationship on equal terms. The reserved, cautious man who weighed his words carefully in Moscow was not to be found here in Germany; particularly when, as in the case of Jones, Padmore noted that 'Bringing people from the colonies is not like bringing them from Prague or Paris. When we get a fellow off a boat on a certain port we cannot leave him stranded otherwise the police will pick him up...We must not play with illegal work in this fashion.'¹¹⁴ The simple fact of colour made a black communist's life that much more difficult, and this failure to appreciate the danger and the sacrifice Padmore's recruits undertook left him increasingly frustrated.

Although never directly accusing his comrades, Padmore was attempting in this letter to educate them on the underlying racist assumptions they harbored towards 'Negro work.' The LAI believed that they were merely following procedure and that Padmore was being overly accusatory. They saw only a misunderstanding over a particular incident. Padmore saw an accumulated number of cases where the needs of black recruits were being denied. In their dismissive response to Padmore's criticisms, the LAI denied Padmore the kind of solidarity that comes from mutual respect – a solidarity he did hold with Kenyatta. Their defensiveness betrayed their own fear of the accusation of racism. Yet it would be incorrect to imply that Padmore's role in this situation was as an

¹¹³ Padmore to Comrades, 16 June 1932. 534/3/755, item 159.

¹¹⁴ Padmore to Comrades, 12 June 1932. RGASPI 534/3/755, item 145.

objective educator. Padmore was in the situation much more than he was above it. The point is that the tension between Padmore and his white comrades in the German Communist Party was symptomatic of the period.

The insecurity inherent in race relations underlay a number of interactions between the ITUCNW, black workers and intellectuals, and white sympathizers. It was present in Padmore's denunciation of Harold Moody and the West Indians who pandered to imperialist paternalism, in the black workers' refusal to denounce Marcus Garvey, in Padmore's denunciation of the ISH and the LAI, and in these organizations' suspicion that Padmore was himself being overly accusatory over their lack of action. Underneath the veneer of a thriving movement embodied in the articles and correspondence printed in the *Negro Worker*, lay mutual suspicion. On one side, that Comintern support in practice among its white members was not as sincere as was professed in Moscow. On the other, that Padmore was not solely loyal to the cause of the socialist revolution and may be growing too independent and confident in his actions. The climax to these tensions came after Padmore's arrest in February 1933.

6 Definitive break or gradual breech? Padmore's arrest in Hamburg and his departure from the Comintern

Unsurprisingly, both Padmore and the Comintern defined the reasons for their break rigidly: both ideologically and practically, each party had betrayed the true cause. In March 1934 the International Control Commission (ICC) of the Comintern announced its decision to expel Padmore. They listed his failure to break connections with 'the exposed provocateur Kouyate', his overtures to national reformists and 'bourgeois exploiters' (especially Liberia), and his failure to turn over documents to his replacement.¹¹⁵ Although an extended campaign began in the American communist and African-American press after the ICC statement, the most famous public statement by Padmore came in his 'Open Letter to Earl Browder' in October 1935, in which he refuted the numerous slanders against him and declared that he had left the Party because of its liquidation of the ITUCNW in August 1933.

¹¹⁵ 'Statement of the International Control Commission,' 20 March 1934. RGASPI 495/261/4718.

Since original documents have until now not been examined thoroughly, the myths that each statement fostered have remained unchallenged. Neither the accusations of the ICC, nor Padmore's claim that his break was precipitated by a sudden announcement to him that the ITUCNW would cease work, tells the whole story. Padmore's misgiving that the Comintern was not sufficiently committed to black workers has been demonstrated. The following section will show that the events in 1933 surrounding the raid on ITUCNW headquarters in Hamburg compounded this apprehension on both sides. Rumour and allegation became fact in the minds of each party, and the split as played out in the American communist press made the break seem more definitive than the 'gradual breech'¹¹⁶ that actually occurred in 1933.

On 30 January, 1933 Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany and within two weeks, the ITUCNW offices were raided and Padmore arrested. Although the exact date of the raid cannot be conclusively determined, the last letters arriving in Hamburg are dated around 6 February.¹¹⁷ French secret service reports indicate he was held in jail in Germany for around twelve days before being deported to England.¹¹⁸ Padmore claimed he only stayed in London one day, enough time to gather some money (all his had been taken by the German police) from Arnold Ward, and then depart for Paris.¹¹⁹ Nancy Cunard, who saw Padmore in London some time after the incident, recalled that while he did not give an account of what had happened in Hamburg, it was clear to her that it had been 'ghastly and extremely dangerous'.¹²⁰ His letter to Moscow after his release, in which he claimed that upon entering England 'everything I owned was searched, even my a...' is at the very least an indication of the violation Padmore felt during this experience.¹²¹

The trauma of the arrest and deportation seems to have injected Padmore with a sense of purpose: his first two letters from Paris speedily listed the initiatives he had undertaken, including: as many letters as possible to inform comrades not to write to Hamburg,

¹¹⁶ 'Remembrances of George Padmore.' James MSS/UWI, box 23, folder 440.

¹¹⁷ Vera to George Padmore, 6 February 1933. RGASPI 534/3/895, item 109-110.

¹¹⁸ Confidential Report of Agent Paul, 5 March 1933. Service de liaison avec les originaires des territoires français d'outre-mer, Archives nationales d'outre mer, Aix-en-Provence, France (hereafter referred to as SLOTFOM), 2/19.

¹¹⁹ Padmore to Comrades, 6 March 1933. RGASPI 534/3/895, item 111-116.

¹²⁰ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS, 17/10.

¹²¹ Padmore to comrades, 6 March 1933. RGASPI 534/3/895, item 111-16. Pennybacker also cites this remark. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 77.

reports from South Africa and Jamaica and directives sent in reply, a protest at the Haitian Embassy for the release of a comrade from prison, and plans to publish the *Negro Worker* from Paris and use French ports as a base for distribution. He concluded, optimistically, that ‘despite temporary set backs we will be able to quickly re-adjust ourselves and carry out the general plan of work...We are marching forward and not all the devils in hell will stop us.’¹²² Padmore’s determination to carry on work, however, quickly met with new opposition, and the ‘devils in hell’ that could not stop Padmore came to include not only the Nazi officials who had arrested and deported him or the British police who had interrogated him, but also the Comintern officials who attempted to rein him in.

The relationship between Padmore and Moscow appears to have turned sour in April 1933, soon after Padmore’s first two letters. In reply he received a directive stating that work should be rebuilt with Padmore remaining in Paris.¹²³ However, the letter went on to denounce Padmore, and two criticisms in particular would have struck deeply. Firstly, that Padmore was not deferring sufficiently to Moscow directives in his work and was acting too ‘independently’; and secondly, that he was partly responsible for the raid in Hamburg. On the first, the letter stated that his comrades were ‘astonished’ that Padmore had sent a man ‘whom we don’t know and whom you also likely don’t know well to the West Indies on your own initiative’ without consultation or approval. Padmore’s lack of proper vetting of students sent to Moscow was also raised, in particular with regard to his ‘last choice,’ a West Indian who is listed in the KUTV records as Samuel Padmore, and whose school record reported that he only attended two lectures, was poorly developed politically and was not grasping the theory taught.¹²⁴ The letter claimed that this ‘West Indian affair and the student affair show that you have not orientated yourself correctly in accordance with our requirements and our special situation.’ Clearly, the vehemence with which Padmore undertook his work in Hamburg was perceived as a threat to the supremacy of Comintern leadership, and this letter was an attempt to quash the independent initiative Padmore demonstrated. The letter continued that ‘it is important to stress here the absolute necessity for collective work and not individualist business relationships.’ What was most shocking

¹²² Padmore to Comrades, 6 and 7 March. RGASPI 534/3/895.

¹²³ J. Byrsy to George, 3 April 1933. RGASPI 534/3/895, item 5.

¹²⁴ File of ‘Hamilton’. RGASPI 495/279/71. Translation by Mary Fyodoroma, Institute of African Studies, Moscow.

was the remark that ‘it is the general opinion that you are not entirely blameless in regard to the incidents in the other place.’ Padmore’s comrades believed him to have been imprudent in his personal correspondence, leaving his personal connections and whereabouts too open and thus easily identified by the authorities. There is no recorded response by Padmore to this accusation: in fact, this is the last letter in any archive between Padmore and Moscow. This letter, its attenuation of his independence and implication of blame for the destruction of the ITUCNW offices and the endangering of his comrades, marks the breaking point in direct communication between Padmore and Moscow.

Following this letter, the relationship between Padmore and communist party members became one of spiraling accusations and suspicions on both sides. A Comintern agent in Paris named I. Razumova was sent on several occasions to warn him that he must break his ties with Kouyate.¹²⁵ She also informed him that he would be sent back to work in the United States, at which point apparently ‘his displeasure became most strong.’ Padmore’s possible return to America does not come up in any published documentation. He apparently told Razumova that he had no visa and no money to go to America but it seems that the issue was not pursued further because by this time ‘he had already turned away his ties with us.’ While the report by Razumova included reference to many of the Comintern’s stated reasons for Padmore’s expulsion, including the repeated warnings for Padmore to break his ties with Kouyate, it also reported the main reasons Padmore was disgruntled with the Party: ‘His displeasure … started from the fact that the Profintern was not sufficiently sensitive to black people.’¹²⁶ Padmore’s own personal difficulties financially and the lack of means given to publish the *Negro Worker* were, for him, two examples. By the end of August, the relationship was severed completely.

It is important to note here that Padmore’s subsequent claim that he broke with the Comintern because they wanted to close down the ITUCNW¹²⁷ was never actually articulated by Razumova. As early as September 1933, just one month after Padmore claimed he was told that the ITUCNW would be closed, the Profintern had completed

¹²⁵ ‘On the case of Padmore, member of Negro International Comintern,’ undated. RGASPI 495/261/1380, item 7-8. Translation by Mary Shemyakina.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ ‘An Open Letter to Earl Browder,’ *The Crisis* (October 1935).

an assessment and plan for the continuation of the *Negro Worker* and the ITUCNW.¹²⁸ The ITUCNW remained in place, though stunted, until it was finally shut down in July 1936.¹²⁹ Yet while the Comintern did not immediately liquidate the ITUCNW, Padmore saw through the shallow support provided to the ITUCNW by equating the lack of material support, both financial and logistical, with the organizations demise. To Padmore, the initiative he had taken in his work was an indication of his commitment. The attempt to rein in those liberties showed the Comintern's unwillingness to allow the flexibility required for work in Africa and thus, in the eyes of Padmore, betrayed the subservient nature of Comintern 'Negro work.'

Although the ICC official statement outlined personal reasons for expelling Padmore, he interpreted the reasons as political. Before the publication of the ICC statement, Padmore received word that he was going to be denounced. He wrote a letter to the American Communist Party explaining events as he saw them. Padmore claimed that on 13 August, 1933 Otto Huiswoud appeared in Paris and demanded the return of all ITUCNW documents.¹³⁰ Padmore was 'astounded' at Huiswoud's actions, particularly since no one could explain to him exactly why he was being denounced.¹³¹ He believed that there were 'political not personal issues involved.'¹³² Padmore's interpretation then was that the personal campaign against him, which had already begun and would increase, was a means of diverting attention from the fact that the Comintern had *politically* abandoned its commitment to the black workers by closing down the ITUCNW.

The fact that the Comintern did not liquidate the ITUCNW makes Padmore's explanation of events even more interesting. The conflicting evidence leaves the moment of the actual break unclear. The longer-term tension between Padmore's

¹²⁸ Edwards to Profintern, 19 September 1933. RGASPI 534/3/895, item 106-107.

¹²⁹ See RGASPI 534/3/986 and 534/3/1103 for ITUCNW correspondence. The recommendation to the Profintern that the ITUCNW be liquidated is found in 'Special Discussion Material on the Negro Question,' 10 July 1936. RGASPI 534/3/1103, item 18-30.

¹³⁰ Padmore to the Secretariat of the CPUSA, 3 February 1934. George Padmore Collection, Princeton University Library (hereafter cited as Padmore MSS/Princeton/C1247). Huiswoud's visits to Padmore are also treated in Joyce Moore Turner and W. Burghardt Turner, *Caribbean Crusaders and the Harlem Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 209-14 and referenced in Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 302n83. In my work in the Moscow archives, I was unfortunately unable to pursue the issues Turner's work suggests.

¹³¹ Report of Conversation with George Padmore, undated. SLOTFOM 3/53.

¹³² Padmore to Secretariat of the CPUSA, 3 February 1934. Padmore MSS/Princeton/C1247.

determined style of work and the Party's hesitation to act on his requests emerge as the compounding factor in the end of their working relationship. In this respect, it is useful to re-read Padmore's concluding statement to the CPUSA in light of the whole period of his tenure with the Party. His conclusion that 'international Negro work is being sacrificed at a time when we cannot afford to weaken the Negro liberation struggles' was both a reference to the supposed political decision to end the ITUCNW, as well as the personal denial of funds to both he and Kouyate in the spring of 1933. The fact that 'some of the most devoted and capable Negro comrades are just being systematically exterminated' was not just a reference to the denunciation of Kouyate, but also to the failure on the part of the Party to aid Jones and Tamba in 1932. That 'Negro comrades especially those who display courage, initiative and intellectual capacities are being systematically reduced to the status of marionettes' refers to the April request for Padmore himself to fall more closely into line and only act after checking with the Party.

Finally, the claim that 'the more advanced international movements in the imperialist countries are not rendering the maximum amount of support and aid to the liberation movements in the black colonies' was a direct reference to the failures of the LAI and the ISH in responding to Padmore's requests over the years. Thus the break was both personal and political, despite Padmore's public claims to the contrary. Padmore sent his letter to Henry Moon, editor of the *Amsterdam News* (New York), and the political conclusions Padmore listed in the letter were summarized in an article that appeared in Moon's paper on 16 June.¹³³ It was a necessary tactical move to address the campaign against him that now raged in the American press.

7 **Betrayal and resurrection: Padmore's denunciation and recovery as played out in the American Press**

If Padmore interpreted his expulsion as political rather than personal, the attacks against him in 1934 were certainly personal. It is important to consider how emotionally difficult these would have been to absorb. His determined resurgence in London after 1934 needs to be understood in the context of these attacks and the positive campaign

¹³³ 'Expelled Red Scores Party: Comintern Halts Work in Black Colonies Padmore Asserts, *Amsterdam News (AN)* 16 June, 1934.

mounted in support of him in the African-American press. The debate in the American press after Padmore's expulsion shows that both Padmore and the CPUSA were concerned with their future ability to command the respect of black workers. Discrediting Padmore personally was a useful way of achieving this goal.

James Ford acted as a key source for accusations against Padmore in the American communist press. In February Ford published an article in the *Afro-American* titled "Padmore sups with Kings and Princes." He gave an interview with the *Negro Liberator* in which he compared Padmore to 'a little Napoleon who struts and brags and froths' and who was using the capitalist press to mount a campaign against the Communist Party, the true liberator of the black worker.¹³⁴ Angelo Herndon, whose arrest and trial in Atlanta, Georgia for insurrection in 1932 was heavily based upon his possession of communist literature including *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*,¹³⁵ was another well-known black American communist who attacked Padmore. Using vicious language, Herndon compared Padmore to 'a frog [that] could not put his belly any closer to the ground' and whose actions armed the 'klansmen and lynchings against our Party.'¹³⁶

It is significant that the debate occurred primarily in the American press, rather than in British, Soviet, or colonial newspapers. This location demonstrates the centrality of the American audience both for the black communist movement and for Padmore. This was, at the time, the strongest arm of the black communist movement and thus a logical audience for the communist attack. But it was also an audience Padmore was familiar with and could not afford to lose if he was to continue as a journalist and a writer. At least 6 articles supporting Padmore appeared in the *Amsterdam News* (New York) between June and December 1934, including a response by Nancy Cunard to Ford's attacks.¹³⁷ The image of Padmore as the lone leader of the ITUCNW, the man of integrity who would not compromise his values in the face of opposition, began to

¹³⁴ Dan Pope, "Ford Analyzes Padmore as Police Agent and Spy" *Negro Liberator*, undated. Solomon A. Kaufman Research Files on African Americans and Communism, Tamiment Library, TAM 218.

¹³⁵ 'Africans Will Help Padmore: Black Students Refuse to Condemn Leader on "Sellout" Charges' *AN*, 4 August 1934.

¹³⁶ "Padmore Belly Crawls," Says Angelo Herndon,' *Negro Liberator*, 8 September 1934.

¹³⁷ 'Expelled Red Scores Party,' *AN* 16 June 1934; 'Padmore Promises Exposure of Communists,' *AN* 28 July 1934; 'Africans will help Padmore,' *AN*, 4 August 1934; 'Padmore hits Soviets again: Says they scorn Liberia and trade with imperialists,' *AN* 15 September 1934; 'Nancy Hits at Ford – Defends Article by Padmore in Anthology,' *AN*, 1 December 1934.

solidify in this period in the African-American press. In a *Pittsburgh Courier* article Padmore was even raised above Garvey and Du Bois since his expulsion from the Communist Party ‘in order to allay the fears of France and Britain’ did what these other leaders could not: ‘actually scare the imperial powers’ by organizing black workers in the colonies.¹³⁸ In its praise of Padmore’s role in the ITUCNW, no mention was made of the foundation set by Ford and Huiswoud. Thus the betrayal of Padmore by these comrades had also turned against them, since it was his name that would now be associated with the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, and its brief but vigorous attempt to organize the black diaspora.

Conclusion

The alluring image of a black man in Stalinist Russia, and the barrier to ‘non-Western’ scholars in accessing Soviet archives during Padmore’s lifetime and in the decades immediately after his death, has meant that the historical narrative of this period in Padmore’s life has been the most inaccurate. There is no evidence that he was at the Frankfurt Congress in 1929 as Hooker claimed. His time in Hamburg running the ITUCNW was actually just over one year, from November 1931–February 1933. Hooker also made the exaggerated claim that his network across the colonial world included over 4000 contacts.¹³⁹ Correspondence in the Comintern archives puts the number at a few hundred, a number still impressive for the determination and time required to build such a base. Despite allegations of holding a false passport and adventures such as a ‘gun-running expedition into the Belgian Congo’,¹⁴⁰ evidence suggests that Padmore was in Africa only once prior to the 1950s. Correspondence places him for the most part in Europe with little time for trips across several continents. The clandestine nature of Padmore’s work has fostered an exoticized version of his life with the Communist International. Germany, where ‘the shadows of Weimar decadence were lengthening’ was believed to have suited Padmore, ‘with his false passports and underground contacts,’ and the ITUCNW base in Hamburg ‘in the seamy waterfront district, under cover of a seamen’s club’ suited the secretive work Padmore

¹³⁸ ‘The Communist Jonah,’ *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 June 1934.

¹³⁹ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Referenced in Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 248.

conducted.¹⁴¹ Roi Ottley's image in *No Green Pastures* of Padmore as 'a specialist in decoys, codes and stratagems' is a perfect example of the glamorous picture of him in this period. Ottley's characterization is heavily romanticized and there is little evidence to suggest that Padmore frequently adopted the classic spy modes that Ottley invoked. Yet if Ottley's description is read in a metaphorical rather than literal sense, we are confronted again with the idea that Padmore hid behind archetypes and images, behind a veil of assumptions and strategies.

Padmore's break with the Communist Party was more than simply a pragmatic decision to create a grassroots 'black international' because communism no longer afforded him the voice and means he desired. Instead, it was a gradual deterioration in relations based upon the underlying racism Padmore perceived in his European comrades well before his misleading claim in 1934 that the Comintern had compromised 'Negro work' by terminating the ITUCNW. The personal undermining of Padmore's decision-making by Comintern colleagues may partly explain why Padmore, until 1957, chose a much more independent work environment by not working for a large political machine. It also pointed to an ideological gap between Padmore's pragmatic approach to the priority of 'Negro work' and his more doctrinaire European comrades and fellow black leaders. The break was personal and political, impassioned and calculated.

While his years with the Comintern were valuable, they were also painful. Indeed, his remark in 1956 regarding A. Philip Randolph's dismissal from the party, resonates particularly poignantly because of Padmore's own experience: 'character assassination has always been one of the most deadly weapons employed by the Communists.'¹⁴² He witnessed African delegates forced out of participation at the Hamburg conference because his European comrades allowed bureaucratic rules to override human responsibility. His appeals for the removal of Tamba and Jones from dangerous circumstances went unheeded. The trauma of his arrest and deportation from Germany, as well as the impact of the communist press attacks against him after he left the CP, should not be underestimated. Finally, the instances where European party members undermined or ignored the needs of black comrades built up over three years to solidify Padmore's impression that communists were insincere in their commitment to black

¹⁴¹ Brown, *Kenyatta*, 166.

¹⁴² Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, 291.

liberation. His position on issues of race remains controversial. As Hooker noted and this thesis will further illustrate, he made private remarks complaining of the habits of black people, but ‘was otherwise reluctant to publicise Negro shortcomings.’¹⁴³ The priority he placed upon black liberation, above communist loyalty, fed an accusation of racial chauvinism once he left the party.¹⁴⁴ Yet, as this and subsequent chapters will show, the attacks he made against individuals he believed to be in the wrong were equally scathing, no matter the person’s race. In this context, the final lesson Padmore received from the Communist Party came with his denunciation by both white and black comrades: their betrayal knew no colour bar.

¹⁴³ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 81; 84.

Chapter 3

The most completely political Negro: Marxism, Pan-Africanism, and Padmore's re-establishment, 1935-1939

In 1946, after arranging the introduction of Padmore to the American novelist Richard Wright, Peter Abrahams wrote to Wright with his own analysis of Padmore:

I think to understand the lack of any sense of hurt in George in relation to the Communists one must understand George. As a Negro he is the most completely political I have ever met. ... I know George pretty well and yet if I were to try, mentally, to take George out of his political setting and see him as a person divorced from all political interests, I honestly don't know what kind of a person he would be.¹

This description of Padmore as 'completely political' is one of the most pertinent reflections on Padmore's personality. Although Abrahams only met Padmore after the period covered in this chapter, his assessment of Padmore's politics and Padmore's break from the Communist Party are extremely useful for focusing the analysis of Padmore's politics in this chapter. Padmore's commitment to political issues was almost absolute, and the man that is reflected, even in personal communication, is one who was constantly engaged with the issues of the time. For Abrahams, Padmore's response to his 'expulsion' from the Comintern was also explained by his absolute commitment to political issues. Abrahams stated equivocally that while 'he may be at variance with the "line" ... George is a Marxist to the core ... George's objectives are the same as those of the CP. Both George and the CP are agreed on the solutions of the ills of the world.'

Abrahams description of Padmore as a Marxist, twelve years after Padmore left the Communist Party, raises one of the most important questions about Padmore's ideology: was Padmore always in essence a pan-Africanist?² Or if not, what was the relationship between his pan-Africanism and other ideological commitments, primarily communism?³ Those invested in writing the history of the left argue that 'up to and

¹ Peter Abrahams to Richard Wright, 23 October 1946. Richard Wright Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter cited as Wright) box 93, folder 1161.

² See for example Worrell, 'George Padmore: Pan-Africanist *par excellence*,' 22-36.

³ For debates about Padmore's 'transition' see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 79; Schwarz, *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, 137.

including the fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945...Padmore...continued to think in terms of Comintern categories.⁴ Rupert Lewis argues that Padmore's Marxism was always highly influenced by Lenin's ideas of self-determination and his critique of imperialism, and that Padmore 'never abandoned completely his Comintern characterization of the Garvey movement and this represented a failure to appreciate mass movements that did not conform to Marxist criteria.'⁵ In both these accounts, Padmore's Marxism did not vanish with his official disaffiliation from the Communist Party; however, they do infer in their descriptions two distinct 'sides' between Marxism and pan-Africanism.

The starker portrayal of Padmore's political development as moving distinctly from communism to pan-Africanism, is in Vincent B. Thompson's identification of 'two phases of contradiction' in Padmore's life. Thompson argues that Padmore's acceptance of communist dogma was a 'total assimilation of an ideological position which blinded him to more holistic assessments of others' caused by youthful zeal, and only tempered by the wisdom that comes with age.⁶ Thompson's assessment appears to read Padmore's ideological position in the early 1930s as capital 'C' Communism (ie the doctrine of revolutionary socialism that was the official ideology of the Soviet Union): Padmore's disaffiliation from the Comintern then signaled for Thompson Padmore's rejection of communism as an ideology.

Others, however, have recognized the ways in which both communist and black liberationist ideas were fitted together by Padmore and his colleagues in the 1930s while they were with the Comintern. Both Pennybacker and Edwards have analyzed Padmore's years with the Comintern in two critical ways: as a collaborative moment where networks were built, and as the base through which Padmore's 'evolution toward Pan-Africanism'⁷ could take place. Pennybacker's valuable analysis has cemented the importance of Padmore's activities from London at this time.⁸ Both authors, crucially, have broken down the dichotomy between 'Padmore the communist' and 'Padmore the

⁴ Callahan, 'The Communists and the Colonies,' 17. Eric Hobsbawm places Padmore, James, and Arthur Lewis in the same category, as 'Caribbean Marxists' who rejected the Soviet Union. Hobsbawm, 'Epilogue,' in *Opening the Books*, 252-253. In agreement, see Schwarz, *West Indian Intellectuals*, 138.

⁵ Rupert Lewis, 'George Padmore: Towards a Political Assessment,' 149.

⁶ Thompson, 'George Padmore: Reconciling Two Phases of Contradictions,' 134.

⁷ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 245; Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 80.

⁸ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 97-98.

pan-Africanist', insisting upon the very specific moments of rejection or absorption when it came to Padmore's transformative ideology of communism and black liberation. Finally, there are those who more forcefully argue that the ideas of people like Padmore and C.L.R. James (who are typically represented as the central black intellectual figures of the left in 1930s Britain), were not on a dual track, not in evolution, but working together in one single explanation of a global imperialist system in which black workers could play a central, not a secondary or separate, role in ending.⁹ Indeed Bogues argues that Padmore was involved 'in anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles from the stance of an understanding of the centrality to global revolution of the black struggle.'¹⁰

Between 1934 and 1939, in the aftermath of the trauma he experienced by his expulsion from the CP and before the outbreak of war in Europe drastically changed the political environment in Britain, Padmore worked to rehabilitate his political career outside the bounds of the international communist movement. This chapter will clarify the nature of Padmore's politics within the anti-imperialist politics of the left, and the emergence of black internationalism in the wake of the Italo-Abyssinian War. This dual debate will be grounded in the reality Padmore was confronted with when he left the Communist Party. Despite the tension in this crucial period, he found a way to devote himself to his cause by making new connections. The chapter will deepen the main argument about Padmore's pragmatism by examining how Padmore recovered from the attack by his former colleagues by re-labeling himself, and the degree of compromise and appropriation involved in this reinvention.

1 Abracadabra? From 'Communist' to 'African', 1934-1935

Carol Polsgrove's recent research has led her to argue that Padmore attempted to 'rebrand' himself after he left the Communist Party. Concerned primarily with Padmore as a writer, she argues that in May 1935 when Padmore neglected to mention his recent history with the Comintern to his new literary agent, Otto Theis, he took the first step in a 'strategic move' to 'rebuil[d] his political identity as a non-communist.'¹¹

⁹ Poe, *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism*, 53. Poe states that for Padmore, 'Marxist ideology provided a useful paradigm with which to understand colonialism and imperialism.

¹⁰ Bogues 'CLR James and George Padmore: The Ties that Bind,' 185.

¹¹ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule*, 8-9.

This new identity was signaled, for Polsgrove, by Padmore's self-identification to Theis as an 'African' presenting the case of his people to the British public. Her argument, however, only partly considers the purpose and permanence of this 'strategic move.' As shown in Chapter Two, Padmore had already declared himself to be an African when it suited a particular need.¹² In order to further elaborate this particular tactical move in 1935, this section outlines Padmore's precarious position in the period between his departure from the Comintern, and his move to London in 1935.

1.1 *Paris in Limbo*

In the autumn of 1933, Padmore traveled to England for a brief speaking tour. In December 1933, he reported on this trip to a new group of radicals in Paris, including Kouyate and the Martiniquan writer Rene Maran, who had set up a 'Comite d'Etudes' in preparation for a Negro World Unity Congress they planned for 1935.¹³ Padmore had, in fact, been working with some of the men in the Congress Committee since 1930.¹⁴ He was charged with raising money to print copies of a subscription notice for a Negro World Unity Congress to take place in 1935 in Paris.¹⁵ Unable to access Comintern resources any longer, Padmore had already expressed frustration in meetings in 1934.¹⁶ Neither the conference nor the funds for subscription ever materialized. This initiative was Padmore's first serious confrontation with organizing initiatives that lacked a concrete funding source and relied on constant searches for, and appeals to, donors. Despite financial strains and the eventual demise of the conference, Padmore worked with this committee during the winter of 1934 to make their proposed Congress a reality. He contacted potential donors, drafted a manifesto, and attended regular meetings of the group.¹⁷

¹² See Chapter 2, p. 86.

¹³ Report of a meeting of the Comite d'Etudes pour l'organisation d'un Congres Mondial Negre, 13 December 1933. SLOTFOM III/34.

¹⁴ Reports of Agents Joe and Paul. 7, 9, 14, 21, 28 October and 30 December 1932. SLOTFOM 3/53.

¹⁵ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 275.

¹⁶ 'Meeting of the Union des Travailleurs Negres,' 24 July 1933. SLOTFOM 3/53; 'Report of Agent Moise,' 30 March 1934. SLOTFOM 3/34.

¹⁷ See Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 278-282 for an analysis of the 'Manifesto' written separately in French and English by Kouyate and Padmore respectively.

Edwards argues that Padmore and Kouyate's black internationalism 'takes shape in detour, in dialogue.'¹⁸ Yet where this 'detour' is precisely, remains unclear. For those who see Padmore as always essentially a pan-Africanist, the detour could be read as both men's brief engagement with the Comintern. Hooker's emphasis upon Padmore as displaying 'a rather trying francophobia'¹⁹ could also read the detour as his period with Kouyate in Paris, on his way from leadership of the international black communist movement in Moscow and Germany, towards a permanent home in London and leadership of new organizations he would himself create. Yet Edwards insists that while this year of chaotic events (after both had been expelled from the Comintern), could be seen as a time of desperation, of being 'uprooted,' it was also enabling.²⁰ Thus 'detour' may not be the appropriate word for what Edwards is describing. Padmore's time in Paris was certainly enabling. It provided him with the first concrete experience of organization outside the confines of a larger (more wealthy and influential) organization. His own subsequent efforts, including his overtures to W.E.B. Du Bois for support and legitimacy for his own initiative to start black international committees,²¹ began in his collaboration with Kouyate.

1.2 *An indirect response to his CP colleagues: How Britain Rules Africa*

Hooker describes Padmore's response to his expulsion as a 'silence under attack' that marked him as 'a different sort of ex-communist than many.'²² According to Hooker, Padmore's refusal to defend himself 'except on rare occasions' was primarily a strategy to deny anti-communists any useful criticism of the communist movement. Yet to fully understand Padmore's frame of mind in this period the ideological and personal commitment he had made to the communist movement must again be recalled. Nancy Cunard described Padmore's mood when he stayed with her at her summer home in Reanville, Normandy in the summer of 1934.

Padmore was utterly overcome by this attack and it made the deepest impression on him possible – which I could well understand ... On the one hand Padmore, one of the few people I reverenced for his integrity and very being (all of it); on the other hand, that this should come from members of the ideology

¹⁸ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 245.

¹⁹ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 121.

²⁰ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 247.

²¹ Edwards cites Padmore's letter to Du Bois in 1934 for support for the Negro World Unity Congress. Edwards, 246-247.

²² Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 35.

(Communism) that I admired also entirely and wholly. It was unacceptable – and yet it had happened... “Overcome” he was.²³

For Cunard the strain of the assault on Padmore was not simply the normal injured pride of one under personal attack, but was rooted in his bewilderment at the lack of fidelity shown by those who professed the same ideological beliefs as himself. While Padmore was certainly not inactive, the ‘silence’ of only one public letter²⁴ explaining his break with the CP can perhaps be understood as an unwillingness to sustain a direct battle with those like Ward, Huiswoud, and Ford who had been his comrades and mentors and who were now invested in destroying his reputation. Padmore chose, instead, to fight his battle by other means.

Padmore responded to his break with the Comintern by ensuring that his name remained in the public sphere and did not vanish, as so many of his Russian colleagues were beginning to disappear across the wasteland of Siberia and its gulags.

For those who remained in the ITUCNW and the NWA, the deterioration of strong Comintern support for anti-colonial work, accompanied by a precarious legal status across Europe, made their work increasingly frustrating. The rise and fall of the ITUCNW had occurred during the highpoint of Comintern anti-colonial work that ended with the Soviet Union’s entry into the League of Nations. Padmore’s departure also coincided with the ITUCNW’s loss of legal offices in Germany and the destruction of its files after the raid in Hamburg that resulted in a forced move to clandestine activity.²⁵ In March 1934 he was back in England defending his honour to colonial students, and Arnold Ward reported to the International Labor Defense (the legal arm of the Communist Party) in New York that Padmore had ‘done us a lot of harm here.’²⁶ The proliferation of Padmore’s name then, in the public sphere, in the African-American press, in plans for international events, and in books such as Nancy Cunard’s *Negro Anthology*, released in February 1934, were thus a direct challenge to the work of his Comintern ex-colleagues.

²³ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Pizer, November 1959. Cunard MSS/17/10. For Cunard’s ‘communist vocabulary’ in *Negro* see Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 28.

²⁴ ‘An Open Letter to Earl Browder,’ *The Crisis*, no. 10, October 1935. This article is analyzed in Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 84.

²⁵ The effect of this is shown in ‘Proposals on the Work of the ITUCNW,’ 29 October 1935. RGASPI 495/155/101.

²⁶ A. Ward to William L. Patterson. 6 March 1934. CPUSA MSS/LOC, reel 273, delo 3482.

Padmore also began, at Reanville, to produce a new book on Africa that would launch his name before a new audience and establish his presence outside the clandestine networks of the Comintern. The aims of *How Britain Rules Africa* were twofold: firstly, it was an alternative means of breaking his ‘silence’; and secondly, as Padmore declared on several occasions to Otto Theis, it would inform the British middle class and Labour supporters about conditions in Africa. *How Britain Rules Africa* announced Padmore’s voice in the aftermath of his comrades’ attacks. The best evidence of this can be found in the quotation Padmore chose to open the book:

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak,
They are slaves who will not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in *silence* shrink
From the truth they needs must think,
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three.²⁷

This was a defiant reminder that Padmore, the grandson of a slave, was no longer in slavery. The epigraph signals the first aim of the book and should be read as a direct response to Padmore’s attackers and a signal that he was determined to continue his work, even if alone. In a letter to Otto Theis Padmore insisted that his second aim for the book, its urgent need, was daily becoming more relevant in 1935: ‘We are witnessing the re-enacting of the imperialist drama of the 19th Century, namely, a scramble for the dividing up of the last free Africa on the one hand, and on the other hand, the re-division of what has already been parceled out.’²⁸ In the midst of the furor over the Italo-Abyssinian ‘crisis,’ Padmore’s attention was placed squarely on imperial designs across the continent. It was Padmore’s ability to link popular and unpopular events across the Empire together that made his work so effective. For example, by linking events in Ethiopia to South African demands for territorial expansion in this letter, Padmore justified the urgency of his book to a British working and middle class audience whom Padmore lamented, ‘know as much about Africa and its problems as the man on the moon. It is to supply this want that I have written.’²⁹

²⁷ The quotation is by American Romantic poet James Russell Lowell. Padmore, *How Britain Rules Africa*, vi. Emphasis added.

²⁸ George Padmore to Otto Theis, 7 July 1935. Louise Morgan and Otto Theis Papers, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, box 13, item 4 (hereafter cited as Theis MSS).

²⁹ Ibid. Padmore also notes in an earlier letter of 17 May that the aim of the book is not to inform blacks about their own conditions: ‘this we know better than anybody else.’

1.3 *London Calling*

The value of Padmore's book, he reiterated, was that it was from the perspective of 'an African.' While Polsgrove has highlighted his tactical reasons for this claim (i.e. that since he was not a scholar and was no longer a leading communist, the label provided legitimacy to his writing),³⁰ his letters to Otto Theis contained two other crucial insights into Padmore's strategic thinking in this period: timing and audience. The British middle class were crucial to Padmore's strategic aim of building resistance to European imperialism, as well as for his own resurgence as a credible leader in this confrontation. Once the vicious press attacks removed the option of alliance with the communist movement in Europe and the United States, Padmore knew he needed to move beyond the boundaries of underground communist networks and into the less restrictive space of the British metropole in order to continue his work. Although Padmore was under constant surveillance by the Metropolitan Police Special Branch and MI5 (to be discussed in Chapter Five), it is important to note here that his move to London did provide him with access to resources from the imperial centre that would otherwise have been impossible. Indeed, it is precisely these 'contacts and collaborations' provided by the metropole, and Ras Makonnen's assertion that these would have been 'unthinkable back home,' that forms the basis for Edwards's work on Kouyaté and Padmore.³¹

Padmore's self-identification as an African author for *How Britain Rules Africa*, and his move to London, were strategic initiatives necessary in order to continue anti-imperial work outside the Comintern. However, these were not permanent acts that immediately placed Padmore in a specific locality or political identity. It is clear from available correspondence between Padmore and different individuals that his life between August 1933 and September 1936 was unsettled.³² Padmore moved to London by September 1936, but as we shall see his permanence in the capital remained unresolved until war

³⁰ Polsgrove, *How Britain Rules Africa*, 6.

³¹ Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 241-242.

³² Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 88.

broke out in 1939. This physical and mental unsettling was coupled with a need to find a new audience and supportive network for his political activism. The work Padmore conducted with Kouyate was certainly enabling; however, as an English-speaker whose primary experience and networks were with the British Empire, London was a more natural location from which to ensure that his work would challenge and contribute to public discourse. The personal attacks against him made it all the more necessary that he gain a platform from which to articulate his Marxist understanding of capitalist, imperial power structures and their control over the lives of black people. He moved to London in 1935 then, to embrace the resources provided by life in the centre of the world's most extensive empire.

2 Padmore the 'pan-Africanist'

In October 1935, just months after Padmore left Paris permanently, Mussolini's forces invaded Ethiopia – one of two territories in Africa not under European domination. The Italo-Abyssinian crisis acted as a catalyst for pan-African thinking across the black diaspora; it was viewed as emblematic of a larger betrayal of Africa and peoples of African descent.³³ The conception of a pan-African community thus gained new currency,³⁴ and Padmore was involved in sustained resistance efforts on two main fronts: his journalism, and the organizing efforts of the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA) with C.L.R. James. The crisis is a useful starting point for a more detailed examination of Padmore's 'pan-Africanism' in this period since his efforts were sharply contrasted at the time with the failings of international communist organizations. This lack of vocal opposition, along with the weak position of the NWA and the ITUCNW in general as discussed above, meant that when Padmore arrived in London he stepped into a favourable environment in which to rebuild himself against his communist attackers.

In May 1936, Arnold Ward reported that Padmore's article on Abyssinia in W.E.B. Du Bois's magazine, *The Crisis*, had further tarnished the reputation of the NWA in London, noting how 'The inactivity of the AWM, the LAI, and the CP on the

³³ Asante, *Pan-African Protest*; James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*.

³⁴ Despite the general surge in Pan-African feeling, James Meriwether has shown that African Americans differed in the importance they placed upon the invasion of Ethiopia over domestic struggles and the real conditions of blacks in America. See Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*, 27-56.

Abyssinian question brings George Padmore and Marcus Garvey right into the limelight.³⁵ Soviet participation in the League of Nations now meant that those organizations still affiliated to the Comintern only very weakly opposed the Italian invasion. More importantly, in this letter Ward mentioned Padmore's name in conjunction with the two leading figures of Pan-African ideas up to this point – Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois – a reference already made in the *Pittsburgh Courier* article of 1934.³⁶ His position as a leading advocate for unity among peoples of African descent was now becoming firmly established. The extent to which Padmore's reputation as a proponent of black unity should be viewed as a clear pan-African ideology, however, requires some explanation. The ideological basis for Padmore's 'pan-Africanism' at this time can be found in his journalism and in his efforts to establish the International African Service Bureau (IASB), the organization that grew out of James's IAFA.

2.1 *Hobson, Lenin, and pan-Africanism: an economic understanding of black unity*

In Pennybacker's response to the argument that Padmore was always essentially a pan-Africanist, she emphasizes the difficulty in defining Padmore thus since 'Pan-Africanism was always a movable-feast.'³⁷ Pan-African scholars have so far been unable to establish a single definition of pan-Africanism. The traditional definition in its most narrow form is as a movement for the political independence and unification of Africa itself.³⁸ Other definitions of pan-Africanism consider a wide range of components within the definition: the idea of Africa as the homeland of Africans and African descendants, the idea of solidarity among people of African descent, glorification of an African past and African culture, the struggle for political independence from colonialism, and the struggle of people of African origin, particularly living outside Africa, against racial prejudice.³⁹

³⁵ Arnold Ward to Edwards, 26 May 1935. RGASPI 495/155/102, list 15.

³⁶ Chapter 2, p. 94.

³⁷ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 79.

³⁸ Logan, 'The Historical Aspects of Pan-Africanism, 1900-1945,' 55.

³⁹ Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and the Movement*, 5; Ackah, *Pan-Africanism: Exploring the Contradictions*, 12.

Definitions that consider multiple components, acting across geographical spaces and social classes, point to the organic nature of the movement. Yet this has led Geiss to conclude that pan-Africanism was essentially chaotic and irrational, that it represented ‘an unconscious and inarticulate demand’ for equal rights. This argument is erroneous.⁴⁰ The programme of manifestos, protests, books and articles by pan-Africanists like Du Bois and Padmore show the very deliberate way in which these men set about their task. Yet Padmore rarely used the term pan-Africanism to describe his work in the 1930s. The Congress he hoped to host with Kouyaté represented a Negro *unity* conference, and the bureau he launched in 1937, although initially spoken of as a ‘Pan Afro Group,’⁴¹ was named eventually as an *international African* organization. At this point then, Padmore articulated pan-Africanism primarily in its most general sense, as an idea that those in Africa and in the diaspora shared a history of oppression, and thus needed to unite in solidarity in order to realize their demands for economic, social and political equality.

Padmore’s logic of black unity was an expression of his firm belief in a Leninist interpretation of imperialism and global power. He admittedly drew both from the founding British anti-imperial theoretician, J.A. Hobson, and from V.I. Lenin. In an article for the Gold Coast *African Morning Post* in 1935, he explained the South African desire for neighbouring British protectorate territory as economic: it was caused by an agrarian crisis in South Africa and the fear of competition from neighbouring exports. Here Padmore’s explanation of imperial expansion as caused by competition and export markets was rooted in both Hobson and Lenin’s theory of monopoly capitalism, internationalism, and market demands. However in this instance, it was more directly related to Hobson’s emphasis upon imperial expansion as annexation rather than Lenin’s more elastic definition of empire as ‘informal control.’⁴² Also agreeing with Hobson,⁴³ Padmore argued that the ultimate aim of annexation was to ‘rob the Native tribes of all their lands and turn them into a proletariat for the

⁴⁰ Geiss and Keep, *The Pan-African Movement*, 5.

⁴¹ Hogsbjerg, *CLR James in Imperial Britain, 1932-1938*, 202. Hogsbjerg references Pennybacker’s use of Ralph Bunche’s diary while in London from February to September 1937. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 90-94; 304.

⁴² For the differences between Hobson and Lenin’s theses see Eckstein, “Is there a Hobson-Lenin thesis’ on late nineteenth-century colonial expansion?”, 312-316.

⁴³ Cain, *Hobson and Imperialism*, 133.

exploitation of the mineral resources of the country, just as has been done in the Transvaal.⁴⁴

Yet Hobson was a reformer, and as will be apparent later in this chapter, Padmore in this period ultimately sided with Lenin in his conviction that monopoly capitalism's demand for imperial markets was irreversible and would inevitably lead to another world war and revolution. In a review of the film 'My Song Goes Forth,' starring the black actor Paul Robeson, Padmore criticized the film because it 'lack[ed] a really militant spirit.'⁴⁵ The 'revolutionary spirit' which drove Padmore in 1929 to commit to a life of political action and which we have seen linked him to his West Indian predecessor's like Claude McKay,⁴⁶ was obviously essential to Padmore's understanding of a committed political radical.

2.2 *From ideology to action: Founding the International African Service Bureau*

Padmore found the 'militant spirit' he was searching for in his childhood friend, C.L.R. James,⁴⁷ and a group of black radicals converging in London after 1935, who founded the IAFA. In May 1936, the same month that Ward wrote his letter to the ITUCNW complaining of Padmore's influence in London, Addis Ababa fell to the Italian army and Emperor Haile Selassie fled to London. Far from ending diasporic attention on Ethiopia, Selassie's presence in London centralized the efforts of those active in the metropole,⁴⁸ and further encouraged West Indian and West African media attention covering the plight of Ethiopia. From June 1936 to the end of 1939, nineteen articles attributable to Padmore about Ethiopia or Haile Selassie appeared in the Trinidadian newspaper *The People* and the Gold Coast newspaper *The African Morning Post*.⁴⁹ After joining James in his IAFA, meetings were held with the aim of forming a 'Pan-African Federation' during the summer of 1936.⁵⁰ By May 1937 Padmore, James, their

⁴⁴ Padmore, 'Anglo-Boer Conflict in South Africa,' *The African Morning Post*, 4 June 1935.

⁴⁵ Our London Correspondent, 'Paul Robeson's Best Part Yet,' *The People*, 22 May 1937.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Hogsbjerg has argued for James's commitment to 'real' politics in the 1930s. James and Padmore, then, would have come together in 1935 at a critical juncture in their development as intellectuals and activists. See Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 6-19.

⁴⁸ For example, a young Una Marson worked for Selassie and the Abyssinian Delegation in London in 1936. Una Marson, 'Racial Feelings,' *Public Opinion*, 17 July 1937.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 1.

⁵⁰ Hogsbjerg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 201.

new Guianese comrade Ras Makonnen and a West African named Robert Broadhurst (who had participated in the 1911 and 1921 Pan-African Congresses in London), along with other important radicals like the Barbadian seaman Chris Jones and the Sierra Leonian trade union activist I.T.A. Wallace Johnson,⁵¹ transformed the germ of both the IAFA and the Pan-African Federation into the International African Service Bureau (IASB).

The militancy of the IASB was firmly based in what James attributed to Padmore's 'tremendous political orientation and insight and persistence and determination' in the belief that African independence was imminent.⁵² James's analysis of the importance of Padmore's political orientation to his resolve refers, primarily, to Padmore's ideological belief that the destruction of imperialism depended upon world revolution, and that the growing tide of fascism and its attendant international tension preceded this revolution. Importantly, what James highlighted as key to understanding the IASB (and what he believed Hooker 'never understood') was 'how narrow, how limited, how difficult it seemed at the time to be thinking about the emancipation of the African colonial people'.⁵³ Communication lines with those in Africa were limited, and few people in general actually believed in the certainty of African independence. In explaining the experience of founding the IASB, James's recollection of the challenges both of physical size and of theoretical imagination when it came to Africa are critical to understanding Padmore's state of mind at the time. The founding of the IASB was a testament to Padmore's conviction that black people were united in their experience of oppression as well as their resistance.

One of the first acts of the IASB was to instigate a campaign against an inflammatory article published in *Thomson's Weekly News* and the *Glasgow Weekly News* which purported to relate a story in Nigeria that fed on archetypal fears of relations between

⁵¹ A draft document in the papers of Ralph Bunche states that the IASB was set up by incorporating Wallace-Johnson's "West African Youth League" (WAYL) and the Committee of the Friends of Africa. 'An Appeal,' Ralph Bunche Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Bunche MSS), box 10b, folder 13. Wallace-Johnson's life remains under-researched, but for a short biography of his work up to 1945 see Leo Spitzer and La Ray Denzer, 'I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League: Part 1 & 2,' 413-452 and 565-601.

⁵² Transcription of interview between Rukudzo Murapa and C.L.R. James. Undated. James MSS/UWI, box 22, folder 421.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

white women and African men.⁵⁴ That one of the IASB's first actions was focused on British misperceptions about Africans is crucial – it calls to mind Padmore's stated aim of *How Britain Rules Africa*. In the inaugural publication of its first organ, *Africa and the World*, the organization claimed one of its chief functions to be to 'enlighten public opinion in Great Britain...as to the true condition in the various colonies, protectorates and mandated territories in Africa, the West Indies, and other colonial areas.'⁵⁵ Although a collaborative effort, the IASB also very much bore Padmore's mark of influence.

Aside from Ethiopia, the IASB was concerned by the rumoured appeasement of Hitler by granting Germany colonies in Africa.⁵⁶ In December 1937, the IASB drew up a memorandum protesting the return of German colonies.⁵⁷ The issue, as elaborated by Padmore in *The Gold Coast Spectator*, was not simply that German rule had been and would be brutal since the principle of trusteeship would ask the Fascists to 'treat blacks even better than they treat the Jews.'⁵⁸ He was also at pains to show that all other forms of European imperialism were no less destructive and abhorrent to the native populations.⁵⁹ In his most radical statement on Germany and Africa, Padmore denied any distinction between the realities of black people and the Jews in Germany: 'There is as much democracy for Negroes in Mississippi as in Africa...The natives have as much liberty and freedom in their own countries as the Jews enjoy in Hitler's Germany.'⁶⁰

By 1938, the convergence of imperial interests became the underlying message in his journalism. British imperial networks, its system of Colonial Governors, civil servants, and London investors, were always able to dictate labour conditions for all colonial

⁵⁴ 'IASB: Alleged Treatment of White Women in Nigeria,' 9 and 16 September, 1937. TNA/UK, CO 583/218/16.

⁵⁵ Hogsberg, *C.L.R. James in Imperial Britain*, 203.

⁵⁶ For a summary of the historiographical debates surrounding Britain's support for Italian and German colonial demands, see Bush, *Imperialism, Race, and Resistance*, 259-60.

⁵⁷ Our London Correspondent, 'Africans to Protest Against Germany's Colonial Demands,' *The People*, 11 December 1937; Our London Correspondent, 'Diplomatic Moves to Barter Africa in Readjustment of World Situation Disclosed,' *African Morning Post*, 11 December 1937.

⁵⁸ Padmore, 'This "have" and "have not" business – some facts bared,' *The Gold Coast Spectator* 2, 9, 16 October 1937.

⁵⁹ Padmore, 'A Negro Surveys the Colonial Problem,' *African Morning Post*, 30 January-1 February 1939.

⁶⁰ Padmore, 'The Negro Faces the War,' *Workers Age*, 23 December 1939. Schwarz also notes that Padmore 'regularly equated the suffering of Jews in Germany with blacks in the British colonies' see Schwarz, *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, 141.

peoples.⁶¹ For example, Padmore reported in 1938 that the Governor of Northern Rhodesia had been appointed the new Governor of Trinidad, leaving for the West Indies at the same time as a Royal Commission was being appointed to look into conditions in the colonial islands. He added that an individual who had been on a recent Trinidadian Commission was also now being appointed to a Rhodesia Commission.

Thus he showed that at the same time as new ways were being explored to harness black labour in Southern Africa, black labour in Trinidad was being suppressed through the deployment of a Governor from Rhodesia. The same individuals who judged events in Trinidad would be those who worked to consolidate labour in Rhodesia. Black people under colonialism, whether in Africa or the West Indies, were more closely connected than they imagined. For Padmore, imperial structures of power explained contemporary European racism in its numerous iterations in Nazi Germany, colonized Africa, and the West Indies. Yet the programme of the IASB, along with Padmore's obvious focus on the exploitation of Africans and their descendants, led many of his contemporaries and some historians to indulge in a debate about pan-Africanism and racial chauvinism. Essentially, was Padmore's pan-Africanism based primarily on racial oppression?

2.3 *Padmore's pan-Africanism: Race and imperial tyranny*

Rodney Worrell argues that after 1935, although Padmore's 'communist orientation' allowed him to 'transcend the narrow confines of Black Nationalism and embark on a more transformative path of pan-Africanism where class and race were firmly welded together,' he 'had shifted to the Pan-African camp [and] the race question took centre stage.'⁶² Worrell's argument can be supported by a number of Padmore's articles. The fate of Africa, Padmore declared in *The People*, was inextricably linked to 'the future of the Black Race.'⁶³ Everywhere, he told his Trinidadian readers, 'the Negro is a pariah.'⁶⁴ When James and Padmore started a new organ for the IASB, *International*

⁶¹ Our London Correspondent, 'Messrs Tate and Lyle Deny Certain Statements Re: Riot,' *African Morning Post*, 26 May 1938.

⁶² Worrell, 'George Padmore: Pan-Africanist Par-Excellence,' 29.

⁶³ Our London Correspondent, 'Africans to Protest Against Germany's Colonial Demands,' *The People*, 11 December 1937.

⁶⁴ Our London Correspondent, 'Black and White Problem Worrying British Government,' *The People*, 8 January 1938.

African Opinion, which ran from July 1938 to March 1939, their manifesto placed the fate of Ethiopia as the final warning to Africans and people of African descent that they must guard Haiti and Liberia as the two remaining states ‘where to be black is not a stigma.’⁶⁵ Yet although Worrell is correct in his assessment that Padmore increasingly spoke of exploitation in racial terms, it was the economic tyranny of imperialism that remained at the core of Padmore’s argument. This was most clearly outlined in an extract of *International African Opinion*:

The Colonial problem is the central issue of world politics today. Africans and peoples of African descent are on the whole a “colonial people”, that is, their destinies are not in their own hands...They are told that they are being held in sacred trust for civilization...We repudiate this imperialist benevolence, because we are fully aware that behind it is masked ruthless and incessant exploitation. “International African Opinion” will aim always at breaking the economic, political and social chains which bind Africans and peoples of African descent.⁶⁶

This radical statement that all blacks were held under a form of colonialism was an important transnational demand that spoke across numerous racial experiences. Imperial trusteeship was not sacrificial but self-serving. All black people were united in their struggle for autonomy. Finally, in the list of oppressive chains that needed to be broken, economic degradation was listed first. Thus the pan-African argument for unity as articulated in the IASB’s transnational message was fundamentally based upon the economic exploitation of the imperial world system. Padmore’s pan-Africanism in this period cannot be divorced from his Marxist education and his Leninist understanding of the world order.

3 Stepping into British politics: Marxism, Fascism, and the British Left

If Mussolini’s obliteration of Haile Selassie’s African rule spurred pan-Africanist identity, Soviet alignment with the League of Nations’s ‘actions’ on Abyssinia also highlighted several crucial debates for the British left at the time. Soviet entry into the League of Nations, and its turn towards an anti-fascist Popular Front policy that asked communists to cooperate with national governments whose policies they otherwise despised, was the spark for lasting tension among the fractious groups of the British left. When the formation of Ramsay Macdonald’s National Government in 1931 caused political units like the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), the National Executive

⁶⁵ ‘Fate of Liberia and Haiti is Analysed in Manifesto,’ *African Morning Post*, 22 June 1938.

⁶⁶ ‘International African Opinion: A Review,’ *The People*, 3 September 1938.

Council (NEC), the Socialist League (SL) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to distinguish their allegiances more distinctly, it was the ILP who emerged as the strongest opponent of Empire and the group unwilling to ignore the about-face the Soviet Union undertook in its foreign policy in 1934. Padmore's entry into London was an entry into these debates.⁶⁷

The fascist threat in Europe, as first argued by Hooker, was central to all Padmore's thinking in the 1930s. After the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 and its rejection of 'third period' sectarianism in favour of a 'united front against fascism,' Pennybacker argues that 'Padmore's alienation was complete. He had not renounced "communism" as a guide to action but he expressly rejected its contemporary Soviet manifestations.'⁶⁸ Both authors' efforts to situate Padmore's ideas within anti-fascism, the Soviet Union and the 'left,' however, should be explained here. Padmore's ideology and his affiliations in 1930s Britain must be understood within the debates on the British left about fascism, the threat of war, and Empire. If Padmore had not renounced communism, what exactly was his ideological position now?

3.1 The British Left

First, it is important to understand events within the British Left. The Seventh Comintern Congress in the summer of 1935 endorsed CPGB efforts to create a united front campaign in Britain. The intermittent negotiations between the four major groups on the left to forge a united front against fascism, between the summer of 1935 and the expulsion from and re-instatement of Stafford Cripps to the Labour Party in January 1939, produced the atmosphere of sharp debate and tenuous alliances within which Padmore built his own relationships. CPGB membership, at its lowest in 1930, rose between 1936 and 1939 to a total of 18,000 in 1939.⁶⁹ The party gained enough support so that it was able to persuade Stafford Cripps of the Socialist League (an organization that consisted, between 1932-1937, of individuals from the ILP who wished to remain affiliated to the Labour Party), and James Maxton of the ILP, to join them in a 'Unity Campaign,' launched on 24 January 1937. That the campaign was launched on the same date as a new round of show trials in Moscow meant that the relationship was

⁶⁷ Corthorn, *In the Shadow of the Dictators*, 40-59.

⁶⁸ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 83.

⁶⁹ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 267.

short-lived; Stafford Cripps believed the trials to be ‘an internal matter for Russia,’ the ILP quickly criticized the trials and called for an internal investigation, and the CPGB rebuked the ILP’s ‘definite breach’ of the unity agreement.

Against the silence of the Socialist League and the loyalty of the CPGB to Moscow, the ILP was the only party on the left willing to take an openly critical stance against Stalin’s rule. Although ILP disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932 meant that its membership dropped heavily and was never more than 3,000 members for most of its existence, its high profile members including George Orwell, its affiliation with Kingsley Martin and his *New Statesman and Nation*, and the leadership of James Maxton meant that it maintained a disproportionately high profile in British politics.⁷⁰ The anti-imperial, anti-fascist stance of the ILP brought the Party into frequent conflict with the CPGB. These positions also made the party a natural ally for Padmore. By 1938 his articles appeared not only in ILP papers, but also in the *Workers Age*, the organ of the ILP’s American equivalent: the Independent Communist Labor League. In this paper Padmore was represented as a ‘well-known radical, for years active in this country [the U.S.A.]’,⁷¹ as well as a ‘British Socialist’.⁷² Depending on audience then, Padmore could be an African, a West Indian, or a British Socialist. The fluidity of his identity meant that in a period where Padmore was firmly establishing himself outside the control of the Communist Party, he did not close himself off to engagement with the CP but remained inside the debates of the left.

An example of Padmore’s continued involvement in key debates on the British Left can be found in his attitude towards Stalin and the Soviet Union. Despite his departure from the Comintern, he maintained a doctrinaire idea of the need to defend the Soviet Union against an inevitable capitalist attack both in his journalism,⁷³ and in private debates among ‘colonials’ in London. Indeed, he maintained his conviction that the challenge posed to capitalism by the Soviet project was of ultimate importance even into 1940, when he continued to argue that the invasion of Poland was a smokescreen used by

⁷⁰ Corthorn, *In the Shadow of the Dictators*, 2.

⁷¹ Padmore, ‘British Imperialism in the West Indies,’ *Workers Age*, 5 March 1938.

⁷² ‘British Socialists Denounce Empire,’ *Workers Age*, 8 February 1939.

⁷³ His fascination with Soviet defence is evidenced in two articles. Our London Correspondent, ‘Russia Strong Enough to Defy All the Powers Single-Handed,’ and ‘Russia’s Growing Undersea Fleet,’ *The People*, 24 April 1937.

Hitler to hide his ultimate aim of destroying the Soviet Union.⁷⁴ Thus in certain ways, Padmore remained indoctrinated in Soviet ideology well after his disaffiliation. Like the ILP, he responded to events in the Soviet Union by becoming anti-Stalinist, not anti-Soviet. Padmore's analysis of the Moscow Show Trials in 1937 and 1938, Sri Lankan politician T.B. Subasinghe recalled, influenced colonial groups in London such that 'we all became anti-Stalinists while supporting the Soviet Union.'⁷⁵

3.2 *Padmore and Lenin*

Padmore's ideological commitment to debates on the left went beyond a simple allegiance to defending the Soviet Union. His understanding of imperialism and capitalism was clearly based upon Lenin's emphasis on monopoly markets in an imperial age. The clearest example of Padmore's thinking on this during the 1930s can be found in a series of 1937 articles Padmore wrote for the *Gold Coast Spectator* (the newspaper he had assisted in 1931 in its search for an affordable printing press). The articles were dense and analytical, and clearly not 'dumbed down' for a 'backward' West African audience.⁷⁶ The series began by basing its analysis in one of Padmore's favourite themes, fascist arguments for colonies in Africa. In his explanation, Padmore firmly stated the Leninist advancement upon Hobson's ideas that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalist development, since the effect of monopoly capitalism on world market prices worked to the advantage of those with colonial possessions.⁷⁷ Padmore agreed, with Lenin, that 'in the epoch of imperialism, the capitalist system has passed from the stage of free competition to monopoly' and thus each industrialized country strove to monopolize markets, raw materials, and spheres of investment.⁷⁸

This is why, Padmore argued, any idea that colonies could be detached from nations and governed under international control would never work. Colonies were integral to the success of industrial economies and it would be fatal for any country, no matter their central organizing ideology (whether Fascism, Nazism, Republicanism, Socialism, etc),

⁷⁴ T.B. Subasinghe to Marika Sherwood, 27 February 1995. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The article was based on the argument made by Padmore in his published monograph, *Africa and World Peace*.

⁷⁷ For Lenin's distinction from Hobson on the issue of monopolistic capitalism see Eckstein, 'Is there a "Hobson-Lenin thesis?"', 297-318.

⁷⁸ Padmore, 'This "have" and "have not" business – some facts bared,' *Gold Coast Spectator*, 9 October 1937.

to give up their overseas monopoly. Appeals to the bourgeoisie to end any unfair economic practices in the colonies was therefore ‘asking them to do the impossible.’⁷⁹ Padmore thus concluded the article by declaring that ‘the Colonial Question must lead, as it did in 1914, to another World War.’ Exploitation of colonies would always continue, ‘as long as the economic basis of such a system is predicated upon the principles of capitalism. It is the economic system that has to be changed.’ Padmore’s analysis of the colonial situation – the situation he already contended was that of all black people – was thus firmly rooted in Lenin’s explanation of imperialism as the basis for World War I and the necessity for socialist revolution.⁸⁰

4 Still a West Indian: The convergence of Padmore’s pan-Africanism and Marxism during the West Indian Labour Revolts

In an undated flyer for an ILP meeting on “The Position of Coloured Workers in the British Empire” Padmore’s name appeared as the principle speaker. He was described as a ‘West Indian [who] has an excellent command of the English Language’ and who also ‘has first hand information of the conditions under which the Colonial Workers live.’⁸¹ The paternalism of assumptions about West Indians’ ‘command’ of the English language had confounded both Claude McKay and CLR James before him.⁸² What is most significant here is that Padmore was in this instance a West Indian, not an African, and a West Indian with first hand knowledge of colonial workers – despite the fact that he had not set foot in the West Indies for over a decade. Padmore’s classification as a West Indian suited contemporary news in 1937 and 1938, when labour unrest spread across the West Indies and gained public attention in the British press. These revolts, which began in British Honduras in early 1935 and culminated in the strikes, marches and demonstrations across Jamaica in 1938, became a major subject of Padmore’s journalism and a key action point for the IASB. The IASB became heavily involved in West Indian affairs and although many see this period as Padmore’s stronger identification as an ‘African,’ it was also the period in which he was most involved in

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See also Worrell, “George Padmore: Social and Political Thought,’ 180-182.

⁸¹ Flyer for the Independent Labour Party. Undated. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

⁸² For the battle both engaged in to prove their prowess as writers, see Winkiel, *Modernism, Race and Manifestos*, 37. Bogues also analyzes the status of the black intellectual as specimen. See Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets*, 11.

West Indian politics. His continued Marxism and his persistent encouragement of pan-African unity came together in his support for Caribbean workers.

4.1 Analyzing and aligning without distinction to race or class

Padmore's journalism covering the West Indian revolts demonstrates the varying distinctions he made between class-based and race-based conflict. Padmore reported for Stafford Cripps's paper, *The Tribune*, that the wave of strikes represented 'one of the most significant demonstrations of inter-racial solidarity between Negroes and East Indians which has occurred in a colonial country for years' and that this solidarity came from the ruthless exploitation both groups had experienced in the West Indies, Africa, and India.⁸³ He evoked the legacy of slavery to describe the poverty of the West Indian workers, who continued to subsist on 'the same diet [of bread-fruit and dried salt fish] which the slaves were fed upon.' Yet Padmore was also quick to point out that inter-racial solidarity was also a result of the fact that 'in no sections of the British colonial empire are class lines more sharply defined than in the West Indies.' He concluded that in the Caribbean, 'the problem is definitely one of class against class,'⁸⁴ rather than race.

In focusing attention on the plight of West Indian workers, Padmore was often willing to put aside personal differences of opinion and ally with those both on the left and the right of his own politics. On 8 August 1937, the IASB held one of many protest meetings in Trafalgar Square in solidarity with the striking workers of Trinidad and Barbados,⁸⁵ at which he shared the platform with Labour MP Reginald Sorensen and LAI leader Reginald Bridgeman, with whom his relations had 'for a long time been extremely acrimonious.'⁸⁶ When Grantley Adams, future leader of Barbados and House of Assembly representative in 1937, arrived in London in December hoping to secure an interview with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Padmore worked with Adams

⁸³ Our London Correspondent, 'When Trinidad Flared Up,' *The People*, 18 September 1937.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Our London Correspondent, 'Africans Hold Mass Meeting in London,' *The People*, 4 September 1937.

⁸⁶ 'Secret Information on Wallace-Johnson and the IASB,' 27 January 1938. Gambia National Archives. No. 179 – 4/73. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

and Harold Moody's LCP to ensure this audience and to organize speaking engagements for Adams.⁸⁷ Moody and the LCP often differed politically from Padmore and the IASB, yet during this period Padmore forged stronger connections with the LCP than ever before.⁸⁸ He also maintained contact with the Jamaican communist, Richard Hart, who printed a celebratory article of James and Padmore as a 'shining example' to Jamaicans in his *Jamaica Labour Weekly*.⁸⁹ Hart received a prompt rebuke for this article from the CPGB that warned him against Padmore and James and requested that the two Trinidadians 'not be given any prominence at all' in the paper.⁹⁰ Hart assured his comrade that no further articles would feature Padmore and James; however, he later admitted that he and his comrades ignored CPGB warnings and continued to correspond with Padmore as a useful source of information.⁹¹

4.2 Padmore's response to the 1938 West Indies Commission

Although the IASB focused on building British public awareness of the reality of imperialism on the ground in its colonies, Padmore still struggled with how best to approach Colonial Office responses to colonial dissidence. Commissions of Enquiry were the standard 'response' by the metropolitan government to problems in the colonies. Working with these commissions versus denouncing them as ineffectual, was always a debate for the anti-colonial activist and usually defined the moderate from the radical. In his own analysis of Britain's position towards the West Indian revolts Padmore articulated both moderate and radical tendencies.

In early 1938, the Colonial Office recalled the Governor of Trinidad as part of its strategy of addressing the oilfield revolts in 1937. The Governor had actually spoken out in defence of the striking workers, and Padmore condemned the Colonial Office

⁸⁷ Our London Correspondent, 'Governor of Trinidad Called to England,' *The People*, 18 December 1937; Our London Correspondent, 'Report on West Indian Labour Troubles,' and 'Government Employees in British Guiana,' *The People* 29 January 1938. For more on Grantley Adams see Hoyos, *Grantley Adams and the Social Revolution*.

⁸⁸ George Padmore to Harold Moody, 7 April 1939. Moody to Padmore 8 April 1939. St. Clair Drake Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Drake MSS/Schomburg), box 64, folder 3.

⁸⁹ Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, 404.

⁹⁰ Ben Bradley to Richard Hart, 17 April 1939; Hart to Bradley 7 May 1939. National Archives of the United Kingdom, (hereafter cited as TNA/UK), KV2/1824.

⁹¹ Interview Marika Sherwood with Richard Hart, 20 February 1990. Notes in possession of Marika Sherwood.

move as an act against the Trinidadian people rather than a step towards solving the crisis.⁹² Following the violent revolts in Jamaica in the spring of 1938, the British Government issued another West Indies Commission (Moyne Commission). Padmore decried the value of the countless Commissions and inquiries that did not actually intend to fundamentally change the situation in the colonies. At a mass meeting in Trafalgar Square organized by the IASB, Padmore demanded agrarian reforms by land settlement schemes and the establishment of agricultural banks to aid peasants, improved housing and other social conditions, the abolition of child labour, and that education be made compulsory and free.⁹³ Padmore warned his Trinidadian readers that ‘only the workers’ own organisation [sic] and agitation will drag concessions from the unwilling imperialists.’⁹⁴

However, Padmore also encouraged workers to take advantage of the Commission to place their case before British government and trade union officials. While he did not place hope in the Commission, he consistently encouraged utilizing it as an opportunity to demand self-determination and better working conditions for West Indian workers.⁹⁵ Prior to the Commission’s departure, the IASB took the opportunity to submit a joint memorandum with the LCP and the NWA which made it clear that what the West Indian workers were demanding were the basic rights that existed in Britain.⁹⁶ Padmore’s ambivalence toward the Commission, however, is illustrated by the fact that although the Commission requested follow-up oral testimony from Padmore, Moody and Blackman, Padmore did not turn up to the hearing on 29 September 1938.⁹⁷ He thus seemed to waver between working within, or rejecting, Government reforms.

5 Principle or Pragmatism? The building of new networks

By cultivating a mainstream, British audience in *How Britain Rules Africa* and by forging new alliances to support the rebellions in the Caribbean with groups on the left and the right, Padmore began to build a new set of networks outside the confines of

⁹² Our London Correspondent, ‘How Sir Murchison was Worked Out,’ *The People*, 5 February 1938; Our London Correspondent, ‘Our Correspondent Sits Near Sir Murchison,’ *The People*, 26 March 1938.

⁹³ Our London Correspondent, ‘London Negroes Call for Democracy in West Indies,’ *The People*, 30 July 1938.

⁹⁴ Padmore, ‘West Indians Asked to Beware of Commission,’ *The People*, 3 September 1938.

⁹⁵ Padmore, ‘British Imperialism in the West Indies,’ *Workers Age*, 5 March 1938.

⁹⁶ Our London Correspondent, ‘International African Bureau Submits Memo to West Indies Commission,’ *The People*, 8 October 1938.

⁹⁷ Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings*, 373.

Communist Party connections. His pragmatic politics were put to the test as these networks blossomed, and though he maintained a dialogue with those outside his immediate IASB circle, his willingness to compromise in order to obtain the larger goal of colonial independence was still developing. The building of these new networks provides a good example both of Padmore's pragmatism alongside his growing reputation among British anti-imperial circles for strongly defended, forthright opinions.

Padmore's initial contacts in London were all interested in colonial issues but embraced a range of political positions. On 24 May 1936, he spoke alongside Reginald Bridgeman, as well as the NWA and ILP members at an Empire Day workers rally in Victoria Park 'Against Colonial Exploitation and for the Complete Liberation of the Colonies.'⁹⁸ On the opposite side of the political spectrum of anti-imperial organizations, Padmore also acted as the main speaker at a Remembrance Day Service on behalf of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) of West Africa, 'when Prayers will be offered for the Progress of the Society both at home and abroad.'⁹⁹ In July 1936, he attended the Fifth Indian Political Congress where he impressed a young Norwegian socialist, Ivar Holm. Holm and Padmore spent a great deal of time together in the summer of 1936 discussing colonial issues. Padmore's influence was such that, recalling this thesis's introductory argument that Padmore's political praxis was ultimately pedagogical, Holm claimed that when it came to colonialism, Padmore 'was my teacher.'¹⁰⁰ These discussions sparked a lifelong friendship and gave Padmore the opportunity to travel to Norway in 1938 on behalf of the IASB where he gave lectures to students and was welcomed as 'the beautiful negro from the West Indies and London.'¹⁰¹ His contacts with Indian activists included talks of forming a Colonial Marxist League in 1938,¹⁰² and the introduction of Mrs Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Secretary of the All-India Women's Conference, to Holm on her visit to Oslo in August 1939.¹⁰³ In 1937 a Ugandan Prince, A. Nyabongo¹⁰⁴ lived intermittently with Padmore

⁹⁸ Pamphlet in possession of Marika Sherwood.

⁹⁹ Ibid. This is evidence that Padmore 'did not deride whites who sought to help Africans based on religious sentiments.' Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Ivar Holm to Dorothy Pizer, 4 April 1962. Kwame Nkrumah Papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (hereafter cited as Nkrumah MSS/Howard), box 154-41, folder 13-15.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. See also Our London Correspondent, 'Negro Leaders in London Express Thanks for Norwegian Support of Abyssinia,' *The People*, 26 February 1938.

¹⁰² Ajit Kumar Mukherji Roy to Padmore, 29 June 1938. TNA/UK, KV2/1824.

¹⁰³ Ivar Holm to Dorothy Pizer, 4 April 1962. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 13-15.

¹⁰⁴ Special Branch Report, 8 June 1938. TNA/UK, KV2/1824, item 24a.

when not studying in Oxford, and Padmore covered Nyabongo's academic success for Trinidadian readers.¹⁰⁵

Although Padmore could also find time for socializing, the content of discussion or the purpose of an evening of entertainment often returned to political subjects. He could frequently be found sharing Sunday afternoon tea at the home of novelist Ethel Mannin, an ILP member whose Wimbledon home became a regular discussion space for anti-colonial leftists.¹⁰⁶ When he went out for drinks with Holm and other friends 'as usual we discussed the Comintern policy,'¹⁰⁷ He did attend London's 'coloured' night clubs, but used these occasions as sources for his 'bread and butter' journalism.¹⁰⁸

Tense debates most frequently occurred between Padmore and those who were concerned with colonial welfare but were not ideologically adamant anti-imperialists. This included correspondence with Oxford Rhodes Trust scholar Margery Perham, who had recently sat on the Committee advising Lord Hailey's *An African Survey* and who became increasingly involved in government commissions after 1940, as well as Padmore's cooperation with Harold Moody's LCP. Far from being a quiet observer, evidence shows that Padmore participated vocally in events, meetings and personal correspondence. For example, at the end of the July 1937 LCP Conference, Padmore led a protest resolution in the closing session against the proceedings of a session earlier in the day by Sir Donald Cameron, Governor of Nigeria.

The faith of the LCP in imperial benevolence annoyed Padmore. Their moderation derived from the fact that they did not view imperialism from the same Marxian critique and therefore did not demand its unequivocal destruction. As one of the most active organizations at the time, the LCP therefore often became a site of debate for Padmore. In some instances his LCP colleagues would report, without surprise, that Padmore had not turned up to a meeting, apparently because 'he was piqued about something.'¹⁰⁹ It

¹⁰⁵ Our London Correspondent, 'American Negro Bishops Attend World Christian Conference,' *The People*, 4 September 1937.

¹⁰⁶ Ivar Holm to Dorothy Pizer, 4 April 1962. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 13-15. Also Padmore to Bunche. 13 April 1937. Bunche MSS, box 10b, folder 13.

¹⁰⁷ Ivar Holm to Dorothy Pizer, 4 April 1962. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 13-15.

¹⁰⁸ Our London Correspondent, 'How London's Harlem Heard Joe Louis's Victory,' *The People*, 2 October 1937.

¹⁰⁹ LCP Secretary to Hugh W. Springer, Barbados, 8 November 1938. Drake MSS, MG 309, box 64, folder 2.

was not always moderate LCP members Padmore was frustrated with. The LCP often acted as a focal point for colonial protest, and at a June 1938 meeting where the LCP, the IASB, the Colonial Seamen's Association, and the NWA drafted a joint memorandum to the Rhodesia Commission, Peter Blackman of the NWA 'so annoyed other members of the committee' with his insistence that the NWA draft be taken *in toto*, that Padmore 'had to be physically restrained from beating him.'¹¹⁰ Once again, behind closed doors, Padmore could unleash a passionate critique upon his fellow anti-colonial activists.

Metropolitan London in the 1930s was a site of intense debate and remarkable collaborations among colonial peoples. Padmore's experience of the anti-colonial networks operating in London is just one strand of a much larger story.¹¹¹ His willingness to participate in events with those on opposite sides of the political spectrum displayed a level of maturity, but was also based in the practical reality of the small size of these organizations against the deeply entrenched power they challenged. The vibrancy of these networks proved a compelling force for a committed anti-imperialist determined to exploit any power shifts resulting from a coming war.

6 Approaching War

What has become clear in this chapter is that while Padmore was not magically transformed over-night from a communist to a pan-Africanist, the years between his break with the Comintern and the onset of World War II were transitional. This was the case not just politically, but socially as well. These were years of financial hardship and of uprootedness, not just in the sense of political allies but also in his personal relationships and geographical location. He still had a wife and daughter in the United States, and family in the West Indies. London provided all the political opportunities for his work, but as war in Europe became more and more likely, it did not present the safest space for a young radical who was a visible minority and advocated the destruction rather than preservation of the contemporary British system. Yet London, as he later remarked, was the 'most strategic place from which to mobilize public

¹¹⁰ Arthur Lewis to Harold Moody. 25 June 1938. Drake MSS, MG 309, box 64, folder 2.

¹¹¹ Barbara Bush, *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*. For an analysis of the importance of London as 'place' for imperial networks and in particular for the birth of Pan-Africanism, see Schneer, *London 1900*, 203-226.

opinion and give inspiration to colonial peoples.¹¹² As the war which Padmore believed was inevitable drew near, he weighed his options and ultimately, chose to remain where he saw the best political opportunity – in the imperial centre.

By 1938 Padmore had become increasingly concerned about racism in Britain. Stories about ‘strange friendships’ between white women and black men incited fear of a ‘colour problem’ in Britain.¹¹³ The *Daily Express* pandered to local fears by printing stories about the ‘sudden’ increase in coloured men in the Cardiff port community of Tiger Bay, Wales.¹¹⁴ To Padmore these were more than small stories contained in port towns in England, but endemic of a larger European menace that Britain was not immune to. While the British public maintained that ‘it cannot happen here,’ Padmore argued that ‘the signs of an incipient Fascism in the home country are not lacking. Jew-baiting in the East End of London is becoming quite common...Now comes a more insidious racial propaganda against the coloured peoples of the Empire which has no great basis in actual fact.’¹¹⁵ Anxiety about growing fascism and repression was not confined to stories about coloured communities – they became a lived reality for Padmore and his colleagues in the IASB. Padmore explained to his old professor, Alain Locke, that the IASB

were the first to feel the effects of the repression which is invariably associated with war preparations. Our Bureau was placed under rigid surveillance and every obstacle was put in our way for normal functioning. Friends in influential circles informed me that as soon as war was declared it was most likely that we would be completely suppressed and placed in internment.¹¹⁶

Given these warnings, Padmore transferred the most important documents of the IASB to a safe place and increased his efforts to leave the country.

Although plans to return to the United States were well under way by March 1938, Padmore had trouble arranging a visa. He needed to travel under his passport name of Malcolm Nurse; however, when Padmore left for the Soviet Union in 1929, Hooker

¹¹² Padmore, ‘Dr. Hastings Banda: An African Leader,’ *Public Opinion*, 14 February 1952.

¹¹³ Our London Correspondent, ‘Black and White Problem Worrying British Government,’ *The People*, 8 January 1938. For British perceptions of black people in 1939, especially the fear of mixing between white women and black men see Schaffer, ‘Fighting Racism,’ 257.

¹¹⁴ Our London Correspondent, ‘Coloured Men Declared to be “Dumped” in South Wales,’ *The People*, 26 November 1938.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 3 October 1938. Alain Leroy Locke Papers, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University (hereafter cited as Locke MSS/Howard), box 164-76, folder 16.

states that he was refused a re-entry permit by the American authorities.¹¹⁷ As a first step, he tried to clear his name and establish the fact that he had secured employment and accommodation. Eventually, he was able to secure a letter from George Schuyler at the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and so establish his status as a journalist. He then asked his old friend Cyril Olivierre, who remained a close tie between Padmore and Julia, for a letter saying Padmore could stay with Olivierre. Padmore told Olivierre that 'Julie has helped me considerably – morally and materially. My one desire now is to be in a position to repay her for her devotion and sacrifice. It is with this object in view that I am coming to exploit the possibilities on your side.'¹¹⁸ This confession to Olivierre is extremely important. It points to a key aspect of understanding Padmore's motivations and mindset during this period, the pull in a number of directions that beset his position in London and caused a particular kind of anguish. In almost every aspect of his life the understanding of responsibility, of commitment, is central to who Padmore was. That he felt that he owed something to Julia Nurse, that he must 'repay' her, shows that Padmore did not take lightly his leaving her and their daughter behind. The political call to commit to the struggle to end imperialist exploitation was ultimately stronger than the commitment he had made to his wife (and vice versa), but his abandoning of this commitment continued to haunt his thinking for at least a decade after he left his position with the Comintern.

Contrary to Hooker's implication that when Padmore left for the Soviet Union his relationship with his wife and daughter was over, as Polsgrove has noted, he had not 'made a clean break' with his wife.¹¹⁹ He seems to have been quite serious about returning to the United States since, in the midst of the 'storm' in the fall of 1938 when he hid the IASB files, he turned down an opportunity to secure passage to Haiti and to wait instead for an opportunity to go to the United States. The refusal to issue Malcolm Nurse with a visa left Padmore incredulous:

Were I a man given to vanity, I would consider it a great compliment [to be considered such a threat to national security], but my egotism is not so inflated as to make me believe that my sojourn in the United States would endanger the liberties of 330 million Americans.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 14.

¹¹⁸ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 30 March 1938. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624, folder 1.

¹¹⁹ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 29; Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 14.

¹²⁰ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 3 October 1938. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

Padmore may not have believed himself to be a great threat, but he was still confident enough in the value and effectiveness of his work from the metropole that he believed it a better option to stay in Britain than to cross the Atlantic to Haiti where, if he could not get into the United States, he would likely have had to return to Trinidad.

So Padmore chose to remain in London, with access to the resources of metropolitan newspapers, reports, and central rallying spaces like Trafalgar Square. He became increasingly involved with the ILP, having come to the view that although the party had ‘displayed a lamentable confusion’ during the Italo-Abyssinian Crisis, it was now ‘the only working-class party in Britain that has a correct approach to the questions of imperialist war and the colonies.’¹²¹ His determination and conviction also became stronger. He wrote to Ralph Bunche that although the difficulty of eking out a daily living was a strain, ‘I don’t complain. I get a kick out of life and feel certain that the future is OURS.’¹²²

In fact, Padmore always maintained an aversion to taking the ‘easy way out.’ He distrusted the corruptibility of comfort and believed in the value of adversity to maintaining discipline and self-reliance. In a letter to Margery Perham in early 1939 he reflected upon his own experience over the last decade: ‘If we [the IASB] had Moscow gold or Berlin or Rome subsidies, things would be easier but we would certainly not be developing the qualities of leadership...People may not agree with our views, may even hate us, but I know in their heart of hearts they have more respect for us.’¹²³ With the restrictions of war preparations growing, so Padmore’s certainty that he was on the right side also became stronger. As Europe prepared to fight another war, he knew that unless the European powers were constantly reminded of the freedoms they so easily trampled upon in their colonies, they would again define liberty only on their own terms:

These people who were fit enough to fight and die for “democracy” and “self-determination” from 1914-1918 were, by Article 22 of the League Covenant, designated as unfit to rule themselves. And the Labour Party, in its condescension, arrogates itself the right to determine which sections of them are

¹²¹ Padmore, ‘British Imperialism and the Labour Movement,’ *The Workers Age*, 23 April 1938.

¹²² George Padmore to Ralph Bunche, 13 April 1937. Bunche MSS, box 10b, folder 11.

¹²³ George Padmore to Margery Perham, 31 January 1939. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

equipped to take over the guidance of their own destinies ... We Africans will never relinquish our rights to freedom.¹²⁴

Padmore, the African, was prepared for the same kinds of wartime promises and post-war overtures to freedom and rights as emerged out of Versailles in 1919. From the imperial centre, he was well placed to keep colonial subjects in Africa and the West Indies informed of these promises and encourage unity against any revocation of these rights to freedom.

Conclusion

The years in between Padmore's departure from the Comintern and the outbreak of the Second World War were transitional in the sense that he was forced to build up a new base in London, and to cultivate new networks that could provide the same kind of support for his work that the Comintern had previously done. Yet in order to understand Padmore in this period, it is important to remember that there were numerous paths open to him: he maintained contact with Julia Padmore and their daughter, and explored the possibility of returning either to the United States or the West Indies. His decisions about geographical location and the kinds of work he would engage in were made in the context of the increasing power of fascism in Europe, its manifestation in the Abyssinian Crisis, labour rebellions in the West Indies, and the response of the British Left to these key events. His final decision is best understood in the context of Abrahams's conclusion that it was impossible to divorce Padmore from his political setting.

When the German edition of *How Britain Rules Africa* became a success in the Third Reich, Padmore bemusedly pointed out the irony of its success after his own expulsion from the country: 'It is all a game of real politics.'¹²⁵ In moving to the imperial centre, both Padmore's ideological and strategic political leanings developed as he navigated a new social and political environment. His pragmatism continued to evolve as he manipulated his identity to cultivate specific new and old audiences. Padmore's appropriation of different identities in this period, his new collaborations with moderate

¹²⁴ Padmore, 'African View of the Colonial Problem,' *African Morning Post*, 9 January 1939.

¹²⁵ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 17 December 1936. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

individuals and organizations and his engagement with some metropolitan commissions, were an indication of the new ways in which his work evolved. However, it would be wrong to imply that his pragmatism belied his principles. The courting of British public (both middle and working class) opinion and the demands addressed to government policymakers (whether through a petition to a commission or a public protest) were coupled with strong convictions and forceful words.

By highlighting the plight of the peasantry in Africa; by reiterating the exploitative process underway in the transformation of Africans into a proletariat; and by uniting all black people under a form of colonial oppression, Padmore and his colleagues in the IASB articulated a very specific form of pan-Africanism. That, at this point, Padmore and the IASB did not universally apply the term ‘pan-Africanism’ to their work is significant. The branding of Padmore’s work as ‘pan-Africanism’ occurred, as will be shown in the next chapter, at the end of the Second World War, in a deliberate attempt to affiliate with W.E.B. Du Bois and a bourgeois intellectual history of Pan-Africanism. The pan-Africanism of Padmore and the IASB in the latter half of the 1930s was a product of the invasion of Ethiopia, the Marxist education of IASB members, as well as the environment of the British Left within which they functioned.

Ultimately his Marxism did not wane in the face of a stronger commitment to black unity nor the evolving ideas of ‘pan-Africanism.’ Instead these ideas were for Padmore, throughout the 1930s, central aspects of the same logic that understood racism as a product of imperialism, and imperialism as both a political and economic system of dominance that could not be modified by those bound up in its interests. Thus all black people, whether under formal empire or not, faced the economic, social, and political restrictions of a colonial mentality.

Chapter 4

‘The long, long night is over’¹: A War of Opportunity?

We are in a better position today than ever to make our voices heard. It is up to us to take full advantage of the opportunity.²

I am skeptical of all this four freedoms talk. Eye wash. But all newspaper men are cynical people. Perhaps because we know more than the censors permit us to reveal.³

The conviction of the British left, and of Padmore, that the march of fascism and imperialist incursions in Africa in the 1930s would inevitably lead to war, was affirmed on 1 September, 1939. The arrival of World War II heralded a new phase in Padmore’s politics and tactics which reached their culmination by the end of the war. The massive shift in how Britain and its empire functioned;⁴ the resource requirements that increased the value of the colonies;⁵ and the re-alignment of the global balance of power towards the United States and the Soviet Union⁶ all created – in Padmore’s eyes – an immense opportunity for colonial peoples to alter their social and political realities. He viewed this opportunity with clear hope, but also with private skepticism.

Padmore’s commitment to political activity and his analysis of the potentialities of a world war were still based, according to C.L.R. James, fundamentally on his confidence in a Marxist analysis of global capitalism: ‘he felt that capitalism was going to crash in War number two and out of it would come the revolution.’⁷ Padmore’s belief in the need to fight for a socialist revolution is affirmed in his response to an ILP survey printed in *Left* at the end of 1941. He stated that if the present government were to achieve peace, it would be merely ‘an imperialist peace’, but that he hoped that suitable conditions (including ‘by revolutionary means’) for a Socialist Government would

¹ ‘Manifesto to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals of Africa,’ in Adi and Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, 56.

² Padmore to Moody, 4 October 1942. Drake MSS/Schomburg, MG 309, box 64, folder 4.

³ Padmore to Olivierre, 5 December 1944. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624, folder 1. Cynicism about the outcomes of the war was a feature of the African American newspapers of the time. Singh, *Black is a Country*, 126-27.

⁴ Jeffery, ‘The Second World War,’ in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, v 4, 321-324; Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa*, 49-63.

⁵ Holland, *European Decolonization*, 48.

⁶ Betts, *Decolonization*, 21; Hyam, *Britain’s Declining Empire*, 409.

⁷ Interview of CLR James by Rukudzo Marapa, undated. James MSS/UWI, box 22, folder 421.

arise.⁸ Yet this optimism was based not on inevitable determinism but on careful strategy and dogged commitment to thinking about all of the variables and contingencies of war and an eventual peace. He intently observed the military, political and economic forces at play during the war, embodying the earlier IASB warning to West Indian workers to be vigilant by documenting in his colonial journalism all the promises, precedents, and economic implications of practices set out during the war.

The increasing amount of time Padmore spent writing newspaper articles during the war was partly a practical strategy to ensure a livelihood in wartime conditions, but also a significant aspect of his political activism. This chapter will demonstrate that his journalism acted as an essential arm of his strategy to take advantage of every opportunity presented by the war. Although his journalism was much more prolific after the war, this is the period when Padmore ‘the journalist’ truly became a newspaperman. Hooker’s biography insists that Padmore’s work as a correspondent ‘never was his forte’, noting that ‘only on one occasion did an article of his scoop the press.’⁹ More recent assessments praise Padmore’s ‘wit and brilliance as a journalist,’¹⁰ and the importance of his journalism both to his livelihood and his overall work.¹¹ However, these assessments have been based almost solely on Padmore’s articles in African-American (and some British) newspapers. During the war, Padmore utilized his status as an official correspondent for African-American newspapers – which placed him daily in the Ministry of Information – to despatch relevant updates to the colonies. These informed upon the economic and political conditions in African, Asian and West Indian colonies, the colonial contribution to the war effort, the presence of the ‘colour bar’ in the military, and the promises of the Labour Party and of Churchill’s coalition government regarding self-determination.

How did Padmore view the opportunities of a world war which, after 1941, allied the world’s most powerful capitalist imperialist *and* socialist countries in the name of freedom, equality, and anti-racism? Unlike his assessment of the West Indian Commission at the end of the 1930s, where he encouraged awareness but held out little hope for actual change, Padmore assessed the possibilities for political advancement

⁸ ‘Socialists Answer Our Questions on the War,’ *Left*, November 1941.

⁹ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 84.

¹⁰ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 102.

¹¹ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 58.

between 1940 and 1945 as favourable. This chapter will examine the rationale behind his strategies and their relationship to his evolving political and theoretical principles. It will outline the establishment of Padmore's 'profession' as a journalist and explore the extent to which it became a medium for his overall political work. During the war Padmore also expanded his network to a more traditional audience with a larger political constituency than the black working class or the anti-colonial radicals who occupied the fringes of political power. He did this in order to gain legitimacy for his vision of the growing Pan-African movement – a vision that included cooperation on a wide scale.

1 'War is really hell'¹²: The Battle for Britain and its restrictions on an anti-colonial dissident

Plans to secure Padmore's passage out of Britain continued after war was declared between Britain and Germany on 1 September, 1939. However, once again the restrictions placed on Padmore's passport and the trouble of his alias meant that he could not travel 'even if I wanted to take the chance of facing Herr Hitler's sea raiders.'¹³ In April 1941, he politely thanked his old friend Cyril Olivierre for the offer to get him out of England: 'I am happy to know that my friends think my life worthy of saving. For this reason I must rededicate myself to the task to which I have given my best – the emancipation of our peoples, especially at this crossroad of history.' As in the previous decade, Padmore interpreted the logistical barriers and the offers of financial assistance from friends not simply as a gesture of affection, but as a political calling. The potential of the historical moment outweighed the possibility of safety and comfort in America. However, the arrival of war affected Padmore's plans such that, from roughly 1940 to 1942 his political activities were greatly diminished as he, like all those living in Britain during these years, struggled to survive.

1.1 The contingencies of war

Britain's declaration of war almost immediately altered the conditions in which Padmore worked. On 25 August 1939, the British government, after only four hours of

¹² George Padmore to Alain Locke, 28 February 1944. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

¹³ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 18 April 1941. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624.

debate in the House of Commons, passed the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act.¹⁴ Several clauses in this bill had important implications for Padmore's ability to carry out the forms of resistance he used in the 1930s. Section One of Regulation 39B made it an offence to 'endeavour to influence, orally or otherwise, public opinion in a manner likely to be prejudicial to the efficient prosecution of the war *or the defence of the realm*'.¹⁵ Under Regulation 39E 'processions of a political character' were banned.¹⁶ These regulations were created primarily with organizations on the Far Right like the fascist British Union or the Far Left like the CPGB in mind. However, the regulations meant that the political rallies in Trafalgar Square that marked the work of the IASB in the 1930s were also no longer possible. Indeed, any attempt to prevent Britain from defending its 'realm' (Empire) became a serious legal offence. Once the Blitz began in September 1940, the threat of subversive activity became even greater in the minds of the authorities. It also made Padmore's primary activity, writing, much more difficult.

The censorship of correspondence meant that he and his allies overseas needed to be more creative in how they communicated. For example, 'Malcolm' was resurrected in letters to refer to Padmore's potential passage to America.¹⁷ Indeed, Padmore's traditional contacts with the United States were important in 1940 and 1941. He wrote to his old professor, Alain Locke, hoping to set up an 'Afro-American/West Indian society' in the belief that the increased Americanization of the Caribbean would continue.¹⁸ When C.L.R. James became seriously ill at the end of 1940, Padmore headed an appeal for funds to help James with medical expenses, and acted as the relay for money from British comrades to James in the United States.¹⁹ He also acted as a conduit for the exchange of books and materials between Britain and the United States by offering to send Locke any books he could not get in the United States,²⁰ and arranging for a printing of Williams' *The Negro in the Caribbean* through the Panaf press spearheaded by Makonnen.²¹

¹⁴ Stammers, *Civil Liberties in Britain during the Second World War*, 14.

¹⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Ibid, 88.

¹⁷ Jae to George Padmore, 25 December 1940. TNA/UK, KV2/1824.

¹⁸ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 11 April 1941. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16. For the American presence in the West Indies during World War Two see Neptune, *Caliban and the Yankees*.

¹⁹ Chris Small to George Padmore, 7 & 18 April 1941. TNA/UK, KV2/1824.

²⁰ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 28 February 1944. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

²¹ George Padmore to Eric Williams, 29 April 1944. Eric Williams Collection, University of the West Indies St. Augustine (hereafter cited as Williams MSS/UWI), folder 122.

The quiet space required for writing was, of course, difficult to find once the bombing of London began. Padmore turned, instead, to absorbing military strategy. He ‘became a keen student of military affairs’ and, especially once the Soviet Union was fully drawn into the wartime equation in 1941, met frequently with other colonial dissidents in London to ‘stud[y] the maps [and] read articles of military correspondents.’²² Although always a voracious reader, Padmore became increasingly consumed with reading in the absence of the rallies and meetings that had so occupied his time in the past. The study of military history, and the expansion of Britain’s general knowledge about its new Eastern ally (Russia) and enemy (Japan), was facilitated by a proliferation of books on these subjects. Indeed, the war actually fostered a vast reading environment. Padmore’s personal library (now held in Accra) is filled, in the main, with books published during the war. At the end of 1942 he told Alain Locke that ‘Today more people are reading than ever before, and books are the only things we can buy without coupons.’²³

It was not just military and political history that Padmore absorbed, but also European ‘cultural life.’ In 1941 the scarcity of paper meant that the British depended upon radio as a ‘mediating power’ both in relaying events and providing entertainment. Radio became ‘a background accompaniment to the dislocations and uncertainties of everyday life.’²⁴ Padmore listened on the radio to opera broadcast ‘from Rome and Munich! What a topsy-turvy world!’²⁵ and took in Puccini’s classics at Sadler’s Wells, noting that ‘We are trying to forget the tragedy and suffering around us in art and music and literature.’²⁶

Yet as usual, politics crept into social events. He celebrated New Years Eve, 1942 with Nancy Cunard and a group that included a US diplomat: ‘It was a most stimulating evening, discussing the Poll Tax, the South, Willkie, the future foreign policy especially in relation to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean.’²⁷ Cunard had returned to Britain in August 1941, and the two quickly began writing a new pamphlet, ‘The White Man’s

²² T.B. Subasinghe to Marika Sherwood, 27 February 1995. In possession of Marika Sherwood.

²³ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 31 December 1942. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

²⁴ Sullivan, ‘Listening Through,’ 173.

²⁵ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 11 April 1941. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

²⁶ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 31 December 1942. Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Duty.’²⁸ In this task they had a new collaborator, Dorothy Pizer, whom Padmore had met through the contacts he did maintain with the CPGB.²⁹ Pizer grew up in the East End of London, the daughter of a Jewish tailor. Her childhood home was without books (her father had quit school at 15); however, Dorothy Pizer became a skilled typist and fluent in French. Both these skills proved invaluable once she and Padmore struck up a partnership. During the 1930s Dorothy Pizer’s brother was a member of the Communist Party and she also became involved in the work of the party.

The nature of the relationship between George Padmore and Dorothy Pizer in the early 1940s is not entirely clear, but it blossomed into a strong emotional and intellectual partnership, and the two were living together by the end of the war. They never married; however, Beatrice Pizer, Dorothy’s neice, claims that their relationship was so important that she legally changed her own last name to Padmore sometime in the 1950s.³⁰ Indeed, Padmore’s will (written in 1951) lists Dorothy Pizer as a beneficiary, while in 1959 the will is signed with the name Dorothy Padmore.³¹ In Dorothy Pizer, Padmore had found a true intellectual companion. She has been praised for her tireless work as a secretary to provide a living for Padmore, her typing efforts on his manuscripts, and her reputation as a consummate hostess and excellent chef for the revolving door of African and West Indian nationalists who came to their home.³² Yet she was much more than this. Their relationship was both a practical and an intellectual partnership. It was a companionship in which ideas could be debated and strategies worked out, as the two ‘discussed...one way, and then another.’³³ Nancy Cunard described them as ‘a superb team’ who ‘seemed to complete each other and there was harmony between [them], and when at work such admirable competence.’³⁴ Although during the war Padmore described Pizer as ‘a friend’³⁵ in his correspondence with Julia, it was clear that within the chaos of war, he became much more rooted, with her, in Britain.

²⁸ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS/17/10.

²⁹ Author interview with Beatrice Pizer, Dorothy Padmore’s niece, 27 April 2011. Pizer is mentioned in the acknowledgements to *Africa and World Peace*. She also published an article in *International African Opinion* in 1938. Dorothy Pizer, ‘How Blacks Fought for Freedom,’ *International African Opinion* 1, no. 4 (October 1938), 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Last Will and Testament of George Padmore, 30 June 1951. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624.

³² Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 29.

³³ Dorothy Padmore to Ivar Holm, 18 December 1946. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 14.

³⁴ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS/17/10.

³⁵ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 5 December 1944. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624.

1.2 Enter the Soviet Union

After a lull in Padmore's writing in 1940 and 1941, he worked in 1942 to produce a manuscript that would outline the 'Soviet solution to the National Problem'³⁶ as an example for Britain. A first draft was complete by the end of the year, and Padmore boasted to Cunard that 'it is one of the best pieces of sociological work I have yet done. It breaks new ground never covered before and will not be for a long time.'³⁷ Unfortunately, this 'new ground' Padmore envisioned swiftly retreated when he could not find a publisher. The wartime phenomenon of reading mentioned earlier was something of a paradox: while books became more accessible, paper for printing new books and, consequently, a publisher's willingness to accept less well-known authors, decreased.³⁸ The help of Dorothy Pizer over the four years it took for Padmore to have the book published, was so great that he requested she receive credit as well. As he continued to develop the manuscript, his personal library expanded with books on Russian and Soviet history, the Far East, Women in Soviet Russia, and even the creation of a thriving Soviet theatre accessible to its minority populations.³⁹

What Padmore believed was new in his manuscript was not the topic itself. The idea had been prominent among left European circles since the Russian Revolution. Indeed he attended a Fabian Conference in October 1942 on the subject of the equality of the races in Soviet Russia.⁴⁰ But, rather, the way in which it was presented. In the same period that Padmore became fully established as a newspaperman, he attempted to distinguish himself beyond mere fact telling. Padmore wished to distinguish himself even among classical historians whom he believed 'write well, but they say nothing. They never explain. They only chronicle events.' He displayed a strong confidence in

³⁶ George Padmore to Alain Locke, 31 December 1942. Locke MSS/Howard, box 164-76, folder 16.

³⁷ George Padmore to Nancy Cunard, undated. Cunard MSS/17/10.

³⁸ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 59-65.

³⁹ The works that informed Padmore's study included: S.P. Turin, *The USSR: An Economic and Social Survey* (London: Methuen, 1944); Joseph Macleod, *The New Soviet Theatre* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943); G.D.R. Phillips, *Dawn in Siberia: The Mongols of Lake Baikal* (London: Frederick Muller, 1942); William Mandel *The Soviet Far East and Central Asia* (New York: International Secretarial Institute of Pacific Relations, 1944); Fannina W. Halle, *Women in the Soviet East* Translated from the German. (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1938).

⁴⁰ Padmore, 'MP Demands Equality for Negroes,' *Vanguard*, 24 October 1942.

his own abilities when he confided to Cunard that ‘It is relatively easy to gather data on any given subject, but it requires expert knowledge to explain these facts intelligently.’⁴¹ By analyzing military strategy and the position of the USSR in the conflict, Padmore attempted to seize the opportunity afforded by the reversal of Soviet Russia from enemy to ally. This opportunity provided what he saw as a ready test case for Britain on how to transform its Empire. The military contribution of the colonies also afforded Padmore with a second line of attack in demanding self-determination.

2 ‘The Negro Faces the War’⁴²: fashioning a case for liberty through wartime racism and the colonial war effort

In May 1915, W.E.B. Du Bois published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The African Roots of War”, which stated that the present war was a war for empire. He declared that ‘in a very real sense Africa is a prime cause of this terrible overturning of civilization’ because the wealth accrued by the Western world was primarily from colonies.⁴³ In the early months of the war and throughout hostilities, Padmore reiterated Du Bois’s argument that the resources of former and present European colonies were integral to both the cause and conduct of this war. Returning to a theme from his writing in the 1930s, Padmore emphasized the vital importance of the colonies for the Allied war effort. The main characteristic of Padmore’s outlook during this period, visible in his newspaper articles on the colonies and the war effort, was a combination of hope and cynicism.

2.1 The paradox of war: colonial support and colonial repression

Significantly, the relative lull in Padmore’s writing in 1940 and 1941, noted above, did not occur immediately. In the first half of 1940, Padmore covered the implications of the outbreak of war for the colonies in Trinidadian newspapers and in the ILP’s *New Leader*. Conditions in Africa were one of Padmore’s first priorities in early 1940. He reported a famine in a Kenyan Native Reserve,⁴⁴ a miners strike in Northern Rhodesia,⁴⁵

⁴¹ George Padmore to Nancy Cunard, undated. Cunard MSS/17/10.

⁴² Padmore, ‘The Negro Faces the War,’ *Workers Age*, 23 December 1939.

⁴³ Quoted in Zinn, *A People’s History*, 354.

⁴⁴ Our London Correspondent, ‘Famine in Kenya Native Reserve,’ *Vanguard*, 23 March 1940.

⁴⁵ Our London Correspondent, ‘African Miners in Northern Rhodesia on Strike,’ *Vanguard*, 11 May 1940.

and the arrest and detention of his comrade, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, on 1 September 1939 in Sierra Leone, now deemed a person likely to act in a way ‘prejudicial to public safety or defence.’⁴⁶ Wallace-Johnson’s incarceration from 1939-44 was a reminder to Padmore of the uneven liberties between the colonies and the metropole, as well as the precarious position he himself faced as a fellow dissident. Padmore surveyed conditions in India, Africa and the West Indies, pointing out that repressive measures had been instituted in all the colonies to ensure imperial control.⁴⁷ On the theme of Africa’s role in the war, he reasserted Du Bois’ claim that, according to both Britain and France, one of the causes of the outbreak of war was Germany’s demand for colonies in Africa.⁴⁸

Finally, Padmore underscored the swift response of the colonies in offering financial support and manpower to the war effort. A special series on ‘Colonial Aid to Britain in the Great War’ appeared in Trinidad’s *Vanguard* in March 1940. The article summarized the contribution of the West Indies, South Africa, the Rhodesias, Protectorates in Africa, and the British East Africa possessions during World War I.⁴⁹ He also reported that Africans in Matabeleland, Southern Rhodesia created a war fund that had already raised £1,100 and continued to grow.⁵⁰ This fund was actually a relatively small one in terms of the surprising financial donations of Africans to the British war effort. For example, by November 1942 the ‘Spitfires Fund’ in the Gold Coast, one of many across the colonies during the war,⁵¹ had raised £111,225 towards fighter planes.⁵² Most historiography on the financial contributions of colonies to the war effort focuses on the value of its labour force;⁵³ Africa as a vital supply route;⁵⁴ the reversal of India’s status from debtor to creditor;⁵⁵ the sale of imperial assets to America in return for lend-lease; or the levying of taxes and low payments for West African

⁴⁶ Padmore, ‘Arrest of Wallace Johnson,’ *The People*, 16 March 1940 (reprinted from *African Standard*); Our London Correspondent, ‘Political Prisoners in Africa Discussed in Parliament,’ *Vanguard*, 18 May 1940.

⁴⁷ Padmore, ‘Freedom War Grips Empire,’ *Vanguard*, 25 May 1940.

⁴⁸ Our London Correspondent, ‘British and French Empires United in Keeping Germany out of Africa,’ and ‘Hitler Demanded German Colonies in Africa, Says French Ambassador,’ *Vanguard*, 4 May 1940.

⁴⁹ Our London Correspondent, ‘Colonial Aid to Britain in Great War,’ *Vanguard*, 16 March 1940.

⁵⁰ Our London Correspondent, ‘Financial Help from Natives,’ *Vanguard*, 23 March 1940.

⁵¹ Meshack Owino, ‘In His Majesty’s Service: The Akamba of Kenya and British Fighter Aircraft in World War II,’ Conference Paper. *Africa in World Politics Conference*. University of Texas, Austin. 25 March 2011. Also Jeffery, ‘The Second World War,’ 311.

⁵² See regular coverage in *The Ashanti Pioneer* from July 1940 to November 1942.

⁵³ Johnson, *World War II and the scramble for labour in colonial Zimbabwe*.

⁵⁴ Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa*, 54.

⁵⁵ Milward, *The Economic Effects of the Two World Wars on Britain*.

produce that ‘amounted to forced loans.’⁵⁶ Yet Africans also provided direct financial donations to the defense of their imperial ruler. Padmore was aware of this astounding loyalty and, though he ultimately disagreed with it, worked throughout the war to use it to advance the claim for self-determination.

2.2 *Race and the ‘colour bar’*

It was the participation of colonial subjects as soldiers and military personnel that provided the most controversial and thus provocative headline with which Padmore could press his case for the value of the colonies.⁵⁷ Although in June 1940 only France was arming colonial troops, Padmore anticipated that Britain would soon follow.⁵⁸ Indeed, he noted that one hurdle had already been overcome in March 1940 when Britain admitted its first ‘coloured’ army officer for training, Arundel Moody (son of Harold Moody).⁵⁹

Padmore’s coverage of colonial troops in the war is a good example of his pragmatism in this period, since there is substantial evidence that Padmore disagreed with the participation of ‘loyal’ colonial subjects in the British military. He publicly refused conscription in the *New Leader* and, after the war, Roi Ottley published excerpts of Padmore’s letter to the Minister of Labour and National Service. In no uncertain terms, Padmore declared to the Minister his contempt for a Government that demanded the support of its colonial subjects and simultaneously denied them the same rights for which the war was being fought: ‘I think it is a piece of bold effrontery to expect a victim of Imperialism, who is excluded from all the lofty declarations of the Atlantic Charter, to contribute to the perpetuation of my own enslavement.’⁶⁰ Padmore stated equivocally that socialists should not support the British war effort,⁶¹ and that local colonial leaders were offering their peoples as ‘human sacrifices’ to a cause that was not in their interest.⁶² Yet his journalism concerned itself with the welfare of colonial

⁵⁶ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 121-141.

⁵⁷ For colonial troops in Britain’s war effort see Schaffer, ‘Fighting Racism,’ 246-265; Bousquet and Douglas, *West Indian Women at War*.

⁵⁸ Our London Correspondent, ‘Black Troops to be Recruited in British Colonies for service in France,’ *Vanguard*, 29 June 1940.

⁵⁹ Our London Correspondent, ‘Negro Training as Britain Army Officer,’ *Vanguard*, 30 March 1940.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Ottley, *No Green Pastures*, 68.

⁶¹ Padmore, ‘Socialists Answer Our Questions on the War,’ *Left*, November 1941.

⁶² Padmore, ‘The Negro Faces the War,’ *The Workers Age*, 23 December 1939.

workers in war industry;⁶³ covered the impact of stationed Black American GIs in Britain upon British society for the ‘colour bar;’⁶⁴ and fought British attempts to use American racism as an excuse for their own racialized fear of the impact war service would have on its ‘loyal’ colonial citizens. In 1941, the IASB, the LCP, and others protested to the Colonial Office against allegations that Black Americans seeking work on American bases in the West Indies were being barred.⁶⁵ Thus his decision to write about the achievements of colonial troops in the war, for his colonial readers, is a good example of his consideration of singular advancements within an overall strategy of ending racist practices.

2.3 *The hypocrisy of a ‘united colonial empire’*

The appearance of a ‘united colonial empire’ was a key aspect of the British war effort and was presented, both at the time and by historians since, as such.⁶⁶ In a radio broadcast in the spring of 1940, Secretary of State for the Colonies Malcolm Macdonald declared that Britain’s war effort was ‘sustained by the support of a united colonial empire’ in which not just the Dominions, but the colonies had sprung into action. Macdonald claimed that this was because ‘they, who have experience of us as rulers, recognize us instinctively as the champions of the liberty of small peoples.’⁶⁷ Padmore swiftly repudiated this claim to champion liberty for ‘small peoples’. The war was ‘certainly not one for democracy’ since ‘they themselves deny [democracy] to hundreds of millions of coloured peoples.’⁶⁸ Indeed according to Padmore, the occupation of Holland, Belgium, and France (all possessors of overseas empires) showed that ‘in failing to recognize the indissoluble link between their own finely balanced democracy and the right of coloured races to self-determination, they objectively assisted the onward march of Fascism.’⁶⁹ Pennybacker has criticized Padmore’s failure to envision the possibility of a solution to European fascism that ignored the world’s black

⁶³ ‘Negroes Suffer Discrimination in Many War Industries,’ *West African Pilot* (hereafter cited as *WAP*), 30 June 1941; Our London Correspondent, ‘Forced Labour Plan for Africans Explained,’ *Vanguard*, 2 January 1943.

⁶⁴ Our Own Correspondent (London), ‘MP Fights to Save 2 American Negro Soldiers in Britain from the Gallows,’ *WAP*, 13 July 1944.

⁶⁵ ‘West Indians Protest Against Ban on American Negroes,’ *WAP*, 26 July 1941.

⁶⁶ Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 21-22.

⁶⁷ ‘Helping the Colonies: A Broadcast by the Right Honourable Malcolm Macdonald,’ *Vanguard*, 20 April 1940.

⁶⁸ Padmore, ‘The Negro Faces the War,’ *The Workers Age*, 23 December 1939.

⁶⁹ Padmore, ‘To Defeat Nazism We Must Free Colonials,’ *The People*, 14 September 1940.

population, a fate that did occur with the Allied victory in 1945 and a continuation of the status quo for black peoples in Africa, the West Indies, and the United States.⁷⁰ In the quotation above, Padmore's insistence that the denial of democratic rights to 'coloured' peoples bolstered fascism, was again apparent. Yet Pennybacker also notes that this belief fueled his work. It was this fine line between envisioning an end to European fascism that included the world's 'coloured' population, and acknowledging the consistent failure of European powers to come to terms with their own hypocrisy, which characterized Padmore's work at this time. Self-determination, Padmore already claimed in 1940, was 'an opportunist slogan...meant to apply only to European nations.'⁷¹ Anticipating Churchill's interpretation of the Atlantic Charter by a year, Padmore understood the fundamental operating principles of European politicians who, despite the socialist principles of some, were still bound up in the racist logic of Empire.

Padmore's position on the war always reiterated that it was, above all, two things: an imperialist war fought for control over territories and peoples, and a racist war. His views on Hitler and Nazism were rarely treated to any lengthy analysis outside of Germany's imperial desire for territory and its racist motivation for domination.⁷² For Padmore, the issues of race, liberty, and the war effort were intertwined throughout the war and came together most clearly through the continued presence of the 'colour bar' in the Empire and its contrast to the stated aims of the Allies for freedom and equality. Padmore's strong belief in the fallacy of race⁷³ became an increasingly critical part of his attacks on the 'colour bar.' After reading in 1943 of the ethnic make-up of Filipinos as 'a curious blend and mixture' of Malaysian, Mongoloid, Chinese and Negroid, Padmore remarked: 'What a mixture! Really, we are all bastards.'⁷⁴

Indeed, the three issues of race, liberty and the war effort came to a head not only on the question of African and Caribbean colonial troops, but more predominantly in Britain's effort to defend its holdings in South East Asia. In early 1942, Padmore paid close attention to Britain's desperate situation in South East Asia and the implications of this

⁷⁰ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 86-87.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² 'What Germany Is Fighting For,' *Vanguard*, 13 April 1940.

⁷³ He made extensive notes on his copy of M.F. Ashley Montagu's book *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: the Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

⁷⁴ The remark is hand-written in the margin of Padmore's copy of Hallett Abend, *Pacific Charter* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1943), 62.

struggle for the Empire's 'coloured races.'⁷⁵ Japanese recruitment of Malays and Ceylonese⁷⁶ meant a greater reliance upon 'coloured troops' to defend the vital base of India.⁷⁷ Britain's last minute attempt to call for 'unity of coloured races' to defend Malaya was interpreted by Padmore as a desperate and insincere cry by a military effort nearing defeat.⁷⁸ Padmore's reports of military events in the Far East during 1942 are a good example of the juxtaposition of cynicism and hope in his writing. He wrote hopefully that the war in the Far East was forcing 'century old race and colour prejudices used to bolster up white prestige' to 'giv[e] way to more democratic racial relations.'⁷⁹

Yet he concluded in June 1942 that although 'guileless people' might believe that change to colonial policy was imminent, this was 'presumptuous,' since 'British imperialists are not prepared to make the least fundamental concession to the demands of the colonial peoples even though their very existence is being threatened.'⁸⁰ He had observed the failed efforts of the West African Students Union in London⁸¹ and a cablegram from '20 million Africans' in Nigeria challenging Churchill's statement in the House of Commons that the Atlantic Charter did not apply to coloured races of the Empire.⁸² Padmore recognized that any hope of freedom was still one that would have to battle prejudice deeply ingrained in the economic, political, and social logic of imperialism. Indeed, Britain's failure to recognize the colonial war effort was swiftly realized in its antipathy to West Indian migrants after the war: two-thirds of settlers on the *Empire Windrush* served in Britain during the war and were using their gratuities to pay passage back to Britain.⁸³ Padmore, then, used his journalism to build awareness of Britain's reliance on its colonies, its treatment of colonial citizens, and its rhetoric of

⁷⁵ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 66.

⁷⁶ Our London Correspondent, 'Japanese Fifth Column Activities Among Coloured Races in Africa and Asia,' *Vanguard*, 2 May 1942.

⁷⁷ Our London Correspondent, 'Coloured Officers to Lead British Army Should Japs Invade India,' *Vanguard*, 21 March 1942.

⁷⁸ Our London Correspondent, 'Britain Calls for Unity of Coloured Races Against Japs,' *Vanguard*, 14 March 1942.

⁷⁹ Our London Correspondent, 'Coloured Officers to Lead British Army Should Japs Invade India,' *Vanguard*, 21 March 1942.

⁸⁰ Padmore, 'Democracy's Colour Bar,' *The Vanguard*, 27 June 1942.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Our London Correspondent, '20,000,000 Africans Send Cable to Churchill,' *Vanguard*, 28 February 1942.

⁸³ Ian Spencer, 'World War Two and the Making of Multiracial Britain,' 213.

freedom, equality, and self-determination in order to prepare the ground for a post-war battle for independence.

3 ‘Our London Correspondent’: George Padmore the Journalist

Although Padmore now had over a decade of experience harnessing the newspaper as a means both to propagate his message and to pay the rent, it was in the late 1930s and during the war that his job as a correspondent for numerous newspapers became his profession. As is shown in his statement that ‘all newspapermen are cynics,’ this became a profession not simply as income, but as outlook. The diligent tracking of his dispatches and the anticipated (although often unrealized) fees that went with them,⁸⁴ are just one example of the professionalism of this routine. However, as has already been shown in previous chapters, his journalism was much more than merely ‘a conduit’ between the colonial press and British newspapers like the *New Leader*.⁸⁵ They involved a vast, dynamic network across both sides of the Atlantic, running North/South and East/West. This section will demonstrate that Padmore’s journalism played a crucial role in his political life both as a profession and as praxis.

Padmore published extensively under his own name. However, the majority of what should be attributed to him was actually published with no clear identifier. Teelucksingh’s research into Padmore’s articles in Trinidadian newspapers first identified Padmore as a ‘London Correspondent’ for the newspaper.⁸⁶ There are a number of different ways of identifying an article by Padmore: subject matter, location and way in which the article was received, source of reprint (if any), and/or the attribution of the article to either ‘Our London Correspondent’ or ‘Our Foreign/Special Correspondent.’ By applying a combination of these indicators, an article by Padmore in a West Indian or West African newspaper can be identified.

While dispatches frequently claimed to be ‘From Our London Correspondent,’ the same newspapers sometimes printed Padmore’s name as the author and identify him as ‘Our London Correspondent.’ In terms of subject matter, in the late 1930s, an article in a

⁸⁴ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁸⁶ Teelucksingh, ‘The Immortal Batsman,’ 19.

West Indian newspaper about Africa, or in a West African newspaper about, for example, Kenya or Rhodesia, was quite often Padmore. That is, the newspapers tended to cover local issues and events, and Padmore brought an ‘international’ flavour that usually focused on events in other colonies. However, as the newspapers Padmore wrote for became more established in the 1940s (thus attracting new local writers and utilizing international news agencies such as Reuters), African subject matter could no longer act as an obvious indicator of a Padmore article.

There were also other indicators of his style. Padmore’s articles were often based on summaries of discussions in the House of Commons, debates in British newspapers, or the policies of British political parties.⁸⁷ For example, in an article that predated by nearly a decade his amplification of Nkrumah as a brilliant statesman (see Chapter 6), he presented Haile Selassie in the same terms to a Trinidadian audience.⁸⁸ Padmore often wrote articles that informed colonial subjects on the current state of British politics and the potential implications for colonial governance. These articles often arrived from London ‘via Air-Mail’ and, especially once colonial newspapers began using Reuters telegraph service, an article on any of the above subjects that arrived via air mail would almost certainly have been from Padmore. His colleagues in London describe Padmore carefully shipping bunches of dispatches off in the mail to colonial newspapers: ‘[b]y noon everyday, Padmore would have 15-20 air mail envelopes with his news service going out to Afro-American papers, Asian papers and so forth.’⁸⁹ What is apparent in the West Indian and West African newspapers in this period is that articles by ‘Our London Correspondent’ or arriving from ‘London by Airmail’ would run over several days, after which a gap of perhaps a week or two would occur when a new bunch of articles would arrive in the post.

Besides moniker, subject matter, source of reprint, and/or manner in which the article was received, there is one other method for identifying articles by Padmore between

⁸⁷ Our London Correspondent, ‘The West Indies Discussed In Parliament,’ *Vanguard*, 1 June 1940. This article summarizes the questions asked in parliament regarding the West Indies since the publication of part of the recommendations of the Moyne Commission. The full findings of the commission were suppressed during the war and only made public in 1945 – a fact Padmore also reiterated in 1939 and 1945 in his journalism. The article should be read as Padmore following through on the IASB open letter warning to be vigilant and pay attention to British government discussions of the West Indies.

⁸⁸ Padmore, ‘Anglo-Abyssinian Treaty Signed,’ *Vanguard*, 14 March 1942.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Murapa, *Padmore’s Role in the African Liberation Movement*, 80.

1940-1945. During the war Padmore's dispatches can be identified by a discrete note at the bottom of certain articles (with typical Padmore subject matter) that read 'Censored by MOI.' By 1941 Padmore frequented the Ministry of Information (MOI) to search press cuttings for stories, and to dispatch re-written stories to African-American, West Indian and African newspapers. This was a mark of his ingenuity. Although censorship of his articles was a problem, working from the MOI also had its tactical advantages; in a period when all mail was censored, it was easier to place his articles in front of the censors through the MOI and thus address any problems swiftly and directly. For example, in October 1942 Padmore submitted an article to the censor for transmission to the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* which was passed by the British censor, but blocked by the American. He appeared at the office to appeal the decision, omitted some material, and filed it again.⁹⁰ Thus his presence in MOI allowed his journalism to be more efficient in a period where additional roadblocks were inevitable.

Padmore's 'job' as a correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* resulted in over five hundred articles with the Padmore by-line, from America's entry into the war until its conclusion, in newspapers with a combined weekly circulation of over half a million.⁹¹ His daily presence in MOI allowed his status as 'Our London Correspondent' to become his own, and to develop this title not only in the United States but in West African and West Indian newspapers. Between 1941 and 1944 41 articles in the *West African Pilot* appeared from 'London By Mail,' 33 of which carried an additional note that they had been censored by MOI. In 1944 articles that were censored by MOI from 'London by Mail' also increasingly began to appear in the Jamaican newspaper *Public Opinion*. His experience working in the Press Room of MOI certainly infused a new knowledge and experience of being a 'newspaperman,' such that by the end of the war African and African American newspapers sent Padmore as official correspondent to cover events in Paris.

⁹⁰ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 54-55. See also Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 62.

⁹¹ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 54.

4 Elder Statesman behind the scenes: manipulating leadership and forging alliances

Newspaper networks were not the only set of connections Padmore developed during the war. In 1942, when trying to get his article through the American censors, he added a letter by Moody to the cable in the hope that it would bring added legitimacy, since ‘I know that I am not *persona grata* with the powers that be.’⁹² He was aware that his dissident status would never allow him to be the public figure in the large post-war pan-African movement he now envisioned. Utilizing Moody in his cable is just one instance of the shrewd way in which Padmore exploited alliances with more ‘respectable’ individuals and organizations in order to help his cause.

In 1940, Padmore’s ideological distance from Moody and the LCP was still very visible. In May the *Trinidad Vanguard* published a censored dispatch from ‘Our London Correspondent’ that described the IASB as ‘the “Left Wing” section of the Colonial Liberation Movement in Britain’ and the LCP as ‘a conservative organization composed of middle-class students and intellectuals, with no contact among the colonial workers and trade unions,’ who considered the colonies not yet ready for self-government.⁹³ According to the dispatch, at a recent meeting in London of the Royal Empire Society a speech by Moody had ‘proved [him] the most vigorous imperialist of them all.’ As was typical of Padmore, he maintained contact with Moody but did not shrink from speaking his mind when he disagreed with the prominent doctor.

In November 1939, he sent an indignant reply to a letter from Moody, who had congratulated Padmore on a recent IASB manifesto. Intended as a compliment, Moody told Padmore that he was pleased to see that ‘the language you use is not as violent as your wont to employ in such documents.’⁹⁴ Padmore’s frustration with the constant moderation of men like Moody, and the ideological gulf between them, is clearly evident in his reply and thus is quoted at length.

[Y]ou refer to the absence of violence in our language. That is more than can be said of your leader’s language. I refer of course to Winston Churchill. Did you

⁹² George Padmore to Harold Moody, 4 October 1942. Drake MSS/Schomburg, MG 309, box 64, Folder 4.

⁹³ Our London Correspondent, ‘League of Coloured Peoples Endorse New Colonial Policy,’ *Vanguard*, 15 May 1940.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Murapa, *Padmore’s Role in the African Liberation Movement*, 87.

not hear him on the radio? He was even using such discredited terms as Huns. I wish to God that these great Christian cultured leaders only used the kind of violent language which you say we sometimes use instead of dropping non-violent bombs and letting loose non-violent mines upon innocent human beings. Violence! What is imperialism but a political and economic system of violence? How do you think these hypocritical psalm singing rascals like that high churchman Lord Halifax and his non-conformist chief Chamberlain acquired their empire? Was it not violence? How is it being maintained? Is it not by violence? When Jamaican Negroes ask their white masters for a few coppers are they not met by violence? Why, it seems to me that violence is the high priest of imperialism.⁹⁵

Clearly, it could be jolting to find yourself on the wrong side of Padmore's ire. What is central to this quotation, however, is the vehemence with which Padmore attacked Moody's antipathy to violence. At this time, Padmore's ideological strategy was still rooted in a belief in socialist revolution that would likely require violent means. In 1944, when reading the diary and letters of a Soviet doctor, Maxim Pavlovitch Murov, Padmore underlined a passage in a letter from Murov in 1917 during the Kerensky government in which Murov declared the inevitability of a coming bloody revolution. The revolution would come, Murov stated, 'for the simple reason that never in the world's history have those who possess given freely or gladly to those who have not, even when those who have not are the real and rightful owners.'⁹⁶ In line with his skepticism of the Atlantic Charter and Allied language of freedom then, Padmore anticipated a pitched battle would still be necessary at the end of the war. This battle would be violent since entrenched power never gave up its position willingly. While Moody was still a valuable ally in the struggle of 'our people,' the two metropolitan leaders obviously maintained very different goals and strategies.

A letter from Padmore sent to Moody in 1942 shows that the relationship between these two activists was still that of committed but distant allies: 'keep up the attack from your side, you can depend upon me doing my share.'⁹⁷ The ideological barrier between them still meant that Padmore saw the two men fighting from different 'sides,' with Padmore leading young radical students and Moody the father of the moderate conservative element of Britain's African and Caribbean population. However by 1945 the mood

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ George Borodin, *Red Surgeon* (London: Museum Press, 1944), 25. The markings are contained in Padmore's copy in Accra.

⁹⁷ George Padmore to Harold Moody, 4 October 1942. Drake MSS/Schomburg, MG 309, box 64, Folder 4.

had changed. The primary reason for this change – the election of a Labour government in 1945 – will be discussed below. What is important here is that Padmore now strongly pushed a united Pan-African front that would be able to powerfully state their case at the United Nations and in peace negotiations. Because of his own reputation among British officials, he strategically placed other more ‘respectable’ leaders at the forefront of the movement, choosing to remain ‘the Elder Statesman *behind the scenes.*’⁹⁸

In this strategy, the reputation of W.E.B. Du Bois was essential. Adi’s research into what he has described as Padmore’s ‘British coup’ in setting the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester rather than in Du Bois’s choice of Africa or, at the least, Paris, provides important new insight into the conference and into Padmore’s manipulation of the situation and of Du Bois’ celebrity in order to stage the event.⁹⁹ He shows that although Du Bois had been in touch with Moody, Ladipo Solanke (secretary-general, WASU), Amy Jacques Garvey, and Max Yergan and Paul Robeson of the New York-Based Council on African Affairs to arrange a post-war Pan-African Congress, it was Padmore and the PAF who saw the potential for a wide front with the colonial representatives to the World Trade Union Conference in London in February 1945, who soon took over the initiative. Padmore, Du Bois quickly concluded, was attempting to steal his Pan-African conference. Padmore’s subsequent praise for and deferral to Du Bois as leader, in their correspondence and at the conference, suggests that he quickly realized his error in appearing to upstage Du Bois. He astutely managed to utilize Du Bois as a figurehead while maintaining the desired working-class emphasis that altered the Congress from its previous representation among the intelligentsia.

Padmore had initiated the formation of the Pan-African Federation in 1944 as a broad-based coalition of African and British-based Black organizations. Although Moody was wary of ‘working with Labour Groups,’ Padmore’s correspondence with Du Bois leading up to the conference repeatedly emphasized the high degree of cooperation among different groups in Britain. In August 1945, Padmore told Du Bois that he ‘would be surprised to know how easy it was to bring into existence the Pan-African

⁹⁸ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 19 August 1945. Emphasis added. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624, folder 1.

⁹⁹ Adi, ‘George Padmore and the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress,’ 66-96.

Federation' since '[w]hen it comes to the struggle against Imperialism, British or otherwise, these people feel as one.'¹⁰⁰ Padmore then offered up his relationship with Moody as a 'personal allusion' to the way in which individuals were able to set aside differences. He explained that 'As an individual I have very strong political views on the Left, views which a man like Dr. Moody does not subscribe to.' However, 'regardless of our personal views, there is no cleavage as regards the immediate steps which confront our people.'¹⁰¹

What is significant is the way in which Padmore explained to Du Bois the causes of cooperation in Britain, as opposed to black politics in the United States. Padmore concluded that 'In our ranks the question of Communism or anti-Communism, Stalinism, or Trotskyism, and all the other ideological tendencies which may obtain in the American Negro scene, do not exist here'. Since the main focus of political aspiration at that point was for self-determination of individual colonies, those who subscribed to different political philosophies, 'whether they be Socialism, Communism, Anarchism, etc' did so 'more in the nature of personal idiosyncracies than *practical politics*'.¹⁰² Padmore's own politics can be read directly into this wider description: 'practical politics' trumped the allegiance to a particular political philosophy. However, Padmore's practical politics should not overshadow the fact that in 1945 there was a remarkable degree of unity of idea and purpose among colonial peoples in Britain. Fraternal colonial delegates from Cyprus, India, and Ceylon also attended the Pan-African Congress.¹⁰³ Indeed, Adi concludes that based on the evidence of the Manchester Congress documents and events preceding the conference, 'a general consensus of political views amongst many Pan-Africanists, not only in Britain but in the Caribbean and Africa' was clear.

5 The triumph of a political pragmatist: fashioning a less belligerent anti-colonialism in 1945

¹⁰⁰ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 17 August 1945. James MSS/UWI, box 7, folder 193.

¹⁰¹ Much later, and in a different context, Steve Biko would echo this strategic necessity. See Gail Gerhart's interview with Steve Biko, October 1972 in Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson, eds. *Biko Lives*, 27.

¹⁰² George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 17 August 1945. James MSS/UWI, box 7, folder 193. Emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Padmore, *Colonial and Coloured Unity*, 119.

In December 1945, at the conclusion of almost six years of war, Padmore summed up his physical and mental state to Olivierre: ‘Very tired and overworked. I do what five average farmers would consider a days work.’¹⁰⁴ Life had not been easy in London. In December 1944, he told Olivierre that ‘we are still facing up to the ordeal of air attacks.’¹⁰⁵ The winter of 1945 was particularly harsh: ‘We have no central heating and have to make fires and get coal as best we can when it snows. And we have had heavy falls of snow this year.’¹⁰⁶ Despite all of the hardship of the year, Padmore remarked, ‘I have the satisfaction of seeing concrete results for my years of labour.’¹⁰⁷ These concrete results were primarily the realization of a large, broad-based pan-African movement in the form of the British Pan-African Federation and the October Manchester Pan-African Congress. While the end of the war brought a flurry of activity for Padmore, it also marked a distinct shift in his tactics.

Although Padmore’s ‘practical politics’ partly explains the expansion of his political network, the shift was more profound than a temporal ‘playing nice’ with a man he ideologically disagreed with. His relationship to the communist movement as manifested in the Soviet Union, and his Marxist analysis of global power structures and revolution became much more ambiguous than in the 1930s. He was still a Marxist – Adi rightly points out that he reaffirmed his belief in the value of a ‘Marxist interpretation of history’ in 1956¹⁰⁸ – yet the obvious links present in the 1930s between the worldwide communist movement and Padmore’s language in attacking fascism and imperialism was no longer prevalent. The clearest manifestation of this change is Padmore’s encouragement of non-violent tactics in winning self-determination. As Adi points out, ‘At one time he presents the need for revolutionary violence and at another for Gandhian non-violence and “satyagraha methods.”’ At one time the alternative is Fascism or Socialism, at another Pan-Africanism or Communism.¹⁰⁹ This section asks two questions in order to better understand Padmore’s political strategy in this period. Why did Padmore, despite his earlier writing, more publicly embrace non-violent tactics? Was Padmore, by 1945, filled ultimately with hope or skepticism? These questions focus our understanding of Padmore in 1945.

¹⁰⁴ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 11 December 1945. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624, folder 1.

¹⁰⁵ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 5 December 1944. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 7 March 1945. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 11 December 1945. *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Adi, ‘George Padmore and the 1945 Manchester Congress,’ 89.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

5.1 The implications of a working class electoral victory in Europe

Beginning with *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, all Padmore's books on Africa and its diaspora struggle with the 'paradox' of liberal democracy; that is, the freedoms of Europe against its despotism towards other peoples.¹¹⁰ Behind all of Padmore's writing is a constant battle with 'The Myth' that James outlined so forcefully in *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*; that is, that colonial peoples are not yet 'modern' and therefore do not fit into the structures of European liberal democracy.¹¹¹ As a colonial citizen writing colonial history, Padmore always contended with what Winkiel describes as 'a confrontation with modernity's antique dreams (its racial myths), that which places the colonized in a belated position in relation to the colonizer's progressivist narratives of modern unfolding.'¹¹² In exploiting the possibilities of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations, Padmore identified an opportunity to reverse this narrative by emphasizing the hypocrisy he had always maintained was present but which now was undeniably visible.

To do this, he kept a close eye on the Labour Party during and at the end of the war. In March 1940 Padmore had reported to his Trinidadian readers a speech made by Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee (Labour) on BBC Radio in which he stated that Britain must push forward its policy of extending self-determination wherever possible, abandon its claims to special rights and 'rid ourselves of imperialist domination of other races.'¹¹³ Once Ernest Bevin, leader of the British Trade Union Committee, was appointed Minister of Labour in 1940, his statements about ensuring the rights and development of British and colonial workers in the war effort was carefully recorded by Padmore.¹¹⁴ In 1944, he noted to readers in West Africa that West Indians in Britain were taking the initiative to form their own working class political candidates to contest

¹¹⁰ Losurdo, *Liberalism*, 33-34.

¹¹¹ James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, 28-33.

¹¹² Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos*, 19.

¹¹³ Our London Correspondent, 'Taint of Imperialism Must Go,' *Vanguard*, 16 March 1940.

¹¹⁴ Our London Correspondent, 'Arthur Creech Jones Says Many Africans Lead Poorer Lives Than He Had Thought,' *WAP*, 6 July 1944; Our London Correspondent, 'Negroes Suffer Discrimination In Many War Industries,' *WAP*, 30 June 1941.

the government.¹¹⁵ From the beginning of 1945, writing as the London Correspondent for the *West African Pilot*, Padmore paid close attention to labour disputes in the colonies.¹¹⁶

The position of colonial workers in the new trade union congresses also preoccupied Padmore.¹¹⁷ In both the *Commonwealth Review of London* and the *Trinidad Vanguard* he argued that there was hope in the wide and representative character of the World Trade Union Conference since it was the first time in the history of international labour that colonial workers were given the opportunity to voice their grievances.¹¹⁸ When Labour defeated Churchill's government and swept to power in August, Padmore announced the victory as a 'Bloodless Revolution' by the British people.¹¹⁹ He rushed, 'even before the name of the new Secretary of State for the Colonies ha[d] been announced,' to Party headquarters to 'try and find out something about Labour's programme for the Colonies.'¹²⁰ This he quickly printed for his Jamaican audience, noting that Labour had a clear platform in its programme against the colour bar, the abolition of forced labour, the enhancement of the Colonial Development Fund, and progress towards self-government. Importantly, he noted that the Labour Party's programme stated that expenditure for the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund should be used to promote education and health of local populations.¹²¹ His criticism of the Fund after the war (to be discussed in the next chapter), can be traced to Labour's failure to prioritize these issues and instead allow the Fund to function as another exploitative tool in extracting primary resources from the colonies for Britain's benefit.

The Labour Party's record was particularly important since, Padmore declared to Du Bois in 1945, 'all the Negroes here voted for the Labour Party and supported them....All the Negroes in Britain are members of the Trade Union movement.'¹²²

¹¹⁵ Our London Correspondent, 'Jamaican's In England Form Committee to Finance Working Class Candidates,' *WAP*, 16 September 1944.

¹¹⁶ Padmore, 'Labour Disturbances And Riots In Uganda Protectorate Shocks Colonial Office,' *WAP*, 8 February 1945.

¹¹⁷ Padmore, 'World Trade Unionists in London Elect Negroes to Continuation Committee,' *WAP*, 8 March 1945.

¹¹⁸ Padmore, 'Black and White,' *Vanguard*, 21 April 1945.

¹¹⁹ Padmore, 'British People Make Bloodless Revolution,' *Public Opinion*, 20 August 1945.

¹²⁰ Padmore, 'What Will Labour Do For the Coloured Races and Colonial Peoples of the Empire?' *Public Opinion*, 7 August 1945.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 17 August 1945. James MSS/UWI, box 7, folder 193.

Thus in order to hold the Labour Party to account for their promises to the colonial masses (which was, as has been discussed, for Padmore always now a proletariat thanks to the workings of imperial policy), a Pan-African movement needed to be established that could claim to widely represent the demands of Africans and those of African descent in the West Indies, America, and Europe. This is where, as Adi has shown, Padmore's own initiative to take advantage of the formative meetings for the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) resulted in the organization of a post-war Pan-African Congress in Manchester, rather than Africa.¹²³ After Du Bois contacted Padmore to merge their efforts in calling a Pan-African Congress, Padmore agreed but insisted that all the delegates 'must have mandates from organisations [sic], and they will therefore speak not for themselves but for masses of people representative, not of the middle class strata and professionals in the Colonies, but of the workers' organisations, the co-operative societies, peasant associations, labour parties and national liberation organisations.'¹²⁴

What is clear in the correspondence with Du Bois is that this organizational necessity was not because Padmore believed colonial workers now had a champion in the British Labour Government, but because they needed to be ready to decry, as loudly as possible, Labour hypocrisy. While the Tories 'never promised us anything but blood, tears, toil and sweat,'¹²⁵ the Labour party had made pre-election promises that led colonial peoples to 'expect a more sympathetic attitude towards their problems and aspirations.' Padmore declared that 'If they don't fulfil those [pre-election] promises, we shall expose them even more ruthlessly than the Tories.' The Labour advent to power and the involvement of colonial delegates in the formation of a new global trade union body, provided the specific context for the Manchester Pan-African Congress and specifically Padmore's leading role in structuring its location, date and composition.

5.2 'A sharp break': the past and present in Padmore's anti-colonial strategy

In Winkiel's work on the proliferation of manifestos among racial minorities in Europe in the early twentieth century, she argues that the temporality of manifestos allowed

¹²³ Adi, 'George Padmore and the 1945 Manchester Congress,' 71-75.

¹²⁴ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 18 September 1945. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts (hereafter cited as Du Bois MSS), reel 57/1028-1079.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

groups to construct new communities based on a feeling of racial belonging since it could move ‘across spatial and temporal boundaries’ and challenge modern European conceptions of history and historical agency.¹²⁶ Although she discusses Cunard’s *Negro* and James’s *Black Jacobins* extensively, the manifesto of the 1945 Pan-African Congress is only briefly touched upon. The question of whether Padmore viewed the manifesto as temporal ties directly into this question of his post-war strategy and the extent of a change in his ideas and tactics. Was the Pan-African Congress intended to speak across space and time, to reconceptualize history and historical agency such that material change in the lives of Africa’s peoples would be realized? The answer is a conditional ‘yes.’ Certainly in positioning Du Bois, and not himself, at the forefront of the conference Padmore made an intentional move to locate the present moment within the history of a pan-African movement that had a rich record of black agency in resistance. This is where Edward Wilson missed a crucial piece of the puzzle in arguing that because the Comintern had taught Padmore the art of conference planning it was ‘instrumental in familiarizing’ Africans with international conferences as ‘another stratagem of modern politics.’¹²⁷ Although of course Padmore’s experience with the Comintern prepared him in important ways to organize conferences, it was not the Comintern’s history of international conferences that Padmore invoked in 1945, but the history of Pan-African conferences.

In situating a conference that was intentionally filled with labour delegates and not the bourgeoisie as part of a series of Pan-African meetings, rather than as a colonial labour conference, Padmore recalled a particular past into a present context filled with the potential of working-class victory. In celebrating Labour’s ‘bloodless revolution’ and in the Congress’s manifesto declaring that the delegates believed in peace since ‘for centuries the African peoples have been victims of violence and slavery’¹²⁸ Padmore integrated the present with the past into a new strategy for resistance. It was a resistance that would now stridently call past promises into the present and work to bring colonial peoples to centre stage in the international power relations that became the Cold War. It recognized that the power of the working class in democratic capitalist governments across Europe and the United States after the war meant that the old

¹²⁶ Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos*, 6.

¹²⁷ Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa*, 289.

¹²⁸ Padmore, *Colonial and Coloured Unity*, 55.

strategy of Marxist revolution was no longer a viable strategy for colonial independence. Most importantly, while in the 1930s Padmore's rhetoric prioritized economic independence, the Congress' "Declaration to the Colonial Workers, Farmers and Intellectuals" named political power as the 'necessary prerequisite' to 'complete social, economic and political emancipation'.¹²⁹

C.L.R. James identified a 'sharp break' in 1945 in the theory of Padmore and the IASB (renamed the Pan-African Federation in 1944) from 'the achievement of independence by armed rebellion to the achievement of independence by non-violent mass action'.¹³⁰ This perceptible shift in Padmore's writing in the late 1940s and 1950s has, James noted, never been fully explored. In his analysis, James argued that the Labour Party's election to power was a crucial turning point in Padmore's strategy because of the particular position of the colonies in relation to the metropolitan government. Since armed rebellion in the colonies could easily be quashed by the vast resources available to each colonial administration as part of the British Empire, colonial independence by armed rebellion required either the collapse or paralysis of the metropolitan government. Once the Labour Party was elected to power and it was clear British socialism was still interested in Empire, Padmore's revolutionary strategy needed to be reconfigured. Thus Padmore strategically began to embrace non-violent tactics not purely as a means of satisfying different audiences, as Adi rightly suggests, but also as a logical conclusion of his revolutionary Marxist analysis.

Padmore's emphasis on unity in 1945 and his willingness to advocate non-violent mass action were in large part a result of the changing political environment as represented in the Labour Party's election to government in England. His belief in the importance of the historical moment and of reinforcing a pan-African past informed the composition and presentation of the Manchester Pan-African Congress. As practical as possible, the conference was designed to be both a celebration and a warning. It presented the possibility of change, but reinforced what Padmore had declared to Moody in 1942, when he noted that they were in a better position than ever to make their voices heard:

¹²⁹ Padmore, *Colonial and Coloured Unity*, 56.

¹³⁰ James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*, 71.

‘It is up to us to take full advantage of the opportunity.’¹³¹ Padmore’s hope was in the diminishing power of the British government on the world stage and on the unity of colonial peoples to exploit this position. His skepticism was with the Labour Government’s intentions in fulfilling its stated ideals on the rights of colonial peoples.

Conclusion

The realities of living in a city under threat of invasion meant that from 1940 to 1941 Padmore was forced to adjust to a new social and political context. His position in London became even more firmly entrenched once he began a strong partnership with a London woman who was his equal in tenacity and as a political thinker. What this change in material and political context meant in practice was actually that he participated in a war culture that afforded the opportunity to think about the strategy of war and potential for peace. Although rationing, the frantic bombing of London, and the carnage of war would certainly have been a major part of his daily consciousness, there is little evidence that he wrote about his thoughts or feelings on these issues.

Padmore seemed to operate, always, with a remarkable determination to keep moving forward, on task and active. He listened to the opera ‘to forget,’ but used his time in the midst of war primarily to analyze and strategize. For a man who had been living for over a decade on a small and insecure income, who stood on the outside of mainstream Europe both because of his colour and his political views,¹³² who was now engaged in a ‘mixed race’ relationship, and who had been one of the first to experience the blunt end of Nazi racism, the extraordinary circumstances of this war could easily have seemed just another hurdle to overcome. The war was certainly tragic and destructive for millions of people – there is no question that Padmore understood this very deeply – but it bears remembering that being, in most situations in his life, at the bottom of the heap, he experienced and understood the war differently from the average person in Britain.

Padmore’s journalism during the war was more than merely a way to pass the time in the midst of war, or a means of survival. As Peter Abrahams describes, it was an

¹³¹ George Padmore to Harold Moody, 4 October 1942. Drake MSS/Schomburg, MG 309, box 64, folder 4.

¹³² C.L.R. James argues that West Indians, in particular, have been raised in a society acutely aware of their ‘place’ within it. See James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 205.

incredible ‘industry’ Padmore created in order to ‘inform the whole colonial world’ from London.¹³³ This thesis has argued that almost all of Padmore’s actions held political meaning and political purpose. Given his absolute commitment to ending European imperialism, his rejection of a comfortable middle-class existence and the value he placed upon writing and informing, it is difficult to imagine that he undertook journalism only as a bread and butter job. The newspaper was actually another medium used in order to fulfill an overall strategy. His status as a well-known correspondent developed further after the war, into notoriety with colonial authorities that far surpassed any fame he could have achieved in distant colonial government offices through his books.

The degree of hope and skepticism prevalent in Padmore’s thinking during the war is essential to understanding Padmore as a pragmatic anti-imperialist. Padmore viewed the global war from 1939 to 1945 as an opportunity. This opportunity would not, however, be realized automatically but required efficient organization and a vehement, unwavering demand in order to be achieved. Padmore’s change in political focus in 1945 was not a complete denunciation of his earlier Marxism; however, his belief in 1939 and 1940 that the war could bring an end to capitalism and imperialism weakened after the Atlantic Charter and then disappeared with the election of a Labour Government in 1945. In explaining his over-wrought condition to Olivierre at the end of 1945, he quoted Hitler that ‘win or lost, Britain would be finished’ by the war, and added simply: ‘It’s time.’¹³⁴ Britain was now dependent upon the United States economically, and the USA and the Soviet Union were now the two ‘Great Powers.’ There was hope in the weakening international position of Great Britain, yet wariness in the potential for the new government of Great Britain which did not challenge the fundamental governing structures of capitalism and imperialism but instead intended to work within and ‘improve’ them. This new political reality meant that he began to emphasize a broader version of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism, non-violent rather than violent resistance, and the priority of political rather than economic revolution.

Finally, alliances and networks had always been important for Padmore. The cultivation of a broad alliance became even more crucial at the end of a war that had

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ George Padmore to Cyril Olivierre, 11 December 1945. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624, folder 1.

seen unprecedented participation by the colonies, surprising anti-Fascist alliances between capitalist and communist global superpowers, and the use of rhetoric that proclaimed the freedom and self-determination of peoples. In thinking about Padmore's alliances in this period, his tense relationship with Moody coupled by his determination to unite colonial peoples into a vociferous demand for self-determination, Aimé Césaire's "In the Guise of a Literary Manifesto" comes to mind: 'I give you my abrupt words/ devour and coil around me/...embrace me into furious we.'¹³⁵ Padmore's 'abrupt words' to people like Kenyatta in the 1930s, Moody in the 1940s, and James in the 1950s, signaled a communal 'we' of trust and critique. But they were also directed against the system he opposed and those who supported it. As relations became icy between Britain and its former Soviet ally after 1946, this would make Padmore a target of the authorities and a most notorious dissident of the British Empire.

¹³⁵ Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*, 133.

Chapter 5

‘Playing the Russian Game’: George Padmore and the labeling of African resistance as Soviet Propaganda, 1946-50

The points of view which we seek to present in a hostile white world have to be put forward at psychological moments.¹

[T]he fact that Padmore is supposed no longer to be affiliated to a communist organization is no argument for not treating his efforts as if they were inspired by Moscow. Whatever their source they are likely to have the same effect. He is playing the Russian game even if he is not paid to do so.²

The first five years after World War II mark a high point in Padmore’s influence. He developed contacts between the Indian nationalist movement and his Pan-African network, and his journalism reached its peak in West African newspapers. He was well-known by colonial governors and in the Colonial Office, who monitored his publications as they appeared in the colonies. Those who sought to oppose his work labeled him as both a ‘colonial’ and a ‘communist sympathizer.’

Between 1946 and 1952, when Cold War tension between Britain and the Soviet Union manifested itself in Soviet criticism of Britain’s Empire, the British Foreign and Colonial Office carefully watched the influence of Soviet propaganda in its colonial territories. Communist incursions in Cyprus and Malaysia meant that reports from these territories posed the most immediate concern to British officials. Yet in all the reports coming back from across the Empire, George Padmore is the *only* author ever mentioned by name. The appearance of an article by Padmore, regardless of its content, was reported consistently by colonial Governors in West Africa and the Caribbean: this did not occur in any other reports nor with regard to any other individual.

Thus while this chapter will include Padmore’s activities, networks and writing, it will also be filled with the voices of those who opposed Padmore’s work, as a means of understanding his motivation and experience in this period. The heightened presence in this chapter of those typically dominant in historical narratives, that is government ‘officials’ and the mainstream British press, takes its cue from Robin Kelley’s argument

¹ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 9 August 1946. Du Bois MSS, reel 59/337-376.

² Internal Memorandum, Colonial Office Public Relations, 1 May 1946. TNA/UK, CO 537/1476.

that ‘knowing how those in power interpret, redefine, and respond to the thoughts and actions of the oppressed is just as important as identifying and analyzing resistance.’³ To understand Padmore in these years then, it is equally important to examine the ways in which British officials in the Colonial and Foreign Office, as well as in the colonial governments, interpreted and attempted to subvert his writing. In these years, Padmore produced newspaper articles and books that challenged the form and legitimacy of the British Empire – some of these praised Soviet successes in dealing with its imperial past. In the same six-year period, the Soviet Union launched an attack on British imperialism through the United Nations (UN). It is within this context that the British reacted to the availability in the colonial territories of books and newspaper articles published by George Padmore.

This chapter will highlight the predominance of George Padmore in colonial government reports of Soviet propaganda in the colonies, and the specific threat Padmore invoked by writing about the Soviet Union, challenging ‘Britishness,’ and criticizing colonial development policy. It begins by setting out the fervour with which Padmore embraced the post-war political climate. It will then examine the attempts made by the British Foreign and Colonial Office to control information in the colonies, the deliberate avoidance of the racial undertones of colonial dissent, and the constraints placed upon its attempts by the drafting of a UN Declaration of Human Rights. Finally, it will show how these tensions culminated in the banning of George Padmore’s book, *Africa – Britain’s Third Empire*, in British Africa. George Padmore’s influence on decolonization is demonstrated in this chapter through the identification of the specific ways in which he was a threat to British colonial rule.

1 Pushing Forward: An Overview of Padmore’s Activities and Networks, 1945-1950

The success of the Pan-African Congress in October 1945, and the growing importance of colonial issues in the UN,⁴ gave new energy and momentum to Padmore’s work. In August 1946, he wrote to Du Bois explaining that ‘[w]hile we have found no opposition to our ideas, we cannot just sit upon our past achievements; we must push forward.

³ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 9.

⁴ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 81.

And that is what I have constantly in mind.⁵ In that same summer Dorothy Padmore described the bustle of 22 Cranleigh Street to their Norwegian friend Ivar Holm, writing that '[p]eople pass in all the time, they are coming from India, East Africa, West Africa, the West Indies, the States, from all over the place.'⁶ She noted that an Indian colleague, Dr. Ranga of the All India Kisan Congress (a peasant based association tenuously linked in 1945 with the Communist Party of India)⁷ had been in London for the past month or two and had many conversations with Padmore, giving them an interpretation of the 'Indian scene.'

Both Hooker and Polsgrove have provided an accurate outline of Padmore's activities and networks in this period. He was in Paris in the summer of 1946 covering the Paris Peace Conference for the *Free Press Journal of Bombay*⁸ (although he claimed in an *Ashanti Pioneer* article in 1949 to have been at the conference as political adviser to the Somali Youth Organization),⁹ and continued to cover the UN Trusteeship Council deliberations until 1948.¹⁰ Through Peter Abrahams, Padmore was introduced to Richard Wright,¹¹ a relationship that quickly grew into affectionate friendship and political dialogue across the English Channel (Wright settled in Paris from the United States in 1946 and Dorothy and George frequently stayed with the Wrights on their trips to France). Through the Pan-African Federation and his continued relationship with Brockway, he was affiliated to the Centre for Colonial Freedom after it was inaugurated in February 1946. The Centre meant that Padmore collaborated with other affiliated organizations such as the Federation of Indian Organizations in Britain, the Overseas Association of Indonesians and Malayans, the Kenya African Union, Nigerian Union of Great Britain and Ireland, the Indian Workers' Association, the West Indian Students Union and the West African Students Union.¹²

⁵ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 9 August 1946. Du Bois MSS, reel 59/337-376.

⁶ Dorothy Padmore to Ivar Holm, 23 July 1946. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 14.

⁷ Desai, *Rural Sociology in India*, 411-415.

⁸ Dorothy Padmore to Ivar Holm, 18 Dec 1948. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 14.

⁹ Padmore, 'Future of Former Italian Colonies,' *Ashanti Pioneer* (hereafter cited as AP), 22 Oct 1949.

¹⁰ 'Trusteeship – The New Imperialism,' *Vanguard*, 30 March 1946; 'Big UNO Debates Colonies,' *Vanguard*, 13 April 1946. For Padmore's faith in the United Nations see also Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 102.

¹¹ Abrahams to Wright, 23 October 1946. Wright MSS/93/1161.

¹² Padmore had been working with organizations like WASU long before the formation of the Centre. See Adi, *West Africans in Britain*, 77.

In 1947, Harold Moody died and, although Hooker marks this as the effective end of the LCP and Padmore's cooperation with it,¹³ evidence suggests Padmore held out greater hope for a collaboration with the new secretary, M. Joseph Mitchell who had taken over in 1946.¹⁴ Indeed, Padmore was still writing about LCP activity in early 1948.¹⁵ Finally, in January 1946 he began a two year project of publishing a newsletter from his home, *The Colonial Parliamentary Bulletin: A Monthly Record of the Colonies in Westminster*. This bulletin was essentially a report of all colonial discussions contained in Hansard and is indicative of Padmore's growing emphasis upon British parliamentary opinion as the central means for independence; an emphasis that would climax in his Gold Coast journalism in the 1950s (see Chapter 6). It is also the clearest example of three features of his writing: his report style; diligent compilation of facts; and commitment to the fundamental role of building awareness among colonial people of how British imperialism functioned.

Since Padmore's personal papers have never been recovered it is impossible to comprehensively detail his networks beyond the above list. The evidence available suggests that these networks seem to have been at their height in this period. Dorothy Padmore's correspondence to friends reveals the stream of visitors they hosted from Vietnam,¹⁶ Sudan,¹⁷ and Norway.¹⁸ How these networks functioned was often a reflection of the precarious position of those who, in the aftermath of the Second World War, did not see their role in society as part of rebuilding post-war Europe but rather in renewed challenge to the international status quo.

The development of the Pan-African Federation is an apt example. In the aftermath of the Manchester Congress, the PAF focused on advertising the resolutions of the Congress as widely as possible. Utilizing Padmore's contacts as a journalist, the resolutions from the Congress were printed in various colonial newspapers, and a small

¹³ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 106.

¹⁴ Padmore wrote to Du Bois that Joseph-Mitchell was 'progressively minded' and that they were 'collaborating most successfully.' George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois. 12 December 1946. Du Bois MSS, reel 59/337-376.

¹⁵ Padmore, 'Britons to Learn Racial Respect,' *AP*, 2 Jan 1948.

¹⁶ Dorothy Padmore to Ivar Holm, 18 December 1946. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 14.

¹⁷ Ibid. Dorothy noted that Padmore had been seeing a lot of the Umma Party delegation and the Independence Front for Sudan. Hooker also highlighted Padmore's involvement with the Sudan in this period. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 103.

¹⁸ Dorothy Padmore to Ivar Holm, 23 July 1946. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 14.

brochure of Du Bois' history of Pan-Africanism was printed. Padmore's hope after both these publicity initiatives was that the Federation would be expanded to all colonial organizations 'of a progressive character' as affiliated bodies. The PAF became largely Ras Makonnen's project, with headquarters in Manchester and most documented correspondence through Makonnen rather than Padmore. It appears this may have been a decision taken of necessity since, in the summer of 1946, Padmore wrote to Du Bois that since the Federation had no money for a headquarters in London, the work was being done from his home with Peter Abrahams and 'Miss Pizer' doing most of the work.

Lack of funds plagued Padmore's work, and while Padmore told Du Bois this had its virtues such as 'avoid[ing] a lot of corruption,' it also had 'its drawbacks, for men must eat' and in a community 'consisting of the poorer citizens, it imposes an unusually hard strain.'¹⁹ The frequency with which Padmore was involved in appeals for funds related to the PAF or its members was evident on two occasions in 1948. Firstly, Padmore was forced not only to write the report of the 1945 Congress but to publish it himself. He had 2,000 copies printed at a cost of £100; however, only about half the money which Padmore was forced to pay to the publisher was reclaimed through sales since, although the report sold well in the colonies, money rarely made it back to London.²⁰ Secondly, Padmore continued to be involved with the welfare of the children of his former IASB comrade, Chris Jones, after his death in 1944. Jones had six children with different women, and all had been sent away for care in different families. A fund had been running for a few years for the maintenance of these children, with Ethel Mannin as treasurer. However, by 1948 the fund was only left with one month to cover expenses of two of the girls who were left to the care of a 'coloured' widow. The Padmore's appealed to friends for £5 or £10, hoping to raise a fund of £250.²¹ Thus his networks were often used to sustain a community of individuals who maintained a precarious existence.

Another example of the precariousness of these networks is the manner in which they were cultivated. In 1946, Dorothy Padmore described the sudden appearance on their

¹⁹ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois, 9 August 1946. Du Bois MSS, reel 59/337-376.

²⁰ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 29 May 1948. Wright MSS/103/1522.

²¹ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 22 November 1948. *Ibid.*

doorstep of a man named Alf Bie Christiansen, who had met a mutual friend in Warsaw, Joseph De Silva, and stayed in their flat for ten days. Although Holm warned that Christiansen followed ‘the Communist line,’ Dorothy Padmore replied that they found him quite pleasant, and that they simply ‘did not allow ourselves at any time to be drawn into Stalinist polemics.’²² Thus Padmore, who remained highly critical of the British Communist Party and those allied with Moscow, did not entirely disregard the potential of those who were interested in anti-colonial politics. This was particularly evident in his attempts to widen the affiliations of the Pan-African Federation. For example, Padmore was willing in 1946 to collaborate with Max Yergan in bringing material aid to South Africans.²³ Yergan was most known for his work in South Africa over decades and who, in 1946, was sympathetic to the Soviet Union and had founded the Council of African Affairs with Paul Robeson. Padmore commented to Du Bois that although Yergan had a poor reputation with African intellectuals and South Africans in Britain, ‘that should not prevent us from collaborating with them as far as possible.’²⁴ As in the years of the war, Padmore’s pragmatism allowed him to embrace a wider affiliation than the small group of intellectuals whom he shared a common worldview with. He even attended events of the Royal Africa and Royal Empire Society to report them to his readers.²⁵

2 Mutually developing: Padmore’s journalism and the African Press after World War Two

Padmore maintained his insistence upon a ‘post-war spirit of nationalist awakening’ well into 1949.²⁶ In May of 1948, in the wake of mass riots in the Gold Coast, he wrote in the popular Gold Coast newspaper, *The Ashanti Pioneer*, that strikes in Rhodesia and Sudan showed that ‘Unrest is sweeping over Africa from east to west, and from north to south. Everywhere the natives are answering the right to live as decent human beings and not as cattle.’²⁷ Yet he feared that ‘Africans don’t realise their own strength’, since ‘Although the whites are armed, Europeans are entirely dependent upon black labour to

²² Ibid.

²³ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois. 9 August 1946. James MSS/UWI, box 7, folder 193.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Padmore, ‘Attlee’s Sister Condemns Smuts Govt,’ *AP*, 4 July 1947.

²⁶ Padmore, ‘Uganda Under Reign of Terror?’ *AP*, 22 July 1949. An example of earlier articles on the post-war momentum is Padmore, ‘Sudanese Nationalists Want Complete Independence,’ *WAP*, 6 December 1946.

²⁷ Padmore, ‘Strikes in Rhodesia and Sudan,’ *AP*, 19 May 1948.

run their mines, farms, railways, load and unload their ships and operate every sphere of their economic activities...Consequently, the day the Africans learn the power of organization...the power of the whites over the blacks will be broken.²⁸ Padmore's operating principle in this period was essentially the same as that stated in the PAF journal, *Pan-Africa*, for which Padmore wrote, which argued that 'we live in an age of propaganda', particularly 'imperial propaganda'.²⁹ This section thus sets the scene for the rest of the chapter, by highlighting the key themes of his colonial journalism in this period.

Padmore's primary newspaper in this period was Azikiwe's Nigerian serial, the *West African Pilot*,³⁰ although his articles increasingly appeared in the Gold Coast newspaper, *The Ashanti Pioneer*, such that by 1949-1950 Padmore held the headlining spot almost every day.³¹ It is much more difficult to track his journalism in West Indian newspapers in this period as there are few available copies that have survived. While his articles in Trinidadian newspapers appear to have decreased significantly in this period, as will be shown below there is evidence from Colonial Governor's reports that Padmore's articles appeared in Barbados, Jamaica, and Bermuda. If he was not printing as frequently in Trinidadian newspapers, he still regularly printed articles in West African newspapers that kept his readers aware of events in the West Indies.³²

Despite the continuing labour disputes in the West Indies and the case for self-government, his focus in the first two years after World War II was in three areas: first, the Labour party's betrayal of its earlier stance on colonialism;³³ secondly, race relations;³⁴ and thirdly, Anglo-Soviet relations as they related to the colonies.³⁵

²⁸ Padmore, 'Malan Double-Crosses Attlee,' *AP*, 27 July 1949.

²⁹ 'The African People's Press Today,' *Pan-Africa: Journal of African Life and Thought* vol II, no. 3-4, undated.

³⁰ Idemili, 'What the West African Pilot did for Nationalism in Nigeria,' 84-91.

³¹ Colonial Governor reports also indicate Padmore's articles appeared in the Sierra Leone newspapers, *The African Standard* and *Renaissance African* (I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson's newspaper), but I have found no available copies of these newspapers to check.

³² Padmore, 'Crisis in West Indian Sugar Industry,' *AP*, 22 August 1949; 'Hungry Negro Workers In Trinidad Fight Pitched Battles Against the Police,' *WAP*, 20 March 1947; 'British Colonial Experts Review Future Political Structure of West Indies,' *WAP*, 23 January 1946.

³³ Padmore, 'Former MP Creech Jones Who Detested Flogging of Natives Now Blesses It,' *WAP*, 8 April 1946; 'Labours Colonial Policy Is Indicted,' *WAP*, 29 July 1946; '"Left Wing Socialists' Plead For Intensive Draining of Africa,' *WAP*, 24 June 1947.

³⁴ Padmore, 'Labour Decides To Take Strong Measures Against Colour Bar In British Hotels,' *WAP*, 4 January 1946; 'Colonial Students Face Great Difficulty Finding Living Quarters,' *WAP*, 16 April 1946.

Padmore's attack upon the hypocrisy of Labour was most strongly directed against the betrayal of Arthur Creech Jones and his policies as Colonial Secretary, but could also be brought to bear against the left in general: 'Let us have no illusions...these British, French and Belgian Socialists will be found in the camp of Yankee Imperialism should there be another world war.' He argued forcefully that those who 'claim they are Left-Wing Socialists, can only think of Africa in terms of exploitation.'³⁶ The French Socialist Prime Minister was sending both African and French troops into Madagascar to crush its rebellion,³⁷ and Creech Jones, the 'erstwhile champion and defender of colonial peoples' was now 'defend[ing] the action of the Nigerian authorities in ordering African police to shoot down unarmed and defenceless African workers'.³⁸ Creech Jones's actions in the Colonial Office, Padmore consistently reported, were hypocritical. His criticism did not waver.

These issues of race relations and the Cold War were usually linked. When Clement Attlee's sister addressed the Royal African Society on her 35 years missionary work in South Africa, Padmore reported her response to a question on whether 'Europeans' in South Africa were standing up for Africans: 'the only people who are brave on behalf of the darker races are the Communists.'³⁹ She added that 'Although we deplore their methods and principles, they are braver than most white people and have the courage of convictions.'⁴⁰ In a May 1948 article, Padmore argued that the unfavourable publicity brought about by the colour bar harmed Britain since it needed the friendship and goodwill of its colonial citizens, 'at this time of increasing tension with the Soviet Russia which has long ago abolished all forms of colour bar'.⁴¹ This was an anything but subtle reminder that the Russian threat to Britain was real, and that Russia had a stronger stand on issues of racial equality. He noted that a conference of young British liberals were prepared to tackle racism in schools, but were not prepared to follow

³⁵ Padmore, 'Soviet Delegate Criticizes Reactionary Arguments of Anglo-Saxon Powers,' *WAP*, 2 January 1946; 'Big Guns of UK Anglicans Urge Britons To Win African Aid Against Russia,' *WAP*, 8 May 1946.

³⁶ Padmore, 'European Imperialists Ponder!' *AP*, 16 July 1947.

³⁷ Padmore, 'Madagascar Turns Anti-French,' *AP*, 16 August 1947.

³⁸ Padmore, 'MPs Challenging Secretary of State's Statement,' *AP*, 28 August 1947.

³⁹ Evan Smith argues that although anti-racism was a significant CPGB issue in the 1950s, it was still viewed under the umbrella of anti-colonialism and thus tended to perpetuate the 'foreignness' of domestic issues of racism. See Smith, 'Class Before Race,' 455-481.

⁴⁰ Padmore, 'Attlee's Sister Condemns Smuts Government,' *AP*, 4 July 1947.

⁴¹ Padmore, 'Britain May Kick Out Colour Bar,' *AP*, 20 May 1948.

Russia's lead by making racial discrimination a criminal offence.⁴² Yet while the Soviet model of race relations was important for Padmore, perhaps the key to understanding Padmore's references to the Soviet Union in these years was that it consistently and 'viciously' attacked 'the European imperialistic powers for exploiting the African peoples'⁴³ in the United Nations. He wrote about the Soviet Union in 1946 and 1947 because it articulated a similar criticism of European imperialism, and was seen as an ally.

However, his emphasis gradually shifted in 1948 to focus on the exploitation of colonial 'development' policy, and the power that Africans could wield in Britain's desperate attempt to revive its economy.⁴⁴ This change may have occurred because of Padmore's growing awareness of the Colonial Office's attacks on the West African press. In the summer of 1947, Padmore announced that the Colonial Office was working with the British tabloid, *The Daily Mirror*, to bring out Mirror Group newspapers in Nigeria and the Gold Coast 'with the object of challenging the African owned newspapers'.⁴⁵ As will be discussed below, this plan was part of the Colonial Office's strategy for combating Soviet propaganda in Africa.

After 1947, Padmore began to state more equivocally that his work and the demands of African nationalists did not place them in the communist camp. The Gold Coast press itself staunchly resisted the imposition of British papers and denounced the accusation of communism: for example, one editorial proclaimed that 'the Gold Coast, in sober fact, has no intention to go Red. Rather, it has seen red. Goaded by the forces of organized, brutal exploitation, the masses of the Gold Coast are now resolutely out for just redress'.⁴⁶ Following the Gold Coast riots, Padmore reported that Colonial governments had been instructed to 'drop their anti-communist propaganda aimed at discrediting African nationalist leaders, and devote more time to removing the underlying economic and social grievances of the people'.⁴⁷ Yet while in this article

⁴² 'British Youth to Fight Colour Bar,' *AP*, 5 March 1948.

⁴³ Padmore, 'Colonial Powers Report on Colonies,' *AP*, 30 October 1948.

⁴⁴ Padmore, 'Self-Government – Have we any changes?' *GCO*, 23 July 1948.

⁴⁵ Padmore, 'Will "Daily Mirror" Invade Nigeria?' *AP*, 1 July 1947. 'UK Lords Propose Challenge Zik's Press Ltd By Founding Paper,' *WAP*, 10 July 1947; 'Financiers of New Paper Hope to Succeed Where the PRO Fails,' *WAP*, 11 July 1947.

⁴⁶ Editorial, 'Communism, But Whose Fault?' *AP*, 16 April 1948.

⁴⁷ Padmore, 'Anti-Red Move in Colonies Jilted,' *AP*, 15 June 1948.

Padmore denounced the attempts to label African nationalism as communist and to recognize instead the just grievances of colonial citizens, he spent much of 1949 persistently distinguishing resistance movements from communism.⁴⁸ Colonial Office officials ‘and their agents’, he insisted, were using ‘wicked propaganda’ to ‘brand any gathering of anti-imperialists and colonial nationalist movements’ with the communist stamp.⁴⁹ The label of communism, he had now learned, was a hindrance rather than a help in the bid for independence.

Furthermore, Padmore believed that by setting up a British group of newspapers in West Africa, the Colonial Office was not only attempting to combat African nationalism. It was also an act designed to financially destroy the young African owned newspapers that were both the voice and the leadership of African resistance.⁵⁰ Padmore thus spent considerable time in 1949 focused on the theme of colonial exploitation. He continued to attack the integrity of Creech Jones as Colonial Secretary and the Labour Party’s plans for colonial development. Creech Jones, he claimed, ‘who was once the greatest critic of the exploitation of Africans’, now refused to even listen to African grievances.⁵¹ Creech Jones had sided ‘with the representatives of capitalism and imperialism’ in his ‘betrayal of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the recent issue of constitutional reform.’⁵² Padmore asserted that what Britain did not want to admit, was that it needed its colonies in Africa – not just as a bulwark against the ‘two armed camps’ and the threat of another war⁵³ – but also in its ‘desperate struggle for economic survival.’⁵⁴ In this desperate struggle, there was no mistaking the fact that Britain’s massive investment in Africa⁵⁵ was not the result of any altruistic attitude. Thus Padmore was now using his journalism to reiterate the ideas in *Africa – Britain’s Third Empire*, as seen in his declaration that ‘Africa remains the last hope of the

⁴⁸ Padmore, ‘Cause of Nationalism in Africa,’ *AP*, 12 October 1949; ‘West Africa Looks to Gold Coast,’ *AP*, 29 November 1949.

⁴⁹ Padmore, ‘Asian and African Leaders to Meet,’ *AP*, 5 October 1949.

⁵⁰ Padmore, ‘What Price African Nationalism?’ *AP*, 1 June 1948.

⁵¹ Padmore, ‘Uganda Under Reign of Terror?’ *AP*, 22 July 1949.

⁵² Padmore, ‘Storm Over Constitutional Issue,’ *AP*, 20 December 1949.

⁵³ ‘Asian and African Leaders To Meet,’ *AP*, 5 October 1949. Padmore argued that colonial peoples needed to seize the ‘psychological moment when every power great and small is trying to win their support’.

⁵⁴ Padmore, ‘Labour Government Sublimating Empire,’ *AP*, 24 October 1949.

⁵⁵ Padmore, ‘£165,000,000 Is Set Aside for Africa’s Exploitation,’ *WAP*, 8 February 1948.

European Powers as a field for unbridled exploitation, euphemistically called “development.”⁵⁶

In challenging British development policy as exploitation, Padmore was very specific in explaining Britain’s economic dependence upon the colonies and repeatedly backed his claims up with examples in newspaper articles. The logic behind the heightened interest of the Colonial Office in development policy was, Padmore argued, a direct result of Britain’s dollar crisis. According to Padmore, not only were colonial products a means of *saving* dollars by not having to buy needed products in the dollar rather than sterling market, they were also a way of *making* dollars. For example, since the Gold Coast was the world’s largest cocoa producer and third largest producer of manganese ore used to make high-grade steel, the British were able to sell these products to the United States and Canada and thus obtain much needed dollars.⁵⁷

The Colonial Office line that they were engaged in development in order to help the millions of colonial inhabitants ‘living in deplorable conditions’⁵⁸ was a base lie in Padmore’s eyes. He became increasingly aware that this lie was being used also as a means of countering colonial demands for independence of those who were, as poor, diseased children, ‘unfit for self-government.’⁵⁹ As will be shown, the attitude of treating Africans as children was common in the Colonial Office and had important implications for their attempts to label Padmore’s writing as well. For his part, he featured a story in the autumn of 1949 straight out of *The Economist* by Gold Coast intellectual J.E.S. de Graft-Hayford, who declared that the ‘argument based on the African being child-like may be dismissed summarily...The Watson Commission...found the average Gold Coaster to be endowed with a “fund of common sense.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Padmore, ‘White Supremacy in all Africa?’ *AP*, 6 October 1949. This regional classification of Britain’s empires (comprising the construction and loss first of America, then India, and finally Africa), can be contrasted with John Darwin’s chronological examination of Britain’s Third Empire as that after 1926 when, in particular, the constitutional role of the Dominions was redefined. Darwin, ‘A Third British Empire?’, 66.

⁵⁷ Padmore, ‘Colonial Office Fears Pan-Africanism,’ *AP*, 27 April 1949.

⁵⁸ The quotation is of Tory MP Alan Lennox Boyd. ‘Dollar Crisis and Development,’ *AP*, 3 August 1949.

⁵⁹ Padmore, ‘Rees-Williams Winds Up Debate,’ *AP*, 8 August 1949; ‘Africans Unfit for Self-Government,’ *AP*, 5 January 1950.

⁶⁰ Padmore, ‘Native Asserts Gold Coast is Ready for Self-Government,’ *AP*, 10 September 1949.

Thus overall, Padmore used his journalism in this period to expose Labour's hypocrisy and to build up the sense of an irrepressible momentum in colonial resistance struggles. His journalism was a means to transmit to Africans and West Indians his conviction that they held the advantage in the current imperial debate. The position of Russia on race relations, and its attack upon European colonialism in the United Nations was believed by Padmore in 1946 and 1947 to be a strategic advantage. He soon saw otherwise.

3 ‘Padmore productions’⁶¹: Colonial Government Reports of Soviet Propaganda in the Colonies

3.1 Notorious: reports by Colonial Governors of Padmore’s journalism

On 17 May, 1946 the British Colonial Office sent a telegram to all colonies requesting quarterly reports on Soviet propaganda in the press of their respective colonies, as well as the public response to these articles. The telegram was sent at the request of the Foreign Office, ‘in view of [the] Soviet Government’s present policy of representing itself as champion of colonial peoples and in view of [the] many criticisms of this country and British Empire now being made in Soviet press and foreign language broadcasts from [the] USSR.’⁶² Padmore’s history with the Soviet Union and his interest in the emerging Cold War made him a particularly prominent fixture in these reports.

Signs of tension between Britain and the Soviet Union quickly emerged after the war, and Padmore was one of the first to report on them. In October 1946, an article by Padmore appeared in the *Bermuda Recorder* under the headline ‘Molotov Attacks British Colonial Administration.’⁶³ Padmore was in Paris covering the Peace Conference as correspondent for the Free India Press.⁶⁴ The appearance of this article in Bermuda demonstrates one of the key features of British reports on George Padmore – his geographical reach. Unlike Trinidad and Jamaica, where his newspaper articles had appeared since at least 1938, Padmore does not appear to have had previous

⁶¹ Governor of Sierra Leone to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 July 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6550.

⁶² Secretary of State for the Colonies To All Colonies, Protectorates, and Mandated Territories, 17 May 1946. TNA/UK, CO 537/5120.

⁶³ Governor of Bermuda to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 January 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

⁶⁴ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 100.

contacts in Bermuda. Nor was it a place where his articles were consistently published. Yet an article, written for a press concerned primarily with Indian independence, appeared in Bermuda. This particular article also demonstrates the entangled relationship between criticism of the British Empire and what governors deemed ‘Soviet propaganda.’ Padmore’s article outlined Molotov’s own claims that their ‘model of democracy works satisfactorily in our country’ and could work just as well in countries like the Gold Coast. But what the Governor of Bermuda objected to was not Molotov’s own claims, but Padmore’s conclusion that British colonial policy was ‘democracy in form but autocracy in practice.’⁶⁵ Padmore’s article was thus reported by the Bermuda Governor not because it was propaganda coming directly from the Soviet Union, but because it was critical of British colonialism and was therefore deemed worthy of inclusion under a report of Soviet propaganda.

Initial reports from colonies in West Africa and the Caribbean are brief. They mention very little in the way of direct Soviet propaganda but note the appearance of articles by Padmore. In an early report from Jamaica, the Governor noted that one paper, *Public Opinion*, made unfavourable comparisons between British actions and Soviet achievements, and that these were usually found in quotations by Padmore.⁶⁶ Padmore’s articles were also believed to be Soviet propaganda because they were distributed at nominal cost.⁶⁷ Some colonial reports appear to already be familiar with Padmore’s writing, and offer no justification for his inclusion in their reports. Others began to make a connection between criticism of British imperialism and sympathy with the Soviet Union. The Governor of Nyasaland notified the Colonial Office that the publication *Pan Africa*, produced by Padmore and colleagues from London, had appeared in his colony and that ‘while there appear to be no grounds for suggesting that *Pan Africa* is an instrument of Soviet propaganda, this journal seems to echo certain Soviet slogans.’⁶⁸ This rather measured report by the Nyasaland Governor is contrasted with the harsh response of a Colonial Office staff member that the publication was the effort of ‘Padmore or one of his cronies.’⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Governor of Bermuda to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 January 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

⁶⁶ Governor of Jamaica to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 December 1946. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

⁶⁷ Governor of the Gold Coast to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 February 1948. Report for 1 TNA/UK, CO 537/5120.

⁶⁸ Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 11 March 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

⁶⁹ Internal memorandum, 17 May 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

Thus by 1947, Padmore was notorious among some Colonial Office staff. This notoriety soon spread to the colonies as well, with reports from Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the Gold Coast in 1948 and 1949 regularly reporting Padmore's articles as either 'strongly anti-imperialist,' 'pro-Russian,' or featuring 'a Slavonic Theme.' The repetition of Soviet slogans, along with Russia as subject matter in a number of Padmore's articles, initially did give some colonial Governors reason to include mention of articles in their reports. Finally, the appearance in 1946 of Padmore's book *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* in colonial territory, confirmed Colonial and Foreign Office suspicion of a Soviet conspiracy. It also made Padmore a threat because of his newspaper articles and his books.

3.2 A Provocation? The publication of *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire*

In August 1946, Padmore wrote to Du Bois encouraging him in his latest book, *The World and Africa*. He felt it wise for Du Bois 'to make hay while the sun shines,' noting that 'The points of view which we seek to present in a hostile white world have to be put forward at psychological moments, so when one can get a publisher receptive to the idea of presenting our manuscripts, one has to put all other matters aside and seize the opportunity.'⁷⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Padmore had actually been trying to find a publisher for *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* since 1943. Thus the intended 'psychological moment' for this book – that is, the war-time alliance – had passed by the time the book actually appeared. Padmore knew this – in fact, he anticipated the breakdown of allied relations and its impact upon questions of imperialism and socialism well before the war was over.⁷¹ However, as is evident from his journalism through 1946-1948 discussed above, he also saw in Russian attacks on British imperialism an opportunity to exploit Russian criticism, so as to keep the colonial question at the forefront of British public opinion and to shore up African resistance with the assurance of an ally in the international debate.

⁷⁰ George Padmore to W.E.B. Du Bois. 9 August 1946. Du Bois MSS, reel 59/337-376.

⁷¹ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 65.

How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire began by surveying Czarist imperial history, followed by an examination of how the Soviet Union had dealt with its inherited Empire. It concluded with what would have been a provocative section for the British, entitled “Socialism Unites – Imperialism Divides.” While Padmore noted that ‘[t]he Soviet Union is no utopia’, and it was legitimate to criticize several aspects of Soviet society, he concluded that Soviet policy ‘towards the former colonial peoples...indicates conclusively that only under a planned economy based on Socialist principles is it possible to abolish, root and branch, national and racial oppression and exploitation.’⁷² Reviews of the book printed in local Nigerian papers appeared to have ‘roused the interest of the youth of the country’ to learn more about Russia.⁷³ The book was also brought into the Gold Coast by a colleague of Padmore, nationalist leader Ako Adjei,⁷⁴ 200 copies of which were briefly detained by Customs before being released after two articles condemning the seizure were printed in the local press.⁷⁵

The mere advocacy of a planned economy based on socialism would have been enough for most British officials to condemn it. Yet reaction to this book by colonial Governors was relatively slow and moderate – it aroused suspicion but at this stage they were not fully prepared to instigate a ban on the book. Instead, the book became the cornerstone of a 1948 Foreign Office directive sent to all diplomatic missions from Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin on “Countering Soviet Attacks on ‘Colonialism’ and Colonial Administration.” The directive began by summarizing the main points of Padmore’s book, which was assumed to have ‘done a great deal of damage both in the colonies and in foreign countries,’⁷⁶ and to generally represent the lines of attack found in Soviet propaganda.

After the Foreign Office sent a draft to the Colonial Office for approval, Parliamentary Under-secretary David Rees-Williams pointed out that while Padmore had once been a member of the Moscow Soviet, he was now ‘bitterly opposed to Russian Communism

⁷² Padmore, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire*, x.

⁷³ Governor of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 July 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/2545.

⁷⁴ Ako Adjei was part of the ‘Big Six’ in Gold Coast politics and was arrested, along with Nkrumah, in 1948 as a leader of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). Adjei was also instrumental in recruiting Kwame Nkrumah back to the Gold Coast in 1947. Hadjor, *Nkrumah and Ghana*, 40.

⁷⁵ Telegram Governor of Gold Coast to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 February, 1948. TNA/UK, CO 537/5120.

⁷⁶ ‘Directive for Countering Soviet Attacks on ‘Colonialism’ and Colonial Administration,’ 20 August 1948. TNA/UK, FO 1110/20.

and regards the Russians and the Communists as tarred with the same brush as the Imperialists, or for that matter any other person with white skin.⁷⁷ A footnote in these same words was then added to the directive, and remained in the final text of the despatch. Thus while some Colonial Office staff did acknowledge that Padmore was now avowedly anti-Soviet, his writing was still labeled as Soviet propaganda.

Writing about the Soviet Union was a way of reminding his readers that Britain could be called to account for her record. Soviet accusations of British imperial exploitation at the United Nations supported Padmore's contention that Britain's imperial rationale was duplicitous. Yet Padmore's writing about the Soviet Union was more ambivalent than the lines of the Cold War allowed. Writing about the Soviet Union revived Padmore's communist affiliations for Colonial Office officials, and led to heightened surveillance of his writing. His pragmatism, in this case, did not lead to the results he intended. Yet we have already seen that early in Padmore's career, he understood that controversy sold books. Indeed, it is possible that he may actually have welcomed the publicity that came with the banning of *Africa – Britain's Third Empire* and the British concern for the burgeoning West African press which soon followed.

Highlighting Russia's advanced position on race relations and the possibility of a multi-national state were not new.⁷⁸ Yet it provided Padmore with an opportunity to keep the colonial question in the international arena. While Padmore's work was not always Soviet propaganda, the message of *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire* was decidedly pro-Soviet. However, the fact that it was not this book that colonial governments banned, but a later book on Britain's Empire in Africa, demonstrates that it was not his writing about the Soviet Union that was the primary objection, but his criticism of British imperialism.

3.3 Non-Soviet Threats: Padmore's Challenge to 'Britishness' and Colonial Policy

After initial colonial government reports in 1946 and 1947 described Padmore's articles as being pro-Soviet, by 1949 one Trinidad official admitted that while Padmore's

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Barnes, *Soviet Light on the Colonies*.

articles ‘could not be deemed communistic, [they] were critical of British Colonial policy, especially in Africa and to a much lesser extent, in the West Indies, and fit in with destructive communist propaganda.’⁷⁹ There was a subtle shift in the reports coming from the colonies; Padmore’s articles were no longer mentioned for their Slavonic content, but for their ‘anti-white, anti-British’⁸⁰ character. The attempts to suppress Padmore’s writing exhibited several key themes in British imperial history after 1945: continued paternalistic racism in the Colonial Office, as well as reassessments of what it meant to be ‘British’ (ie white) in the context of East-West tensions and colonial migration to the metropolis.⁸¹

The African as emotional, reactionary, and irrational was generalized into a larger criticism of the African press and, in fact, of Padmore’s writing. As seen above, his articles became categorized as exaggerative and devoid of fact. The African press, particularly in Nigeria, was seen to have had an influence ‘quite out of proportion to [its] small circulation’ since ‘the less sophisticated semi-educated public...accepts all too readily the opinions which [it] daily reads in print.’⁸² Complaints by Nigerians about discriminatory practices in the civil service were dismissed as minor concerns which produced an ‘effect on the African mind ...out of all proportions to their triviality.’⁸³ This was more than mere paternalism. In this respect, British officials were following a tradition of racial categorization that dates to the 18th century creation of an often feminized, childish or primitive African who was imagined in opposition to the male European.⁸⁴ The state of the native population, and the ‘poor’ quality of the African press was used as justification for the regulation and manipulation of information in the colonies and, crucially for the international context, the non-application of Article 19 (which declares the universal right to freedom of opinion and expression) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

⁷⁹ Governor of Trinidad & Tobago to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 February 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6550.

⁸⁰ Governor of Gold Coast to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 February 1948. TNA/UK, CO 537/5120.

⁸¹ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 112-129.

⁸² H.M. Foot to Arthur Creech Jones, 31 May 1949. TNA/UK, CO 875/54/4.

⁸³ Harold Cooper to K.W. Blackburne, 13 October 1947. TNA/UK, CO 537/5133.

⁸⁴ Scheibinger, *Nature’s Body*, 160-164. Fredrickson, *Racism*.

The element of national and racial consciousness present in the description of Padmore's 'anti-white, anti-British' writing by the Governor of the Gold Coast also exposes an underlying fear that was present in the decade after the war. A dramatic increase in immigration from Britain's 'non-white' colonies – particularly the British West Indies – invoked a reassertion of white British nationalism in Britain that sought to redefine non-white immigrants as strangers and thus not 'British.'⁸⁵ Padmore's 'anti-British' writing thus took on a much deeper, elemental danger that challenged national conceptions of identity. For colonial governors, his 'anti-British' writing also penetrated deeply – into the assumption of the inherent superiority of British civilization that was their fundamental rationale for rule.⁸⁶ Attacking Padmore's writing along moral lines could therefore prove very useful. Labelling anti-colonial writing as Soviet propaganda had the added benefit of placing threats to British imperial authority in a very recognizable, oppositional category that both the British public and British and colonial officials could identify. The Soviet propaganda label conveniently undermined the moral authority claimed by anti-colonial activists by associating criticism of the British Empire with, what was swiftly becoming, a symbol in the West of oppression and tyranny.

Not only did Padmore challenge 'Britishness,' he was also, as discussed above, openly critical of the enhanced role of development in colonial policy.⁸⁷ On 7 December, 1948 an article by Padmore appeared in the *West African Pilot* entitled 'UK and US Bargain to Exploit Nigerian Coal.' The article provoked an immediate and widespread reaction both in Nigeria and in Britain. An article decrying Padmore's 'piece of sheer, hostile gibberish' appeared swiftly in *West African Review*, claiming that Padmore's article was 'a good example of dishonesty in journalism' and that 'even the most incompetent journalist should have had enough information in his head to know that it was untrue.'⁸⁸

Unfortunately for the Colonial Office, his observations were to a large degree accurate. Development as a major component of British colonial policy began in the late 1930s under then Colonial Secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, as a strategy for enhancing

⁸⁵ Weight, *Patriots*, 136-141; Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in Our Midst,' 208-209.

⁸⁶ See for example F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*.

⁸⁷ For a historical analysis of colonial development as primarily to Britain's advantage, see Fieldhouse, 'The Labour Governments and the Empire Commonwealth,' 83-120.

⁸⁸ Draft telegram, Brigadier Johnson to Governor, Nigeria, 2 January 1949. TNA/UK, CO 875/54/4.

domestic interests as well as local improvements. While actual investment was put on hold during the war, the place of development as a key component of British colonial policy towards ‘self-government within the framework of the British Empire’⁸⁹ was enhanced. Britain’s dependence on Lend-Lease also meant that opening up the colonies to American business and investment was a necessary compromise for the British government, and thus generally welcomed.⁹⁰ Padmore’s critique of American investment hit upon an area of British weakness after the war that the government did not want exposed. That the article also dealt with colonial development, which by 1945 had become the Colonial Office’s *raison d’être*,⁹¹ would have damaged the Colonial Office in particular. Many jobs and a considerable amount of prestige were now invested in the idea of colonial development as enlightened colonial policy.⁹² Padmore’s public criticism of British development plans would have hit a particularly sensitive nerve after the failure of the East African groundnut scheme.⁹³

Though obviously damaging, it was not simply the libelous information Padmore had presented in this particular newspaper article that the Colonial Office objected to. As the flurry of messages and meetings that Padmore’s article prompted in the Colonial Office demonstrate, it was also the general state of the African press and the inability of the Colonial Office or the respective colonial governments to control it. Controlling Padmore therefore meant exerting greater influence over information in the colonies generally. The dilemma of how to control African-owned newspapers, in particular the relationship between Colonial Governor’s more repressive actions on the ground and the need for the Colonial Office to appear to maintain the British principle of press freedom, was not new to the post-war period – this dynamic existed before World War I.⁹⁴ Nor was the presence of West Indians as newspapermen in West Africa.⁹⁵ Chick argues that after World War II the Colonial Office still held its ambivalent relationship to press censorship, convinced that suppression did not achieve much and was difficult to defend, but that the current use of government news sheets was not effective. It was

⁸⁹ Quoted in Lee and Petter, *The Colonial Office, War, and Development*, 244.

⁹⁰ Horne, *Cold War in a Hot Zone*, 160.

⁹¹ Butler, *Britain and Empire*.

⁹² Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945-1961*, 15-43; Pearce, *The Turning Point in Africa*, 110-115.

⁹³ Morgan, ‘Imperialists at Bay,’ 237-38.

⁹⁴ Omu, ‘The Dilemma of Press Freedom in Colonial Africa,’ 279-298.

⁹⁵ The first African newspaper in tropical Africa was founded in Sierra Leone by a West Indian, William Drape. Omu, ‘The Dilemma of Press Freedom in Colonial Africa,’ 282.

therefore open to the Mirror Group's acquisition, in 1947, of a Nigerian newspaper and the extension of the Group into the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.⁹⁶ It was this acquisition, as both a business venture that would stifle the profits of African-owned newspapers and as a Colonial Office pipeline to African readers, which both Padmore and the African-owned newspapers he wrote for, objected to.

British attempts to control Padmore and the African press were intertwined because these newspapers supported Padmore, and Padmore's articles enhanced the content of the newspapers. Unfortunately for the Colonial Office, the networks built up between colonial subjects in England and those in the colonies now made it difficult to exert the kind of control they wanted. When a Junior Officer in the Colonial Office's Information Department suggested that something be done from the Colonial Office end to 'bring Mr. Padmore's near-truths more into line with facts,' Brigadier R.F. Johnson, head of the News Branch in the Colonial Office, responded that it was very difficult to do anything when the article is 'concocted in one country and published in another.'⁹⁷ The cross border nature of Padmore's writing was therefore a key component of the challenge he posed to British authority. His networks in the colonies allowed for the spread of his articles throughout the world. His position in London meant that he had access to information not available in the colonies and freedom to write his views before being disbursed into the more restrictive space of the colonies. In attempting to control Padmore then, British officials faced the formidable opposition of Padmore's transcontinental networks, as well as new international conventions on human rights. Their attempts culminated in the banning of Padmore's book, *Africa – Britain's Third Empire*, in 1950.

4 Multiple Subversions: The Colonial Office, Article 19, and Padmore's Subversive Literature

The issue of the banning of subversive literature, encouraged in Creech Jones' directive, surfaced in 1950 when five colonial governments in Africa banned Padmore's latest book.⁹⁸ On 22 March, 1950, in response to a question in the House of Commons from

⁹⁶ Chick, 'Cecil King, the Press, and Politics in West Africa,' 375-393.

⁹⁷ Internal memorandum, Nigeria and the Press, January 1948. TNA/UK, CO 875/54/4.

⁹⁸ Schedule of publications, books, newspapers and periodicals prohibited by colonial governments to be imported or circulated, 25 May 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/5246.

Labour MP Tom Driberg on the banning of the book in Kenya, the newly appointed Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Griffiths, replied that the action was taken under the penal code in that country and that ‘the decision is for the Governor of Kenya.’⁹⁹ Debate as to whether colonial policy should be shaped by London or the colonial governments was a continuing issue in the Colonial Office.¹⁰⁰ But in order to evade the Universal Declaration of Human Rights when it came to undesirable publications in the colonies, the Colonial Office adhered to the new rules in official directives to Colonial Governors, and then used the distinction between British and colonial government authority to plead impotence when it came to colonial suppression of what it deemed to be subversive material.

The distinction based on jurisdiction became the line adhered to when, over the following months, the Colonial Office received written complaints from different interest groups and individuals concerned by the banning of Padmore’s book. In reply to letters from a number of private individuals the Colonial Office simply referred to the Colonial Secretary’s statement in the House, adding that the Secretary was ‘not willing to intervene’ in such matters. The Colonial Office determined that the book was ‘highly tendentious and misleading, and would have had the effect of accentuating existing suspicions and of stimulat[ing] inter-racial ill feeling. The Governor banned it after full discussion in the Executive Council.’¹⁰¹ The decision was thus validated by adherence to legislative procedure. In all the responses to questions and complaints about the banning of Padmore’s book, outlined below, the Colonial Office chose to respond by asserting the legal and procedural authority with which the decision to ban the book was made.

Complaints soon poured in that the book was banned not only in Kenya, but in the Gold Coast, The Gambia, Rhodesia, Tanganyika, the Somaliland Protectorate, and Uganda. Against this very wide banning across British African territory, and invoking the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and English law, individuals and organizations in Britain flooded the Colonial Office with a barrage of protest. The LCP stated that

⁹⁹ Mr. Barton to The Assistant Clerk, Race Relations Committee of the Society of Friends, 24 July 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

¹⁰⁰ Butler, *Britain and Empire*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Internal memorandum, ‘Security Arrangements – West Africa: Undesirable publications – ‘Africa’ by George Padmore,’ 31 March 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

Padmore was ‘one of our members’ and asserted that the ban undermined the claims of the Labour Party to encourage free speech in the colonies. The LCP announced that if the ban were not lifted, it would institute a campaign among the working population of Britain and the colonies.¹⁰² The African League minced no words when it put forward that

It has not come to our notice that the British Government has withdrawn its support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights neither has Article 19 of the United Nations Charter been modified to read Universal Declaration of White Rights. Perhaps you will be kind enough to inform the African League if this is the position.¹⁰³

The National Council for Civil Liberties also quoted article 19 of the UN Charter in its letter, and argued that a number of people had written to it suggesting that an intellectual colour bar was now in force.¹⁰⁴

It was not only ‘coloured’ or social interest groups who protested the ban but also private individuals and writers. A.J. Higgins of the “Authors’ Club” wrote on two occasions arguing that the banning of the book was a mistake on the part of the colonial governments as it would only result in increasing the book’s appeal: ‘we cannot run away from the Africans’ natural...ambitions and charges as the Colonial Office is doing by banning a book which is packed with incontrovertible facts.’¹⁰⁵ Higgins published a review of the book in *John O’ London’s Weekly*, and suggested to the Colonial Office that they commission him or another writer to produce an article that would more satisfactorily deal with the book.

Members of Parliament were also recruited by Padmore and his allies to raise the matter with the Colonial Office. After a constituent complained to Conservative MP Colonel Dodds Parker, he wrote to the Colonial Office asking why, if the book was freely available in Britain, it should be banned in colonial territory? Dr. S.W. Jeger, Labour MP for St. Pancras and Padmore’s representative in the House of Commons, received a complaint from Padmore himself and followed up with the Colonial Office in April 1950. Finally, Padmore enlisted the help of Fenner Brockway, MP. On 5 April

¹⁰² M. Joseph Mitchell, to the Right Honourable James Griffiths, 23 March 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

¹⁰³ African League to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 24 April, 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth M. Allen, to James Griffiths, 19 April, 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

¹⁰⁵ A.J. Higgins to Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 June 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

Brockway rose in the House of Commons to ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies why the book had been banned in Uganda and the Gold Coast, and insisted that ‘the banning of books in this way is contrary to the British way of life and, indeed, to the Charter of the United Nations.’¹⁰⁶ This was the second question in a month raised in Parliament on the banning of Padmore’s book.

In his study of parliamentary questions on colonial affairs, Goldsworthy tracks the significant increase in parliamentary questions relating to the colonies between 1945-1960, and argues that this was due to a growing belief that ‘MPs were the vicarious representatives of colonial peoples’ because they were a ‘voteless constituent’ who required parliamentary representation.¹⁰⁷ The questions raised in parliament about the banning of Padmore’s book were therefore part of a shift in how some British politicians thought about the colonies and their role towards them. What is significant about Padmore’s case is that he had, by now, been living in Britain for 15 years and had a British woman as a partner, but was still essentially thought of as a colonial by the majority of white British society. The rights of British subjects, who owned British passports, were intentionally ambiguous during this period when their image as citizens or aliens was often manipulated depending on the circumstances.¹⁰⁸ The book in question was written and available in Britain, and published by a British press. So where exactly did this place Padmore’s rights as a citizen, and who were the Members of Parliament representing when they raised the issue in the British House of Commons? Once again, Padmore did not fit into a single defined category that could be used by the British to respond to his work. He crossed the boundaries of the predominant imagined identities of being colonial, being British, of being pro- or anti-Soviet.

The banning of his book, as noted by Griffiths, had only created ‘unnecessary publicity’ and increased Padmore’s fame in the colonies.¹⁰⁹ The Colonial Office experienced the limits of their power to control information in the colonies. This was an example of the role of campaigners in ‘pressur[ing] metropolitan policy-making,’¹¹⁰ the hope placed on

¹⁰⁶ 473 Parl. Deb., H.C. (5th ser.) (1950) 1185-86.

¹⁰⁷ Goldsworthy, ‘Parliamentary Questions on Colonial Affairs,’ 147.

¹⁰⁸ James, ‘The Black Experience in Twentieth Century Britain,’ 349-350.

¹⁰⁹ Meeting Notes, 25 April 1950. TNA/UK, CO 537/6523.

¹¹⁰ Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, 22.

human rights in the first decade after the war, and of Padmore's ability to raise a wide base of support through his networks.

5 After 1950: The Danger Dissipates

Contending with Padmore's writing forced the British to rethink how they handled unwelcome publications in the colonies. The situation created by the banning of Padmore's book, along with a failed dispatch to the colonies to suppress literature after Article 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights made the directive contentious, demonstrated to British officials that they could no longer use legislative restrictions in the colonies that could be divorced from metropolitan rights and politics. In West Africa after 1950, a shift in Colonial Office and colonial government strategy towards anti-colonial and Soviet propaganda emerged that was focused on exerting a positive image of British colonial strategy rather than instituting legislative or restrictive means of control. British officials now demonstrated a pro-active rather than reactive response to negative publicity – a correction to the initial paranoia between 1946 and 1950.

By 1952, Nigeria had set up three regional coordinating committees on anti-communist propaganda, designed to be publicly divorced from Government associations but firmly under Government direction. The committees also requested that the Colonial Office subsidize their publications so that they could distribute them at a lower cost than their competitors' communist propaganda.¹¹¹ Although not explicitly nor publicly represented as a racial initiative, an attempt was being made to steer the new African political elite pointedly away from communist influence by demonstrating a new racial partnership.

Coinciding with this shift in West Africa, George Padmore's articles appeared less and less in reports sent back to the Colonial Office. After 1950, Padmore's articles were only mentioned in reports from Trinidad and Sierra Leone. In the January-June 1950 report from Trinidad, Governor Sir Hubert Rance noted that the newspaper *Vanguard*, where Padmore's articles were most frequently printed, 'carried progressively fewer of

¹¹¹ Reports of three Regional Coordinating Committees on Anti-Communist Propaganda, 20 November 1952. TNA/UK, CO 537/7759.

George Padmore's articles,¹¹² until it shut down completely in May 1950. Lacking significant material, Rance reported thereafter on everything in the local press which was, according to the reports, usually anti-communist. These reports of a decrease in Soviet propaganda in the West Indies corresponded with a period in which the trade union movement, closely linked with the movement for West Indian Federation, was fractured and split by anti-communism.¹¹³ Rance was promptly told by the Colonial Office that his reports on anti-communist propaganda were not what was requested and he could simply return a 'nil' from then on. By 1952 Sierra Leone was the only colony to report the regular appearance of Padmore's articles.

5.2 *Labelling George Padmore*

Given the association of anti-colonialism with Soviet propaganda, Padmore's own personal history with the Soviet Union, and his current affiliations and writing, British officials found it difficult to interpret his writing. Officials were almost always aware that Padmore had spent time in the Soviet Union and had been intimately involved with the Communist International but not all were aware of the bitter split Padmore had taken from this organization. The first version was allowed to perpetuate while the latter was rarely mentioned in any internal documentation in the Colonial Office, Foreign Office, or the Metropolitan Police who carried out surveillance on Padmore and his colleagues.

The demarcation drawn by the Cold War between pro and anti-Soviet left very little room for someone who sat 'in between' this conventional wisdom. What is crucial to note here is that a figure like Padmore would have been very difficult for British officials to place. His writing obviously displayed sympathies with Marxism, but he was not affiliated with any communist organization. He praised Soviet achievements among its colonial subjects, but also highlighted the positive results democratic freedoms had had on British imperial history making it, as opposed to Czarist Russia's Empire, much less 'repressive and backward.'¹¹⁴ Which 'side' Padmore was on was therefore not entirely clear. Some British officials understood the intention of

¹¹² Governor of Trinidad & Tobago to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 December 1950. TNA/UK, CO 1027/19.

¹¹³ Horne, *Cold War in a Hot Zone*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Padmore, *How Russia Transformed Her Colonial Empire*, 25-27.

Padmore's writing as primarily anti-colonial and focused on criticism of the British Empire; however, they utilized rising anti-Soviet opinion in Britain to associate Padmore's writing with communism and Soviet advances, concluding that his writing had the same effect as if it were Soviet propaganda. By emphasizing that his writing had the same effect, the British were able to legitimize their own attempts to repress Padmore's writing and the colonial press in general. Whether intentional or not, the labeling of Padmore's writing as Soviet propaganda shows the way in which the bi-polar rhetoric of the Cold War functioned as a means of widely categorizing threats to British colonial rule as threats to the greater world order.

Conclusion

The post-war momentum Padmore expressed to Du Bois in 1946 was later compounded for him by the increase in his journalism and the attention placed upon his work by the British Foreign and Colonial Offices. The years 1946-1950 mark a period of high influence for Padmore as his books and newspaper articles came under more intense scrutiny by British officials than his previous work, and his journalism expanded in West Africa to include regular headlining articles in Gold Coast and Nigerian newspapers.

In the anti-colonial writing of Padmore, the British were forced to contend with a determinedly defiant colonial subject who was situated in Britain and thus had access to all the freedoms and information of the metropole, but with networks in Britain and the colonies that allowed for the dispersal of his writing. The ability to operate across demographic and geographic spectrums caused Padmore to be the only individual singled out in British efforts to stem pro-Soviet and anti-colonial propaganda. The British response to Padmore's writing in this period contributes in several ways to the literature on British decolonization. Literature on the Cold War and decolonization divides the dialogue usually between three levels: 'metropolitan, global, and colonial.'¹¹⁵ This study of George Padmore opens up this discourse to include those colonial subjects living in Britain and the unique problems they posed to the colonial

¹¹⁵ McIntyre, *British Decolonization*, 79. See also Darwin, 'Decolonization and End of Empire,' 542-552.

project. Decolonization thus involved a number of levels of conversation across diverse spaces, much more than bilateral or even trilateral communication.

That Padmore's work had, among Colonial Office and colonial government staff, become associated with Soviet propaganda despite explicit knowledge that he had rejected the Soviet Union, reveals the pervasive presence of Cold War rhetoric in daily colonial governance. In this sense, both Padmore and the British officials who labelled his work Soviet propaganda can be said to have been 'playing the Russian game.' The nuances of Padmore's position and his personal allegiances offered up a paradox which did not fit within the rigid lines of the Cold War confrontation, and attempts to categorize him were inevitably flawed.

As part of a biographical study, this chapter shows the ways in which biography simultaneously reveals new vantage points to larger historical events, and allows for an expanding historical narrative of the individuals who made up these moments. It also demonstrates the ways in which we can learn about an individual not only through his/her own actions and opinions, but in how they are perceived by others. That Padmore's penchant for writing about the Soviet Union in the late 1940s provoked reaction from the British is not surprising given the obvious international tensions. Studying this reaction and what it reveals about the forces at play during the period, leads to more specific questions about how Padmore analyzed the colonial position in the new international post-war context, and why he chose to write positively about the Soviet Union despite both his own history and his knowledge of British sensitivity to Soviet power. Despite the appearance of a turn in his political alliances back towards the Soviet Union after the war, it was his assessment of Gold Coast 'tribal' politics in the 1950s that ultimately proved more contentious.

Chapter 6

‘The Chattering Negroes’: the demands of leadership and the politics of friendship in the era of Padmore the ‘outsider,’ 1950-1956

I think of Lieu Dang and other friends in Viet-Minh these days. How can one hate when there are such decent folk in all camps?¹

By the time I am through with them they will all cut their throats to water the stools of their ancestors.²

Padmore stepped into the 1950s more well-known than he had ever been, and with a keen awareness of the incipient presence of the Cold War in the drive for independence. The need for caution and clear thought was essential; yet the heightened tension caused by a multitude of voices all driving forward a vision of independence, left Padmore expressing both exhaustion and urgency. His tactics, when applied to the Gold Coast, came under criticism from opposition leaders in the country who objected to his ‘blind loyalty’ to Kwame Nkrumah. His incessant organizational duties from London became more taxing upon his deteriorating health. The period 1950-1956, leading up to his decision to move to Ghana, saw Padmore question a number of close relationships he had held. There were critical moments where he questioned his future, weighing the desire for stability against his commitment to anti-imperialism and his desire to live a life of honesty.

Padmore’s work during these years has received the most scholarship and is generally focused in two key areas: his relationship with Kwame Nkrumah, and the publication of what is considered his magnum opus, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*. Because of the importance to the historiography of both of these aspects of Padmore’s production, they require some discussion here. *Pan-Africanism or Communism* is particularly critical since it is referenced both as a historical work and often as the lone reference source in works that mention Padmore and his ideas. As for Nkrumah, in a 2003 conference paper Marika Sherwood provided a ‘tentative outline’ of Padmore’s relationship to Nkrumah, briefly covering the years before 1957 mostly via Padmore’s trips to the Gold Coast and his publication of *Gold Coast Revolution*. In C.L.R. James’s 1984 book of

¹ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 26 April, 1954. Wright MSS/103/1522.

² George Padmore to Richard Wright, 19 October 1955. Ibid.

essays, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, he claimed that ‘it is impossible to understand the development of the revolution in the Gold Coast that brought about Ghana, unless you realized from the start, the man behind [it] was Padmore.’ Following up on this point, Manning Marable argued that ‘During the period from 1945 through 1959, Padmore’s ideas largely shaped Nkrumah’s policies and tactics, and in turn, affected the course of Ghanaian political history.³ In Hooker’s biography, Padmore appears to lose touch with reality by focusing on ‘West African affairs after the war, to the exclusion of an active interest in events transpiring elsewhere on the continent.⁴

Hooker’s interpretation does not consider Padmore’s continued articles in newspapers in the West Indies, other parts of Africa, and Asia. The focus on these two concrete ‘achievements’ (Nkrumah and *Pan-Africanism or Communism*), have fashioned Padmore as ‘one of the pioneers of twentieth century Pan-Africanism,’⁵ leaving little room for the bitter internal struggles Padmore had with the development of African nationalism, or the personal relationships that shaped his decision-making. Yet this period in Padmore’s life holds the richest array of sources that provide a glimpse into his own personal relationships and his uncensored response to the burgeoning independence movements in European colonies across Asia, Africa, plus the Caribbean. Dorothy Padmore’s letters to both Richard and Ellen Wright in these years provide a rare glimpse of Padmore at home – his sense of humour, his habits and idiosyncracies – as well as some insight into their own relationship. Polsgrove has made considerable progress in unearthing research that brings Padmore’s personal relationships in this period to the fore; however, she does not always link these relationships to his political decision-making.

This chapter will question Hooker’s claim that Padmore gradually became focused upon West Africa ‘to the exclusion of matters in the rest of the continent.’⁶ Hooker is generally correct to stress Padmore’s increasing involvement in West Africa and particularly the Gold Coast. However, he and subsequent scholars have failed to address fully the question of *why* and *how* Padmore made this transition. Answering these questions forces a consideration of all of the fronts on which Padmore worked in

³ Marable, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 109.

⁴ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 103.

⁵ Rupert Lewis, *George Padmore: Pan-African Revolutionary*, xvii.

⁶ Stephen Howe makes a similar argument in Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, 191.

the period; how he viewed agency and political power; and the barriers he faced in pursuing his goals (both personal and professional). This chapter will show that Padmore was less a theoretician of African liberation, and more of a tactician. His journalism in Gold Coast newspapers from 1951 to independence was focused on British perceptions of the independence struggle, encouraging his readers to act always in a manner that would please British public opinion and thus ensure self-government.

Central to answering the question of why and how Padmore focused his energy on the Gold Coast in this period is Padmore's own view of himself as an 'outsider.' The label can be applied in this period most directly to his association with the Gold Coast, but is also indicative of the distance he maintained in all of his political and social relations. Taking this label as a starting point, it is possible to view Padmore's politics in the seven years before he left his base in London as a period of numerous tensions and contradictions in his friendships and his politics. These tensions then reinforced Padmore's strategic decisions to push for Gold Coast independence as a major step towards the destruction of European imperialism.

1 Public image as breaking point: the toll on Padmore's personal identity and his friendships

There are two emotional perspectives that facilitated Padmore's strategic decision-making during this period. They both revolve around his awareness of the public and the private. During this period Padmore began to admit exhaustion, both physical and mental. He now believed that he may not quite 'fit' in the new nationalist politics of Africa and the West Indies, that he was an 'outsider.' He also chose to break close relationships with two African friends: Peter Abrahams and Joe Appiah, because he believed they had betrayed the political cause. Both the feeling of being an outsider and the decision to end valued friendships are essential to understanding the tensions apparent in Padmore's politics during these same years.

1.1 Padmore's fame and Padmore's image: a private man made public

George Padmore has often been remembered as the 'go-to' man in London. That is, his home was considered to be the place where colonial dissidents, delegations, and

migrants from all over the colonial world converged.⁷ Mary Klopper, a South African humanitarian campaigner who knew Padmore through her work with the Movement for Colonial Freedom, recalled that ‘all the younger anti-colonialists went to see him in his flat near King’s Cross station.’⁸ In his ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore,’ C.L.R. James claimed that ‘few were the African politicians who did not consult Padmore before their visits to the Colonial Office and check with him afterwards;’ his knowledge, enthusiasm and hospitality ‘drew them like a magnet.’⁹ Yet by the 1950s, the constant stream of visitors to Cranleigh House was becoming tiring for Padmore. While Mary Klopper observed the importance of Padmore’s home as a point of contact for young anti-colonialists, she also noted that he did not engage deeply with larger organizations, and ‘kept himself to himself.’

Padmore’s work habits and personal style inclined him to a private life. In reply to a Sunday garden party invitation, he acknowledged the kindness of the invitation, but stated that ‘Unfortunately, I don’t attend social functions. They bore me.’¹⁰ The abruptly blunt but polite response of Padmore to this invitation is humorous, encapsulating a number of personality traits Padmore evinced in his personal correspondence: witty honesty combined with conscientious manners and determined privacy. In a letter to Ellen Wright in 1956, Dorothy Padmore lamented the coaxing it would take to convince George to accept C.L.R. James’s invitation to Christmas dinner: ‘He does moan so at having to go out. I can envisage us growing old and becoming hermits in our own house, because he will neither go out nor have people home!’,¹¹ However the declaration that social functions ‘bore me’ could also be read in reference to Padmore’s history of frustration with the middle class tendencies of the LCP, which in the 1930s tended to ‘organize’ around scholarly lectures, tennis and garden parties, and cricket matches.¹² Padmore’s statement was thus also a rejection of the bourgeois social function that perpetuated an operating principle of ‘respectable’ society.

Padmore’s reserved manner could sometimes be the source of humour for his friends. When he stayed as a guest of the Sudanese delegation in Paris at the elegant *Napoleon*

⁷ Sam Morris, ‘My Tribute to the Late George Padmore,’ *AEN*, 3 October 1959.

⁸ Undated Letter Mary Klopper to Marika Sherwood. In the possession of Marika Sherwood.

⁹ James, ‘Notes on the Life of George Padmore,’ 37.

¹⁰ George Padmore to Dorothy Brooks, 17 April 1956. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹¹ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 24 December 1956. Wright MSS/103/1521.

¹² Rush, *Bonds of Empire*, 111.

hotel, his propriety was the source of an amusing anecdote which, when told to Dorothy Padmore and Ras Makonnen over dinner upon his return, became the source of much teasing

He had taken with him what at a cursory glance appeared to be a lush pair of pajamas...but when they were laid out by the valet de chambre on his bed, they revealed a large tear in the crucial place! And though he hid them away in a drawer, whenever he [returned] in the evening, he found them once again displayed on his bed, with the gaping tear outermost.¹³

Padmore's sense of modesty was injured, but not enough that he could not laugh about it with friends. It was not that Padmore was always serious, nor that he was not social.

However overall, the demands on Padmore's time had begun to wear on the instinctively private man. He confided to Richard Wright that although he was trying to write a book on a 'United States of Africa,' it was proving difficult since

My greatest difficulty is to keep the chattering Negroes away. Unlike Paris, where you can head them off to a café, here they just come in and try to turn my place into a free reading room...Boy, boy the more I see of our people, the better I love them at a great distance. I think it is because the Negro is a born conversationalist, he does not have to have one solid idea in his head to start to shoot off his mouth. Sometimes, I just have to sit back and silently say to myself: "Sir Winston, you have nothing over my folk in speechifying. No sir!"¹⁴

Firstly, this letter calls into question C.L.R James's sometimes idyllic picture of Padmore, and the use in previous histories of his claim that 'George never passed any remarks about the African character...or the difference between Africans and Europeans.'¹⁵ Yet the reality of Padmore's life commitment to black equality lies somewhere in between James's claim and Padmore's statement. The quotation is valuable not because it either disproves James or validates any claims to racism,¹⁶ but because it reveals a jesting side of Padmore rarely visible behind the composed exterior of a man who rejected the surface level 'chatter' of purely social events such as garden parties. Yet it also shows that Padmore was becoming increasingly frustrated with the demands upon his time and resources, and the lack of serious commitment from the people he aided. His feeling that his home had been turned into a 'public reading room'

¹³ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 24 & 26 December 1956. Wright MSS/103/1521.

¹⁴ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 28 June 1954. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹⁵ James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, 259.

¹⁶ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 9.

is consistent with the number of references to Padmore's extensive library, and the two libraries set up in the Gold Coast under his name.¹⁷

1.2 *Friendship and solidarity in Padmore's consideration of the public and the private*

The fundamental point behind the jest of Padmore's 'chattering Negroes' comment to Wright was his growing contempt for 'cafe intellectuals,' from whom 'we can expect nothing...with their corrupt politics.'¹⁸ The comment was not about ethnicity but about those who were only engaged in a struggle 'to a certain degree' – to the degree of chatter, talkativeness, conceptualizing, etc. The label of a 'café intellectual' was a comment made with reference to Leopold Senghor, but was also relevant to Padmore's criticism of the isolated intellectualism of Peter Abrahams and C.L.R. James.

In 1952, upon news that James was imprisoned on Ellis Island and growing increasingly ill, the Padmore's canvassed as many friends and Left sympathizers as possible for financial assistance for James's legal bills, and convinced Brockway to bring James's case to Anthony Eden in the Foreign Office.¹⁹ However, in private correspondence Padmore rebuked James for his failure to stay in touch with his friends in Britain, and also criticized James's latest book on Herman Melville, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*. James took this criticism to heart, and spilled a great amount of ink explaining to Padmore what he had been trying to do in the book.²⁰ James's explanation could be read as revealing an underlying sense of insecurity and even guilt. James suspected that Padmore was criticizing him for wasting time, for engaging in intellectualism for its own sake rather than as the practice of an active, political intellectualism. Indeed in 1955, after James returned to England from the United States, Padmore wrote to Wright saying that 'Nello is still in his Ivory Tower, planning the American revolution. What a dreamer!'²¹ It is through the tension displayed in this letter that we can also helpfully understand James's subsequent commitment, mentioned

¹⁷ Padmore organized, along with an Englishwoman Rose Verner, to collect and ship 300 books to create a library for the school. 'George Padmore's Tribute to Late Kwesi Plange,' AEN, 6 May 1953.

¹⁸ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 19 Oct 1955. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹⁹ Anthony Eden to Fenner Brockway, 13 Sept/52. TNA/UK, KV2/1825.

²⁰ C.L.R. James to George Padmore, 23 June 1953. TNA/UK, KV2/1825.

²¹ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 9 February 1955. Wright MSS/103/1522.

in the introduction to this thesis, to political intellectual advising in the 1960s, which he admitted was modelled upon Padmore's political praxis.

There is another important point about this letter. Polsgrove has argued that the long gap in correspondence between James and Padmore while James was in the United States threatened their relations. However, Padmore's rebuke of James for neglecting their friendship was simply that: a private criticism of a man whom he interacted with on mutual terms and whom he remained friends with until his death. His swift rally to enlist help for his friend, now threatened with deportation, was an act of public solidarity in keeping with his characteristic style.

This difference, between private criticism and public solidarity, is most keenly evident in the ending of Padmore's friendship with Peter Abrahams. Ultimately, it was a lack of discretion shown by Abrahams that upset Padmore. As Polsgrove also describes, Padmore and Abrahams had grown distant since Abrahams left his wife Dorothy in 1948.²² Yet the evidence Polsgrove produces does not fully explain why Padmore resented Abrahams's actions, nor does it portray the impact Padmore's relationships would have had upon his political decisions. In his reference to Peter Abrahams and George Lamming as 'pretentious upstarts' whom he avoided 'like the plague,' Padmore articulated his objection to Abrahams' willingness to compromise his integrity to play a part:

They [Abrahams and Lamming] not only bore me; they make me mad. Since Peter was taken by his ofay friends and dropped after they had made enough use of him to tell the spades back home how to behave as 'black Englishmen' – no bitterness – I have not seen the lads in years. He has deserted all his poor friends who helped him out when he was ever poorer than they.²³

Intermixed within this denunciation is both the personal betrayal of a friend, of someone whom he believed he had sacrificed for in solidarity, along with the ironic accusation of behaving as a 'black Englishman.' While Padmore enjoyed the opera and his journalism betrays a respect for British politics (as will be shown below), he pitied those 'Africans and people of African descent...who consider themselves more British

²² Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 118-133.

²³ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 28 June 1954. Wright MSS/103/1522.

than the Queen!'²⁴ For Padmore there was a distinction to be made: between personal respect for British political institutions and enjoyment of European culture, on the one hand, and Abrahams' involvement with such institutions as the BBC²⁵ and the British Council which generally did not reciprocate respect for African culture.

In 1955 Padmore received word that Abrahams would be touring the United States under British Council auspices: 'What a little rat...His mother and sisters are rotting in Johannesburg and he [is] whitewashing their oppressors for a few dollars...Forget about these apostates.' To Padmore, Abrahams books and tours fed into British ideas of Africa as weak, facing racial, 'tribal', or class problems that prevented Africa's readiness for self-government. Polsgrove makes a compelling point by describing Abrahams representation of Kenyatta in his 1953 book, *Return to Goli*, as 'a public shaming of a pivotal political figure.'²⁶ What she does not say, however, is that this public shaming would be precisely the kind of thing Padmore would have objected to: no matter his private opinion of black leaders from Kenyatta, to Sengor, or Diagne, they all appear without blemish in print in front of a Western audience in 1956.²⁷

The loss of friendships in this period is another small piece in the narrative that begot Padmore's persona as the distant 'outsider.' The 'betrayal' of Abrahams continued to haunt Padmore's correspondence throughout the 1950s. The public and private betrayals of Abrahams, James, and later Joe Appiah, must be viewed as part of the backdrop to Padmore's growing commitment to Gold Coast independence. These betrayals were not, solely, a hurtful blow to friendship, but served to further Padmore's belief in the deftness required to play the political game of anti-imperialism. In calling Abrahams an apostate, it is clear that his public representation of the African plight was, for Padmore, judged on the same level as a forsaking of certain fundamental values equivalent to religious or party principles. It was not, as Padmore once commented and

²⁴ 'Unitary Government Versus Federal Government, *Ashanti Sentinel* (hereafter cited as AS), 30 September 1954.

²⁵ Abrahams participation in a BBC programme in 1952 sparked a comment by Dorothy Padmore that 'once a coloured man gets onto the BBC in any other programme than a colonial or commonwealth one, you know for sure that he's made his peace with the other side. We hope he can maintain his "liberal" detachment in the very free air of Goli!' Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 26 May 1952. Wright MSS/103/1521.

²⁶ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 120.

²⁷ *Pan-Africanism or Communism* is the best example of this and is evidence, as discussed later in this chapter, of the difficulty in using the text as the major source of Padmore's thought.

Polsgrove concludes, simply that Abrahams had ‘sold his political soul for money and fame,’²⁸ but that he had provided fodder for British perceptions of Africans through his public criticisms. Solidarity in the face of British resistance to African independence was, for Padmore, critical.

2 ‘A general’s tactics in the field’: the objective conditions of British politics, and the possibility of independence

Padmore’s flat was not only a reading room for young colonials, but also for sympathetic British intellectuals and Members of Parliament. In a letter to Norwegian comrade Ivar Holm at the end of 1953, Padmore wrote of his role in keeping MPs informed: ‘It is now generally agreed that even MPs don’t even know where the colonies are much less the complex nature of the problems involved when crises break out. That is when they turn to me for information.’²⁹ His newspaper articles in these years show that he was frequently in the gallery of the House of Commons, or within its walls attending meetings related to colonial affairs.³⁰ This section will examine Padmore’s ‘fascination’ with British politics, and the ways in which this fascination reflected his assessment of the potential for African independence. This raises specific questions as to Padmore’s position on violence in decolonization, and his perception of agency and power in the quest for colonial liberation. From his vantage point in London, agency was less in the hands of Africans, who he consistently told to put aside internal grievances in order to please British public and Colonial Office opinion.

Padmore’s engagement with British politics was, at a basic level, a self-confessed ‘fascination for the so-called dirty game of party politics, especially as it is played in Britain...For without politicians, life would certainly be monotonous.’³¹ Despite his detestation of Churchill’s imperialist politics, he secured a ticket in the gallery of the House of Commons, hoping to hear ‘the famous veteran Prime Minister deliver his valedictory address to Parliament’ on the eve of his resignation.³² A man who was,

²⁸ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 133.

²⁹ George Padmore to Ivar Holm, 22 December 1953. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 14.

³⁰ ‘British Press Reports On Kumasi Riots,’ AS, 31 May 1955; ‘British MPs Blame NLM Leaders for Stoning Queen’s Representative,’ AEN, 29 March 1955.

³¹ ‘Bribery and Corruption Among British Statesmen,’ AEN, 2 March 1955.

³² ‘Party Programmes On the Colonies Compared,’ AS, 20 April 1955.

according to Dorothy Padmore, ‘so much the politician himself,’³³ was able in this instance still to venerate a statesman whose policies and attitude toward the British Empire he had fought his entire life. This capacity to dissociate, to respect a politician for his political abilities and put aside his or her actual politic stance, is the hallmark of any politician. It is also consistent with Padmore’s ability to detach from or engage with issues from individuals when appropriate. His devotion to Nkrumah’s leadership *as a statesman*³⁴ in a uniquely advantageous position is key to understanding Padmore’s support for the Gold Coast leader.

It was, however, Padmore’s conviction that independence for the colonies would ultimately be gained only through the will of the imperial power that ultimately guided his obsession with British politics. Power, he declared to Wright in 1955 was, ultimately, in the hands of the imperialists: ‘empty titles...don’t mean a tinker’s damn for the white folk have all the real power in their hands.’³⁵ There was, for Padmore, perhaps no greater example of the extent to which the process of decolonization could be influenced by the decisions of colonial administrators, than the difference between events in Kenya and the Gold Coast. Indeed, in *Pan-Africanism or Communism* he argued that had the Governor of the Gold Coast not been Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, the Gold Coast could also have erupted into violence.³⁶ Padmore’s primary goal in discussing Mau Mau in this book was to redirect the accusations of the use of violence from the Africans to the settler populations in both Kenya and Algeria.³⁷ The greatest violence and injustice, he consistently pointed out, was being perpetrated by the colonial power (the settlers primarily being responsible for violence and the colonial administration primarily responsible for the incarceration and unjust policies towards the African population) – not the Africans.

This position is important. It reinforces the argument that Padmore believed that how decolonization would play out would have much do with how the British responded to African demands. Secondly, it points to the ambivalence in Padmore’s position on

³³ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 14 Dec 1955. Wright MSS/103/1521.

³⁴ ‘Premier’s Self-Government Called Statesmanlike in London,’ *AEN*, 27 October 1952; ‘Nkrumah is Teaching World Statesmen Racial Tolerance,’ *AEN*, 25 March 1953; ‘Key to Nkrumah Strength: Organised & Disciplined Party,’ *AEN*, 26 March 1953.

³⁵ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 19 October 1955. Wright MSS/103/1522.

³⁶ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, 225.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 243.

violence. As will be discussed below, Padmore sometimes described the anti-colonial struggle in war-like terms: he was a ‘general’ whose ‘tactics in the field’ required careful assessment. Furthermore, in setting out the violence perpetrated by British forces in Kenya, Padmore also indirectly laid out a case for the justification of Mau Mau violence. Yet he celebrated Kenyatta’s court statement against the use of violence,³⁸ and encouraged Nkrumah’s non-violent tactics.³⁹ The final, incomplete picture of Padmore’s position on violence is compounded by the fact that he always seemed to skirt around the issue of whether violence could be justified. He did not directly state a position on violence regarding Mau Mau, and there is no surviving evidence of his response to the debates in 1958 at the All-African People’s Conference on violence in Algeria. What we are left with is no clear position on whether violence was justified but instead, again, Padmore’s emphasis upon strategy and tactics.

Since so much of how decolonization played out was, for Padmore, in the hands of the colonial power then, his close analysis of British party politics is crucial. While Polsgrove has used anti-Labour Party articles Padmore wrote in 1954 for the Burmese paper, *Socialist Asia*, to point out his ‘long-running criticism of the Labour Party’,⁴⁰ it is important to note that Padmore criticised all British political parties depending on the context, and also made distinctions between the Labour leadership and its backbenchers. In 1952 Padmore issued a warning on the prospects of independence for specific British colonies upon the return of the Conservative Party to power. He contended that conditions for a peaceful transfer of power were more favourable in the Gold Coast than in Burma, but worried that a Conservative government would make transition much more difficult since ‘the Tories, like the Bourbons, “learn nothing and forget nothing.”’⁴¹

Padmore distrusted the Tories. But it was the Labour Party that he watched most closely by attending meetings,⁴² exposing their contradictions⁴³ or promoting their backbenchers as necessary. In most things, Padmore had faith in the minority rather than the majority of the Labour Party. He regularly mentioned Fenner Brockway’s

³⁸ Ibid, 241-242.

³⁹ ‘Key to Nkrumah Strength: Organised & Disciplined Party,’ *AEN*, 26 March 1953.

⁴⁰ Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 151.

⁴¹ ‘A Comparative Study of ‘Bloodless’ Revolution,’ *AEN*, 21 June 1952.

⁴² ‘British Parliament & Gold Coast Internal Affairs,’ *AEN*, 31 March 1955.

⁴³ ‘Lyttelton Explains Why Federation Must Be Imposed on Africans,’ *AEN*, 31 March 1953.

speeches in the House of Commons in his newspaper articles in West Africa, and he closely followed the goodwill mission of Leslie Hale and Brockway to Kenya in 1952 to investigate the Mau Mau rebellion.⁴⁴ These backbenchers were crucial to Padmore's initiatives in bringing issues to bear in the House of Commons, but were often, Padmore knew, overpowered or ill-informed themselves when it came to colonial issues.⁴⁵ He worried about their ability to impact larger policy within the Labour Party since '[t]he Labour leaders are so compromised that they dare not open their mouths as they did the same when in office. Only the back benchers can lead the attack and pressure is being brought to bear to silence them by the Executive.'⁴⁶

Since British politicians were not entirely reliable, strategy and close observation were thus necessary in order to negotiate the boundaries of anti-imperial politics: 'For politics, like war, is not a science but an art. Its methods of struggle are determined not alone by subjective factors. Account has always to be taken of objective conditions in determining a general's tactics in the field.'⁴⁷ These 'objective conditions' were, primarily, the hard fact that Britain ultimately controlled the devolution of power. This belief by Padmore underlies most of his writing during the period. For instance, his emphasis upon non-violent resistance was based upon his observation, after 'long residence in this country,' that '[the] English are fundamentally a law abiding people and the minute they hear that the colonial politicians advocate violence in settling their disputes, [colonial politicians] alienate whatever sympathy their British friends may have for their cause.' This sympathy was useful in colonial attempts to advance their cause and, therefore, needed to be placated. Padmore insisted that 'What Africans and other colonial peoples must *never lose sight of* is the national psychology of the British race,' and warned that he had 'seen many a good cause ruined by tactless leadership.'⁴⁸ In this statement British public opinion seems to dictate the end result of the 'cause,' undermining the agency of colonial citizens and reinforcing power with the imperial centre.

⁴⁴ 'MPs Goodwill Mission to Kenya,' *AEN*, 3 November 1952.

⁴⁵ Later in life Brockway himself acknowledged Padmore's guidance by noting that Padmore's ideas about Pan-Africanism were a major intellectual influence on his view of imperialism. Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, 171.

⁴⁶ George Padmore to Ivar Holm, 22 December 1953. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 14.

⁴⁷ 'A Comparative Study of 'Bloodless' Revolution,' *AEN*, 21 June 1952.

⁴⁸ 'Movement for Colonial Freedom Appeals to Gold Coast Political Leaders to Avoid Violence,' *AS*, 8 February 1955. Emphasis added.

This emphasis by Padmore in 1955 returns to the issue of agency in the processes ending empire. It is present in *Pan-Africanism or Communism* – where introductory and concluding sections make contradictory statements on priorities for African leaders:

African nationalist leaders must resolve their own internal communal conflicts and tribal differences, so that, having established a democratically elected government, *the imperial power will find less danger in passing power to the popularly elected leaders than in withholding it* [emphasis added]. (xviii)

As long as the African leaders remain true to the people, they have nothing to fear but fear. *Destiny is in their own hands*[emphasis added]. (355)

Thus in the introduction, power is passed from the imperial power to the African leaders, while the triumphal ending presents agency as very much in the hands of African nationalists, who have the ability to determine their own politics and path in the hostile terrain of the Cold War. African leaders must focus on being ‘true to the people,’ rather than focused upon the response of British public opinion to their actions. The paradox of power that Padmore was struggling with in these years underpinned his advancements in the idea of pan-Africanism and the strategy of anti-imperial solidarity.

3 ‘Such decent folk in all camps’: Writing anti-imperial solidarity from London

Events across the British Empire portended change in the early 1950s, and while Padmore’s two books published in the period, *Gold Coast Revolution* and *Pan-Africanism or Communism* have a distinctly West African tinge, his journalism and his correspondence prove that he was still engaged in global events. Presented chronologically, a number of regions and themes emerge from Padmore’s journalism in this period: Asian advances in independence; West Indian independence negotiations; the Colour Bar in Britain; Mau Mau; and the pervasive presence of apartheid as fundamental to British policy towards all coloured peoples. A summary of Padmore’s journalism from 1950 to 1954 can challenge Hooker’s claim that Padmore only focused upon West Africa. Rather, we see that his increasing emphasis upon events in West Africa was actually part of a political strategy for ending imperialism as a whole.

3.1 *The twilight of Padmore's anti-imperial journalism*

In the first half of 1950, Padmore highlighted the complex juncture connecting colonial peoples when he decried the use of Indian and possibly African troops by Britain to suppress the revolt in Malaya.⁴⁹ A tempo of revolt was maintained throughout 1950 in Padmore's articles on starvation and the potential for insurrection in British Honduras (Belize);⁵⁰ unrest in East and Central Africa and the threat of racial war;⁵¹ and even an act of protest against the British Government by a West Indian Governor.⁵² Padmore also celebrated a small act of solidarity between colonial peoples in an article on a West Indian call for a boycott of South African goods.⁵³ Indeed, the threat that Gold Coast independence and black acts of solidarity posed to Malan's apartheid became a recurrent theme in Padmore's articles.⁵⁴ All of these stories were intended by Padmore to serve as a counterweight to the growing power of South Africa's Prime Minister and champion of apartheid, Dr. Daniel Malan. In his journalism, each step towards self-government in West African colonies was linked back as a threat to Malan's doctrine of racial separation and subordination.⁵⁵

In early 1952 Padmore's articles focused upon the debate over the creation of the Central African Federation, and Seretse Khama's case before the British Government.⁵⁶ Khama's exile, Padmore noted, was condemned not only by Africans and people of African descent, but Indian public opinion as well.⁵⁷ Padmore supported the rumoured appointment of former Indian High Commissioner Sir Maharaj Singh to the Mau Mau Enquiry commission, highlighting the fact that Singh had stated publicly that Africa had the full support of Asiatic nations in its struggles.⁵⁸ 1953 began slowly for Padmore, but

⁴⁹ 'African Soldiers May Oust Indians in Suppressing Malayan Freedom Fight,' *WAP*, 19 April 1950.

⁵⁰ 'Honduras May Riot to End Starvation and Oppression,' *WAP*, 12 January 1950; 'Starving Natives Might Riot Warns Bishop of Honduras,' *Vanguard*, 25 February 1950.

⁵¹ 'English Pastor Warns of Racial War Threat in African Continent,' *WAP*, 11 July 1950.

⁵² 'Leeward Isles Governor Resigns in Protest,' *WAP*, 26 May 1950.

⁵³ 'West Indies Call for Boycott of Goods from South Africa,' *WAP*, 27 October 1950.

⁵⁴ 'Dr. Malan Warns British Against Granting Self-Rule to Nigeria and the Gold Coast,' *WAP*, 19 July 1951.

⁵⁵ 'Legal Experts Finalise Gold Coast Constitution – Malan Trembles,' *AS*, 14 April 1954.

⁵⁶ 'Seretse in Exile,' *WAP*, 16 April 1952; 'Labour Members of Parliament Oppose Tories on Khama Issue,' *WAP*, 20 May 1952; 'Africans Boycott Central African Federation Conference in London,' *AEN*, 8 May 1952.

⁵⁷ 'Seretse Khama Tells London Meeting "I am Not Bitter But Frustrated,"' *AEN*, 3 May 1952.

⁵⁸ 'Gold Coast Judge Named Candidate for Mau Mau Enquiry,' *AEN*, 27 October 1952.

soon became a very busy year. As he waited for *The Gold Coast Revolution* to appear in published form, Dorothy Padmore described him as ‘a little stuck for things to do...So he has taken to rearranging and refurbishing the house’ including washing the walls, painting the ceiling and putting in new curtains.⁵⁹ However, the spring coronation of Queen Elizabeth II provided an opportunity for Padmore to highlight colonial protest across the British Empire.⁶⁰ By June, Padmore was back to his usual rapid pace, with Dorothy Padmore complaining of split finger tips from typing: ‘Sometimes I think the typewriter was invented to turn quite nice women into weary slaves. And men are so demanding, especially when “you type so much quicker than I!”’ Dorothy Padmore was not always an unwilling secretary. For example, she insisted that she would complete the index to *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, but not for money.⁶¹ But the demands of this job, and the gendered nature of it, are certainly evidenced in her lament.

In October Padmore declared to his Parisian friend Daniel Guerin that ‘recent events in British Guiana have kept me very busy.’⁶² Cheddi Jagan’s overthrow in British Guiana confirmed Padmore’s concerns that Cold War anticommunism hindered colonial self-government initiatives. He blamed Jagan for ‘irresponsible antics’,⁶³ that recklessly endangered West Indian independence, claiming that British Guiana should serve as a warning ‘to colonial nationalists and trade union leaders to keep clear of communist affiliations.’⁶⁴ Jagan’s failure, in Padmore’s eyes, was not necessarily ideological, but tactical. Jagan had failed to adequately interpret the climate of the Cold War and therefore not only delayed, but actually harmed, every colony’s hopes for self-government. Again, what is important here is that in Padmore’s condemnation of Jagan, he placed power squarely with the imperial ruler. Since Britain ruled over a great number of territories, a mistake by one colonial movement could have a negative impact upon all others. Conversely, as we shall see in his support for the Gold Coast, he believed that victory in one colony could act as a positive lever for the rest.

⁵⁹ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 20 Jan 1953. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁶⁰ Our London Correspondent, ‘West Indies May Teach World’s Statesmen How to Solve Problem of Race Relations,’ *Clarion*, 7 April 1951.

⁶¹ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 7 November 1955. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁶² George Padmore to Daniel Guerin, 29 October 1953. Daniel Guerin Collection, Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, France.

⁶³ ‘Nkrumah’s Tactics Widely Praised,’ *AS*, 3 November 1953.

⁶⁴ ‘British Guiana, A Warning to Colonial Nationalists,’ *AS*, 31 October 1953.

Finally, Padmore's analysis of the primacy of race within empire continued as a feature of his journalism. In 1954 he produced several articles linking the colour bar in Britain to the influx of West Indians to the British Isles.⁶⁵ On top of this, Padmore reminded his readers that the colour bar existed both in Britain and Africa.⁶⁶ For Padmore, the policy of apartheid - and British implicit support for its existence - served as a constant contradiction to any attempts to grant self-government in the rest of the continent. The existence of the colour bar was therefore one more manifestation of an imperial system that not only propagated racial subordination, but also functioned under its doctrine – racial equality was impossible as long as imperialism existed.

What is significant about Padmore's journalism in this period is the constant links Padmore made between *all* British colonies. Through these articles, he constructed a framework for understanding and addressing imperialism based upon an awareness of, and solidarity between, *all* those who had been exploited by that system. His work in the first half of the 1950s, as in previous decades, was never exclusively regional (upon Africa) or racial (upon black peoples).

3.2 *Pan-Africanism or Communism*

Padmore's articles declined gradually in 1954, and sharply in 1955 and 1956. He did not entirely stop work on wider colonial and coloured solidarity; however, the overall output of articles decreased, making the Gold Coast even more prominent in his writing. His articles disappeared after 1954 from Trinidadian newspapers, as well as from the *West African Pilot*. This is partly explained by his new focus on writing his most celebrated work, *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* He began writing this book in late spring 1954, and worked on the bulk of it while Dorothy Padmore was away on her own first visit to the Gold Coast. The initial purpose of the book was 'to give a coherent picture of the ideals and movements which have arisen among black folk independent of the CP.'⁶⁷ The speed with which he wrote the majority of the book is partly explained by the direct use of his previous work; for example, the beginning of the chapter "Who

⁶⁵ 'Race Problem in Britain,' AS, 11 May 1954.

⁶⁶ 'Colonial Office Issue Colour Bar Warning,' AS, 6 October 1954.

⁶⁷ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 21 July 1954. Wright MSS/103/1522.

and what is Mau Mau?" is the exact text of part of a 1953 article published for *Phylon*. It was the last chapter, the one that has created the most discussion among analysts, which Padmore was still 'tinkering' with at the end of April 1955. For Dorothy Padmore, this 'has really been the last straw for me, and pretty nearly for George.'⁶⁸ But the chapter was crucial for Padmore 'as a warning to the boys in Africa' on CP tactics. The amount of time Padmore spent on this last chapter shows the importance he placed upon it, and validates the extensive referencing made to it as a core text that explains his ideology.

Yet as the above discussion of his journalism has shown, to take this book as the sole source of his ideas would be to ignore the bulk of what Padmore was thinking about and doing in these years. As argued in chapter three, Padmore's Marxism did not dissolve when he left the CP, and while his tactics and strategies changed, Pennybacker has argued that the ideas he expressed in *Pan-Africanism or Communism?* were partly due to the failings of the Marxist movement in the 1930s.⁶⁹ Padmore confirmed Pennybacker's analysis in a 1956 letter to Wright in which Padmore declared that his own 'point of view' continued to see Marxism as 'one of the many effective instruments in waging the fight for freedom.'⁷⁰ What governed the last chapter of his book was the fact that he was 'more concerned about the future after independence than the present.'

Pan-Africanism or Communism and, indeed, most of his other books, are mindful of the weight of the past upon the possibilities of the future. It is in his journalism that we see Padmore's keen awareness of the present. For it is in his newspaper articles that Padmore weighed in upon current events, and displayed most vividly his belief that 'we must be flexible in mind to permit for growth...Adoption and adaptation must be our characteristic feature of "Pan-Africanism."'⁷¹ One aspect of this adaptation was the consideration of audience. In his journalism, Padmore could tailor any article to fit a particular audience or political context. The greatest weakness in *Pan-Africanism or Communism* was, perhaps, the fact that Padmore was writing for an African, Western, and Soviet audience, and thus it was possible for readers to see in the book both a courting of 'US government and corporate interests, which might underwrite many of

⁶⁸ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 25 April 1955. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁶⁹ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 101-2.

⁷⁰ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 5 March 1956. Wright MSS/103/1522.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Ghana's state expenses after independence,'⁷² and 'the intellectual forerunner of the theories of "non-alignment" and "positive neutrality."'⁷³

4 ‘The Beacon Light’: Padmore, Nkrumah, and Gold Coast Nationalism

Given Padmore's view that British opinion had to be carefully managed if self-government was to become reality, his focus on Gold Coast independence was a calculated convergence upon a region he believed to be the most fertile ground for promoting colonial solidarity, among a people best placed to negotiate independence from their imperial ruler. In 1954, he concluded that 'the West Indies leaders are divided as those in Nigeria on the question of: to who [sic] is political power to be transferred in a federal set-up? The only colonial territory that has met this essential prerequisite and which the British Government is ready to make final arrangements...is the Gold Coast.'⁷⁴

Until recently, historians had little direct evidence of Padmore's actual involvement in Gold Coast affairs. Instead, Marable used *Pan-Africanism or Communism* to draw lines between Padmore's ideas and Nkrumah's actions, and Rukudzo Murapa used interviews with associates such as St. Clair Drake and C.L.R. James along with Padmore's journalism in African American newspapers to argue for Padmore's influence over Nkrumah. Polsgrove has utilized U.S. State Department Files, the Nkrumah correspondence at Howard University, and British Colonial Office files to argue that Padmore saw himself as the Gold Coast's 'hidden philosopher and strategist.' Her evidence does not, however, go far enough in explaining why Padmore made this commitment, or in what ways his philosophy and strategy presented problems for the Gold Coast. Padmore's commitment to the Gold Coast manifested itself in two ways and for two reasons: the encouragement of Pan-African unity, and an opportunity to implement socialist development strategy on the ground. This section will briefly outline the new evidence of Padmore's directions to Nkrumah and his direct involvement in Gold Coast development, before moving into the personal and political implications of this commitment.

⁷² Marable, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 110.

⁷³ Azinna Nwafor, 'The Revolutionary As Historian,' in *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, xxx.

⁷⁴ 'Labour Party Backs Gold Coast Independence,' AS, 3 September 1954.

Correspondence in 1952 demonstrates that Padmore was consulted regularly on drafts of a constitution Nkrumah was negotiating, until by October of that year it was endorsed completely by Padmore, Appiah, and other Gold Coast nationalists whom he consulted in London.⁷⁵ Padmore then proposed several tactical lines for Nkrumah with regard to delivering the draft for constitutional reform in the assembly with the least disruption from the opposition. He also provided notes and may have even drafted the initial version of Nkrumah's lengthy speech in which he proposed the changes to the Legislative Assembly.⁷⁶ The motion for constitutional reform passed through the Legislative Assembly in July 1953, and Nkrumah then sought Padmore's advice on the next policy to be adopted and the best timing for holding an election.⁷⁷ Elections were held in the spring of 1954, and were meant to provide legitimacy to an announcement of self-government. The announcement, of course, did not come until 1956 since, as will be discussed below, the Gold Coast opposition became increasingly vocal in challenging Nkrumah's leadership.

In July 1953, Padmore wrote that 'the Gold Coast is like a lighthouse in a dark continent showing the blacks the way safely into port. As long as that light shines, there is hope for African marines caught in the turbulent sea of Colonialism and Imperialism.'⁷⁸ In this respect, the narrow interests of Nkrumah's nationalism often frustrated Padmore.

It's time that K[wame] and his colleagues see themselves in relation to the rest of Africa and not as something isolated. They are the beacon light, and in more than their own interests they cannot afford to fall down.⁷⁹

For Padmore, confining the independence struggle to mere nationalism was a dangerous betrayal – there was much at stake in the Gold Coast. In his articles to Gold Coast newspapers, Padmore pressed this message home. The CPP thus became the model for nationalist parties in Uganda, Tanganyika, and Northern Rhodesia,⁸⁰ and the Gold Coast

⁷⁵ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 2 October 1952. TNA/UK, KV2/1850.

⁷⁶ Kwame Nkrumah to George Padmore, 14 May 1953. See also Colonial Office internal memo, 13 July 1953. TNA/UK, KV2/1851.

⁷⁷ Kwame Nkrumah to George Padmore, 18 July 1953. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 13.

⁷⁸ George Padmore to Ivar Holm, 7 July 1953. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 14.

⁷⁹ George Padmore to Ivar Holm, April 1953. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 14.

⁸⁰ 'Nationalism Sweeping Through Central and East Africa,' AS, 7 October 1954.

constitution became the blueprint for constitutions in Singapore and Jamaica.⁸¹ The gravity of the situation was both the future of all colonies still under British rule, as well as ‘the entire future of Africa and the black race in America. Brazil and the West Indies have their eyes upon Ghana as the beacon light guiding an oppressed and exploited race out of the darkness of imperialism into the light of Freedom.’⁸² In this article, Padmore’s use of the image of a ‘beacon light’ was thus also a trope with racial signifiers. Here, though, he has reversed the traditional metonym of the ‘Dark Continent’ so that darkness is associated with imperialism and thus with the European rather than the African.

The reversal of white skin into moral darkness meant that Padmore could also proclaim that in the context of capitalist attacks upon Gold Coast independence, it was ‘no time for even responsible Africans in high places at home and abroad to share their confidence with so called white friends. Too much is at stake, not only for the Gold Coast but for the entire Negro race. Gold Coast failure at this stage would constitute the greatest tragedy for Africa in our generation.’⁸³ While Padmore placed ultimate personal trust in a white woman as his partner; supported the endeavours of white men like Fenner Brockway and Leslie Hale in the House of Commons; and frequently celebrated racial unity and diversity;⁸⁴ he still allowed racial distrust to creep into his writing and thus into his message to Africans. It is clear from the urgent and vehement tone of Padmore’s articles to the Gold Coast and to friends, that his focus on the Gold Coast was, for him, a strategic necessity on the road to fulfilling his ultimate goal of ending the oppression of capitalist imperialism, meted out primarily upon his own race.

⁸¹ ‘New Constitution for Singapore,’ AS, 29 May 1954; ‘Jamaica Ready for General Elections,’ AS, 6 December 1954

⁸² ‘Nigeria, A Warning to the Gold Coast,’ AS, 21 September 1954.

⁸³ ‘British Capitalists to Delay Independence,’ AS, 8 September 1954.

⁸⁴ ‘Tribalist Party Routed in Malaya General Election,’ AS, 11 August 1955.



Figure 4: Padmore and Nkrumah in Ghana, date unknown.

In July 1951, Padmore flew to the Gold Coast for a three-month trip in which he covered events in the aftermath of its first elections for international newspapers, and helped organize a number of key administrative units for Nkrumah's party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). He lived with Nkrumah, and helped organize CPP headquarters, the editorial office of the *Accra Evening News*, and even the new Department of Foreign Affairs. In this respect, he created a study syllabus for members of the Foreign Affairs Department, and drafted an outline of diplomatic procedure for the Department.⁸⁵ In September Padmore proudly wrote to Dorothy Padmore that the final plans for the Department for Political Education, which would 'prepare the leading cadre along the lines of Socialist outlook,' were underway.⁸⁶

Marable's important 1987 work, *African & Caribbean Politics*, provided the first thorough critique of Padmore's influence on Nkrumah by attempting to answer the question of what went wrong with Nkrumah's leadership. Marable argued that the source of Nkrumah's failure was the fact that the CPP was never actually a socialist party: they were only 'vaguely populist and egalitarian' and this was 'reflected by the

⁸⁵ George Padmore to Dorothy Padmore, 6 September 1951. TNA/UK, KV2/1850.

⁸⁶ George Padmore to Dorothy Padmore, 11 September 1951. TNA/UK, KV2/1850.

movement's social ambiguity.⁸⁷ It was, for Marable, 'Padmore's version of Black social democracy' that moderated Nkrumah's ideology such that it was not radical enough.

This claim is only partly true. It has already been shown above that in 1951 Padmore worked on setting up written material and a department that would develop CPP members ideologically. Correspondence between Padmore and Nkrumah shows that Padmore did in fact attempt to steer Nkrumah towards concrete socialist economic planning. From 1951-1954 Padmore directed Nkrumah's induction of a political philosophy based on socialist principles and applied to the context of the Gold Coast. The first projects began in 1951, with housing and road building works that were meant to set the tone of development, and to open the Gold Coast up to investment outside the current stranglehold clasped by the British. Padmore acted as intermediary in negotiations between American, Swedish, and Dutch firms to provide prefabricated houses for the Gold Coast. He was insistent that the factories that made these houses be owned and controlled by the government: 'only in that way can we lay the basis for a socialist economy and keep the capitalists from exploiting us.'⁸⁸ He repeatedly stressed the importance of this project as 'the question that will make or break the Party,'⁸⁹ since it was the provision of necessities such as housing, clean water, schools and post offices which 'mean concretely self-government, otherwise self-government is just a slogan without reality.'⁹⁰

This idea, that ideology and action had to back up Nkrumah's slogans, image, and oratory skills, was key for Padmore. In May 1954, Padmore wrote a letter of instruction to Nkrumah which pointed to his concern that Nkrumah's charisma should not supersede the overall goal of building a free, independent, socialist country that could function on its own:

Until now the party has grown up round the slogan: SGN [self-government now], a flag, and your personality. These may be useful elements in the early days of a movement...But as you reach your goal, the emotionalism subsides, leaving a

⁸⁷ Marable, *African and Caribbean Politics*, 106.

⁸⁸ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 9 November 1951. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, Folder 13.

⁸⁹ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 29 December 1951. *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 22 November 1951. *Ibid.*

vacuum...We must therefore work out a basic philosophy as a guide to future action.⁹¹

Nevertheless, there was an underlying tension between Padmore's determination to provide strong ideological backing for the emerging state structure, and his uncompromisingly positive public representation of Nkrumah. Charisma and flag-waving could not be the substance which won the fight for independence: but in the battle to attain that independence, Nkrumah's image and public support was still critical, and Padmore fashioned it accordingly. Padmore believed that opposition in the Gold Coast was found 'mostly [among] middle class African reactionaries and pro-British stooges,'⁹² as well as 'Chiefs and Aristocrats'⁹³ who were focused on their own advancement rather than the needs of the people. In contrast, Padmore presented Nkrumah to the international press as 'never turn[ing] a deaf ear to anyone in need. He is the same to all – rich or poor, high or low, white or black...the common people love him.'⁹⁴ Padmore thus fashioned Nkrumah's image as a leader of the people, as a man who was truly a revolutionary.

If the independence of the Gold Coast truly was a revolution – and Padmore believed that it was⁹⁵ – then Nkrumah's commitment to the workers and peasants of Ghana was thus absolutely critical to how Padmore presented Nkrumah to the world. Padmore was willing to disregard his concern that Nkrumah's personality should overtake the ideas of realizing socialism, and elevate Nkrumah's image as the champion of the people.

4 Tackling the Opposition: Padmore the 'outsider' and the controversy of 'tribalism'

There was a critical reason for Padmore's positive representation of Nkrumah: Gold Coast opposition and the threat it brought to the granting of self-government. Three considerations were paramount for opposition to Nkrumah during the 1950s: 'tribalism', regionalism and anti-Nkrumahism. On each of these three issues, Padmore prioritized his belief in the urgent need for Gold Coast independence over the concerns

⁹¹ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 10 May 1954. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 154-41, folder 14.

⁹² Padmore, 'Nkrumah Throws the Challenge,' *WAP*, 19 October 1951.

⁹³ Padmore, 'Gold Coast Celebrates Independence Day.' *WAP*, 17 January 1952.

⁹⁴ Padmore, 'Dr. Kwame Nkrumah – First African Prime Minister,' *WAP*, 11 Jun 1952.

⁹⁵ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 15 November 1951. Nkrumah MSS/Howard, box 152-41, folder 13.

of those who questioned the current direction of their national politics. This section will examine Padmore's position on each of these three issues and the response of the opposition to his role in their national politics.

5.1 *The alienation of a diasporan intellectual: communist, outsider, and 'detribalized African'*

In 1956, during preparations for the first conference of Black Writers in Paris organized by African-American novelist Richard Wright, Padmore reversed nearly three decades of identifying himself as an African by arguing that “pure Africans” – not hybrids like me – should play a leading role’ in the conference. Padmore’s hopes for the conference, as outlined in his letter to committee member Dorothy Brooks, provide important insight into how Padmore saw the future leadership of Africa and his own role in it. The letter is extremely candid and worth quoting at length.

Since the emphasis of the conference must centre around Africa, it is only right that “pure” Africans – not hybrids like me – should play a leading role. I feel strongly on this point. Looking back upon Africa’s emergence, it was permissible for “outsiders” like Wright & myself to try and voice the aspirations and grievances of real Africans, but now that they have produced an intellectual elite, it is only fair that we take a back seat and let them speak for their people. I am emphatic on this... Personally, I have a feeling that I am out-of-date in my thinking. I might be too far ahead or too far behind. What I want to find out is what young Africans and Negroes generally are thinking. How do they see the problems of their country and race in the contemporary world setting? And how [do] they intend to tackle them? Only they can give the answer and thereby enable old reactionaries like myself to make the adjustment...We, too, need to re-evaluate our lives. Otherwise we become sterile and doctrinaire, just repeating old, worn-out phrases.⁹⁶

His description of himself as a ‘hybrid’ and an ‘outsider’ had important implications for his role in the Gold Coast, and will be analyzed at length below. His feeling of being old and ‘out of date,’ and his questions to young Africans betray a fear that he may not have the legitimacy to speak with the authoritative voice he still used in his journalism and in *Pan-Africanism or Communism*. Building up a cult of personality around the younger Kwame Nkrumah was in part a partnership between like-minded friends, but also a tactical move to present an authoritative African voice to the world. His statement in 1956 occurred after four years of attacks made against him in the Gold Coast as a ‘detribalized African.’

⁹⁶ George Padmore to Dorothy Brookes, 17 April 1956. Wright MSS/103/1522.

The first issue Gold Coast opposition rallied around was the rapid rise of Nkrumah's leadership. The near absolute power the CPP held following its victory in the 1951 elections, coupled with Nkrumah's imperious leadership, worried the opposition press who saw in him a 'would-be dictator.'⁹⁷ In 1952, the Accra based *Daily Echo* denounced Padmore's propaganda on Nkrumah by declaring that Padmore's 'lie that if Nkrumah fails Africa is doomed, is the greatest intellectual cheat perpetrated by a man full of so many abuses. If Nkrumah fails, there are dozens of capable Africans who will rise to the occasion and do better.'⁹⁸ Padmore's uncompromising support for Nkrumah and the CPP was critiqued in an article that pointed out that Padmore seemed to be excusing CPP corruption on the grounds that it was worse in countries like the United States.⁹⁹ Alongside the actual grievance a writer had towards Padmore in a particular article, there was usually an underhanded insult also levelled in order to discredit him. In 1952 and 1953, the accusation focused on Padmore the 'communist'. However, this soon shifted as the struggle between Nkrumah and a vocal Gold Coast opposition became increasingly centred upon the issue of 'tribalism'.

While in 1952 the greatest insults against Padmore were his 'communist tactics,' there were hints at distrust of him as an outsider. He was referred to as an 'impecunious and stateless ignoramus'¹⁰⁰ who 'escape[d] from the West Indies in a tramp ship.'¹⁰¹ Represented as a sly, underhanded non-citizen who had 'escaped' his homeland and was now 'stateless,' Padmore's legitimacy was questioned because he had lost a part of his identity. In the context of the rise of nationalism in West Africa, this reaction to Padmore presents an inverted example of the relationship between diaspora and nation. In theories of diasporic nationalism the first phase, 'exilic' nationalism, is characterized by an ideal of 'the homeland [as] sacred, or central, or both; to move away from it is to endanger the identity of the nation.'¹⁰² This description is relevant, in the case of Padmore and the Gold Coast, to the views of the homeland population rather than the diaspora. Since Padmore had moved away both from his ancestral home, Africa, as well as from his birthplace, and no longer belonged as a citizen, his return to Africa

⁹⁷ 'Mr. Nkrumah and the Press,' *Daily Echo*, 25 May 1951.

⁹⁸ 'A Black Goebbels,' *Daily Echo*, 29 July 1952.

⁹⁹ 'George Padmore Again.' *Daily Echo*, 2 August 1952.

¹⁰⁰ 'Padmore's Stupidity,' *Daily Echo*, 25 July 1952.

¹⁰¹ 'Black Goebbels,' *Daily Echo*, 29 July 1952.

¹⁰² Tololyan, 'Beyond the Homeland,' 33.

endangered the identity of the Gold Coast nation. When it was announced in mid-1952 that Nkrumah's personal secretary would be a West Indian woman named Joyce Gittens, who trained in England and whom Padmore had recommended, the paper commented that Padmore 'should keep an eye on his own country's development and leave the Gold Coast alone.'¹⁰³

The most malicious attacks against Padmore were mounted by K.Y. Attoh¹⁰⁴ in a series of editorials, which describe Padmore as 'completely detribalised and without moral scruples.'¹⁰⁵ The assumed corresponding link between Padmore's lack of 'tribal' status, and his lack of morals, provides interesting evidence of the deep attachment 'tribal' status had, not just to cultural or familial loyalties, but to a shared value system which was at the core of a person's identity. Attoh went on to malign Padmore's father and grandfather in very deeply destructive terms, arguing that Padmore's own dishonesty proved that his

grandfather must [have been] a traitorous slave among his fellow sufferers. I can picture him sneaking up to the master's bungalow to lie about his colleagues for more food and drink and favours... I shudder to think how many innocent slaves must have lost their lives through the treachery of Padmore's grandfather!¹⁰⁶

The profoundly personal nature of this attack, and the vehement distrust of those who had left West Africa as slaves and thus no longer adhered to the moral code of Africans, is striking. It came, importantly, at a time when 'tribal' loyalties and chieftaincy were being eroded in the Gold Coast via migration, urbanization, and the intentional policies of Nkrumah and the CPP to dissolve the power base of chieftancy.¹⁰⁷ Theorists do not all agree on the link between urbanization and 'detribalizaton'; however, some argue that 'detribalization' actually begins at the point of migration to an urban area.¹⁰⁸ The criticism of Padmore as 'detribalized' could thus also act as a referent to Padmore's link to the urban base of the CPP – he was therefore not simply an 'outsider' for being a West Indian, but also for associating with a new social group in the Gold Coast that did

¹⁰³ 'CPP May Collapse If...Says Member,' *AP*, 27 June 1952.

¹⁰⁴ Attoh, an Accra journalist, was one of a group of 38 opposition members to be arrested under the new Preventive Detention Act in November 1958. See Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 381.

¹⁰⁵ K.Y. Attoh, 'Padmore, Liar of the Year,' *Daily Echo*, 22 October 1955.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*.

¹⁰⁸ Amoah, *Reconstructing the Nation in Africa*, 132.

not retain the links to traditional society. Thus in the same way that Rathbone has noted that the term ‘youth’ had other meanings in Gold Coast society,¹⁰⁹ criticism of ‘detribalization’ could have been functioning on a number of levels within the tense atmosphere of 1950s Ghanaian political culture.

Padmore never responded directly to his critics in the *Ashanti Pioneer* and *The Daily Echo* (either due to the fact that he was unaware of the attacks or, more likely, because he chose, as in the attacks meted out against him after leaving the Communist Party, not to fan the flames). However, Padmore referred to himself on more than the one above occasion as a ‘de-tribalised black’ and that ‘ju-ju don’t work on people like us.’¹¹⁰ In 1955, he remarked to Wright that ‘I hate primitiveness. Me, go native? Not on your life? I will fight for a free Africa and Asia, not live there (laughter).’¹¹¹ While Polsgrove placed Padmore’s ‘contemptuous remarks about African “mumbo-jumbo”’¹¹² in the context of 1950s modernization theory that encouraged the transformation of traditional societies, the remarks should also be understood in the context of a long history of diasporic black intellectuals’ ambivalent response to Africa. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy traces the contradictory response to Africa of black intellectuals like Padmore’s hero, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Richard Wright.¹¹³ This tension with the ‘primitive,’ Bogues adds, was prevalent among black intellectuals whose middle class upbringing in colonial and racialized societies made them ‘a most tortured creature.’¹¹⁴ Considering the observations of both Bogues and Gilroy then, Padmore’s ambivalence toward African tradition was a result of his alienation both in terms of class and geographical origin.

What is significant about the interaction between Gold Coast nationalism, ‘tribalism’, and Padmore the diaspora intellectual, is that the two seemingly conflicting identities actually become more closely intertwined: what Gilroy has described as the black diaspora’s ‘tension between a politics of fulfilment and a politics of transfiguration’¹¹⁵ can be seen both in the ‘home’ population (ie the Gold Coast) and in the diaspora

¹⁰⁹ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 24.

¹¹⁰ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 24 May 1954. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹¹¹ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 23 August 1955. *Ibid.*

¹¹² Polsgrove, *Ending British Rule in Africa*, 147.

¹¹³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 24; 192-193.

¹¹⁴ Bogues, *Black Heretics*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 112.

(Padmore). As will be discussed again in the next chapter, Padmore's conviction that true African independence could only be fulfilled through a transfiguration (including the removal of 'tribalism') brought him into conflict with a segment of the nationalist movement that were not willing to transform their society to his vision.

5.2 'Tribalism', the 'greatest menace': the rationale for Padmore's 'anti-tribalism'

While Padmore's private views on traditional African rituals reveal his personal distaste, his public statements on 'tribalism' explain the ultimate reason for Padmore's 'anti-tribal' attitude: in 1954 'tribalism' stood as the 'greatest menace facing Africa' since, while imperialism was on the defensive, 'tribalism' was on the offensive.¹¹⁶ Between September 1954 and 1956, violence wracked the Ashanti region of the Gold Coast. Most Ashanti supporters of the CPP were forced to live in Accra, and Nkrumah never crossed the boundary between Ashanti and the Colony until well after independence.¹¹⁷ There were signs of resistance to Nkrumah's constitutional negotiations in the Ashanti region (one of the largest and historically most powerful regions in the Gold Coast) in 1953, but it was the CPP's broken election promise to control cocoa prices that sparked the formation of a major opposition party: the National Liberation Movement (NLM). While the NLM attempted to consolidate nation-wide opposition to Nkrumah, there was no mistaking its distinctly Ashanti grievances and thus its primary constituency.¹¹⁸ The initial resolution forwarded by the NLM demanded an increase in the cocoa price, a federal constitution, and a vote of no confidence in Nkrumah and the CPP.

Padmore weighed in on all of these issues. Firstly, his support for Nkrumah has already been discussed at length. Secondly, the issue of cocoa pricing centred around a shift in rationale for the Cocoa Marketing Board, initially set up by the British in 1947 as a means of stabilizing the producer price for cocoa and protecting farmers from fluctuations, but whose reserves became the foundation for the major expansion of the public sector undertaken by Nkrumah.¹¹⁹ Padmore made the case in the *Ashanti Sentinel* for an economic policy that would accumulate sufficient funds for

¹¹⁶ 'Tribalism, Greatest Menace Facing Africa,' AS, 15 September 1954.

¹¹⁷ Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine*, 18.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 39.

development.¹²⁰ He noted that the options open to the Gold Coast if they wanted to develop were limited: the British had gained their capital through colonial exploitation – an option obviously not suitable for the Gold Coast – and other developing countries like Liberia had borrowed to gain capital, only to be trapped in a dependent relationship with Western banks. Padmore's stance on this issue of investment, capital, and development is a fundamental principle of Marx as outlined in the first volume of *Capital*.¹²¹ This is an important reminder, again, of Padmore's continued Marxism.

Thirdly, his response to the demand for a federal constitution was that it was unrealistic¹²² and, ultimately, a mask for 'tribalism'.¹²³ The real danger of the power of 'tribalism', Padmore believed, was that it simply would not lead to independence. He believed this to be so for two key reasons: practicality and propaganda. Firstly, as in Nigeria, without national unity the British simply could not negotiate an appropriate constitution and devolve power to a solid political leadership. The new federal constitution negotiated in 1954 for Nigeria, Padmore believed, set the country back. He saw little hope for self-government in Nigeria by 1956.¹²⁴

He also knew that in the case of the Gold Coast, where the impetus for devolving power was 'readiness' for rule, a solid political system needed to be in place. He feared that Africans 'who talk lightly about federation do not realize the price that has to be paid in terms of political toleration if the system is going to work efficiently'.¹²⁵ His articles in this period frequently focused on the value and maturity of British party politics that demonstrated a stable governance structure. In these articles, an important aspect of Padmore's ideology is revealed. He valued political democracy since it fostered debate around political issues rather than vague slogans. Padmore argued that 'It is always easier to mask one's class prejudices behind vague nationalistic slogans...than it would

¹²⁰ 'British Capitalists to Delay Independence,' AS, 8 September 1954; 'Gold Coast Economic Stability Leads Colonial and Commonwealth,' AS, 12 October 1954.

¹²¹ For a succinct explanation of this point by Marx, see Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 164.

¹²² 'British MPs say demand for federation is impracticable.' AS, 9 November 1954; 'London 'Times Review' Says Not all Ashantis Back NLM,' AEN, 19 March 1955; 'Conservatives Don't Favour NLM: Northern Territories Warned,' AEN, 21-22 March 1955.

¹²³ 'Commonwealth Conference to Ask UK Parliament to Pass Gold Coast Act of Independence,' AEN, 1 February 1955. Nkrumah shared this view. See Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 5.

¹²⁴ 'Tribalism Kills Nigerian Nationalism,' AS, 16 September 1954.

¹²⁵ 'Unitary Government Vs Federal Government,' AS, 4 October 1954.

be through the operation of the party system which reflects the economic and social divisions in society.¹²⁶

This statement makes two important points. Firstly, Padmore saw imperialism also as a class conflict and, therefore, anti-imperial slogans needed to reflect the economic implications of imperialism. Secondly, while this quotation may imply that Padmore was acting inconsistently in his praise of the party system while simultaneously attacking Gold Coast opposition, Padmore clearly supported a party system that debated economic and social, not regional or 'tribal' divisions in society. He even admitted to agreeing with 'Tory imperialists' in their statement that political opposition should never be based 'on personalities, race or religion, but on divergencies of policy.'¹²⁷ Padmore saw the NLM both as a 'tribal' and a class party. To him, it was 'an opposition of the big chiefs, disgruntled intellectuals like Joe [Appiah] and businessmen...financed by the mining and trading companies to abolish government trade monopoly.'¹²⁸ The NLM thus masked its true class allegiance under a veil of 'tribal' loyalty. Its political platform was regional and could not appeal to a mass political base.

The second reason for Padmore's 'anti-tribalism' was that it reflected badly upon Africa and 'the more such reports [of violence in Ashanti] are spread abroad, the easier it will be to secure the backing of world public opinion that the time has not yet come for the British to hand over complete authority to an elected all-African Government.'¹²⁹ Once again, what mattered most was the opinion of those who held the reigns of power - not the African perspective on the formation of their country. The seriousness of the situation was such that Padmore believed the NLM and supportive British interests to be engaged in 'another form of psychological warfare' in its press campaign to discredit Nkrumah and focus on 'tribal' violence. Africans were thus asked to put aside their grievances in order to appease the imperial power.

¹²⁶ 'Party System Lynchpin of Political Democracy,' *AEN*, 7 June 1952.

¹²⁷ 'British Parliament and Gold Coast Internal Affairs,' *AEN*, 30 March 1955.

¹²⁸ George to Dick, 12 April 1956. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹²⁹ 'Malanite Racialists Welcome Tribal Conflict in Ashanti,' *AEN*, 2 February 1955.

5.3 Politics and friendship: Joe Appiah's defection and Padmore's 'anti-tribalism'

Finally, the pull of 'tribalism' had a personal impact upon Padmore when his close comrade, Joe Appiah, defected from the CPP to the NLM in February 1955. Appiah had been one of two witnesses to Padmore's will, written in 1951, and Padmore had acted as best man at Appiah's London wedding to Peggy Cripps after Nkrumah sent his regrets. The two collaborated closely from London in the first half of the 1950s reading through drafts of party documents and the constitution that Nkrumah sent them. Appiah came from Ashanti aristocracy, and upon the death in 1952 of his maternal great uncle, Yaw Antony, inherited a large fortune and property, along with the headship of his family. He returned to the Gold Coast permanently in November, 1954 and only two days after his return, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Ashanti Pioneer* declaring that the formation of the NLM was a declaration that the Ashanti 'are now determined to live and die a Nation.'¹³⁰ This nationalistic fervour was declared almost three months before Appiah's official defection to the NLM. The existence of a 'tribal pull,' as Dorothy Padmore termed it, was not surprising to them, but the fact that Appiah had allowed it to 'over-rule his better judgement' – something we have seen Padmore to prize very highly - and the manner in which he had publicly defected 'has depressed us more than we can tell.'¹³¹

Appiah wrote to Padmore apologizing for his defection, and Padmore initially held out hope that Appiah would soon regret his decision and return to the CPP.¹³² Characteristically, Padmore interpreted Appiah's defection in political terms: firstly, in terms of its impact upon the image of Africa and in particular, to South Africa and Kenya; and secondly, in terms of Appiah's identification with a movement 'headed by people who have nothing in common with Mr. Appiah's socialist philosophy and racial political outlook.'¹³³ While Appiah explained his defection, both at the time and in his autobiography, as a result of corruption in the CPP and Nkrumah's refusal to address it, Padmore interpreted Appiah's defection primarily as a turn to 'tribalism'. From Padmore's point of view, how could Appiah's decision have been political when he did

¹³⁰ Quoted in Allman, *Quills of the Porcupine*, 45.

¹³¹ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 31 Feb 1955. Wright MSS/103/1521.

¹³² George Padmore to Richard Wright, 9 Feb 1955. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹³³ 'British Press Endorse PM's Conciliatory Gesture,' *AEN*, 1 March 1955.

not agree with the politics of the party? In the correspondence and articles Padmore wrote related to Appiah's defection, there is no hint of anger and no attack (surprising since Appiah's defection gave strength to a movement that was seriously challenging Nkrumah's prospects for independence), but rather a tone of sadness tinged with hope.

Judgement of Padmore's role in the Gold Coast 'tribal' conflicts of the 1950s has fallen into two extremes. For Manning Marable, Padmore played a role in Nkrumah's crackdown upon the opposition, while both Rathbone and Allman's work on 'tribalism', chieftaincy and opposition to Nkrumah do not mention Padmore. There is a middle position. Although it would be an obvious stretch to claim that a man living in London could have directed the destruction of Gold Coast chieftaincy, it is obvious that he did act as a focal point for 'tribal' jealousies. It is also clear that in supporting Nkrumah, Padmore did intend to destroy the 'tribal' element of Gold Coast opposition. With the exception of Padmore's earlier claim to a British audience in *Africa: Britain's Third Empire* that the British were destroying indigenous systems of government that were 'fundamentally democratic,'¹³⁴ his views on 'tribalism' remained remarkably consistent. He saw it as a disruptive force that hindered unity and distracted national political debate away from critical issues of economic and social transformation in favour of local 'tribal' and regional interests.

Conclusion

Padmore's politics in the seven years before he left his base in London represents a period of numerous tensions and contradictions in his friendships and his political relations. In his 1956 letter to Dorothy Brookes in which he revealed fears of his own ability to guide the future of Africa, Padmore closed the letter by noting that he had written his response immediately upon receipt of her letter since "To have waited to reflect, I would have written you a 'diplomatic' letter, and therefore, a dishonest one." As we have seen, Padmore chose carefully his moments of honesty as well as his confessors. These moments of honesty reveal not a contradiction with his usual 'diplomacy,' but a tension between how he understood events in Africa and the possibilities of anti-imperial resistance. Padmore's consciousness of the public sphere

¹³⁴ Padmore, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire*, 114.

was behind his interpretation of the loss of friendship of Abrahams and Appiah, and it also dictated his elevation of Nkrumah as a responsible statesman against the emotional pull of ‘tribal’ nationalism.

Padmore turned his attention to the Gold Coast as a strategy for prompting African liberation. This liberation involved political, racial, and economic liberation from the numerous abuses of imperialism. Rather than focusing on the Gold Coast ‘to the exclusion of matters in the rest of the continent,’ Padmore cultivated Gold Coast nationalism as part of the racial, economic and political injustices of imperialism across the globe. He maintained connections with activists across the British Empire, and remained engaged, in particular, with events in the Sudan, Kenya and South Africa. The answers to these questions exemplify Padmore’s tactical political style which left him propping up leaders other than himself, in a region not his own, where he was an ‘outsider.’

Studying the conflicts between Padmore and Gold Coast political opposition to Nkrumah is illuminating for two reasons. Firstly, it helps to focus our analysis of the numerous tensions occurring in the lead up to African decolonization. These involved rapidly shifting power dynamics which had a tendency to raise contentious questions about who belonged in society, and how political power would re-orient itself on regional, urban, and transnational lines. Secondly, Padmore’s experience provides valuable detail to the now well-recognized challenges those from the African diaspora experienced when they involved themselves more directly in the politics of the continent. It shows that tensions between those in the diaspora, and ‘real Africans’ should also be seen as products of historically situated time and place rather than as abstract, or even inherent group antipathy. The category of ‘outsider’ (although an underlying presence for many years) was publicly deployed at a particular historical moment when it was politically acceptable and expedient to do so. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the fact that Padmore was declared to be a Ghanaian by the *Ashanti Pioneer* in 1959 is important. While Padmore did not have to confront ‘tribal’ opposition when he moved to Ghana in 1957, the experience of being branded an outsider carried through to his relations with Ghanaian politicians once in office as Nkrumah’s Adviser on African Affairs.

Chapter 7

Ghana, Death, and the Afterlife, 1957-1959

When I saw the urn in which George's ashes had been placed, I thought how strange that the remains of so tremendous a personality, so great a man, could be put into so small a compass. Do our efforts and our strivings and our acts that we think so important, after all, boil down to so little? I am sad.¹

Political and cultural leaders from around the world, including Richard Nixon, Martin Luther King, Jr, Ralph Bunche, Norman Manley, A. Philip Randolph, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and Mrs. Louis Armstrong, attended the celebration of Ghana's independence on 6 March 1957.² The Padmore's found themselves on a VIP plane to the ceremony with former British Governors, the British Parliamentary delegation, the Norwegian ambassador, plus delegations from China, Burma and Malaysia. Afterwards, Dorothy Padmore joked to Ellen Wright that 'I believe we were the only "unimportant" people on the plane.'³ Although Dorothy Padmore's comment was likely intended partly as a sarcastic jibe against the Establishment, it also contained some truth. Padmore had never held any 'official' leadership position since his time with the ITUCNW. His name was known only to a select circle of people in West Africa, the Caribbean, Britain and the United States, mostly for his books on Africa and his journalism. Rarely were newspaper stories ever printed *about* him, outside of the recent attacks in the *Ashanti Pioneer*. He was not revered as a political, intellectual, nor cultural figure in the same manner as leaders like Ralph Bunche, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, or Kwame Nkrumah.

Yet in contrast to Dorothy Padmore's feeling of inconsequentiality at the time of Ghana's independence, James Hooker has defined Padmore's time in Ghana from the end of 1957 to his death in September 1959 as his 'months of power.'⁴ Ghanaians and American diplomats accused Padmore of desiring power and comfort while working for Nkrumah. Since his death in September 1959, Padmore has been memorialized as one of the 'fathers of African emancipation' and his years working with Nkrumah have been

¹ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 31 October 1959. Wright MSS/103/1522.

² Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 28; Poe, *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism*, 108 .

³ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 9 April 1957. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁴ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 109.

most frequently cited as evidence of this accolade. Padmore's 'importance' is thus very closely linked to his two years in Ghana.

Nkrumah's rule remains contentious both for historians and for Ghanaians. The evidence of popular support for the CPP at the ballot box in 1956, despite the vocal opposition of the NLM, meant that upon independence the CPP retained a clear majority in parliament, holding two-thirds of all seats.⁵ The price of cocoa was high in the latter half of the decade, justifying government expenditure plans that would allow for its ambitious social policies. The country had a constitution that provided for multi-party debates, an opposition in government, and according to Dennis Austin, no equivocal signs that the regional divisions evident in each party foretold any 'piecemeal fragmentation' of the country.⁶ However, the emergence of a new opposition movement within months of independence (the Ga Adangme Shifimo) in the heart of Nkrumah's own constituency in Accra, soon precipitated a crackdown on political opposition that came to characterize Nkrumah's government up until the end of his regime in 1966. A series of measures soon followed designed to stifle any opposition to government including the Deportation Act of August 1957; Emergency Powers Act of December 1957; Preventive Detention Act of July 1958; and finally the Constitution (Amendment) Act passed in March 1959.⁷ In November 1958 the government detained 38 members of the opposition including K.Y. Attoh, the journalist who had so brazenly attacked Padmore in 1955.⁸ The constitutional amendment of 1959 allowed the government to seek a plebiscite on drafting a republican constitution and on 1 July 1960 Nkrumah took office as President of the Republic of Ghana, wielding extensive executive authority.⁹

Padmore apparently had two major roles in Ghana between 1957 and 1959. Firstly, Apter has emphasized Padmore's role in directing the ideological development of the CPP.¹⁰ Thompson argues that Padmore remained a Marxist and 'encouraged Nkrumah in his resolve to consolidate power and move toward the creation of a one-party

⁵ Austin, *Ghana Observed*, 49.

⁶ Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 364-369.

⁷ Ibid, 380.

⁸ Ibid, 381.

⁹ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 151-155. See also Amonoo, *Ghana, 1957-1966*, 1-2. For disagreement that Ghana was a dictatorship after 1960, see Apter, *Ghana in Transition*, xvi.

¹⁰ Apter, *Ghana in Transition*, 349.

socialist state.¹¹ Secondly, in his seminal book on Ghana's foreign policy from 1957-1966, Thompson argues that 'only Nkrumah had a greater hand than Padmore in shaping Ghana's foreign policy during the first two years [of Ghana's history].'¹² Nkrumah's foreign policy and, in particular his emphasis upon Pan-Africanism, continue to be assessed as a central strand of 'Nkrumahism'.¹³ This chapter will examine both these arguments. It will show that Padmore moved to Ghana in order to support a socialist revolution, and that while there he sustained a commitment to the ideas of social revolution which he had learned in his earliest days with the Comintern. It will further examine Padmore's support for Nkrumah, in order to reinforce the argument made in the last chapter that Padmore's tactical support for Nkrumah derived from his belief in the coexistence of African socialism *and* African unity. It will also outline the criticisms of Padmore's Pan-Africanism made by other African nationalists and, the ambiguities in Pan-Africanism which Padmore himself admitted.

This chapter consists of two sections: first, a reconstruction of Padmore's work in Ghana as Special Advisor on African Affairs to Kwame Nkrumah; second, an analysis of the response to his death by friends, colleagues, and political figures. Padmore's two years in Ghana are perhaps the most difficult period in which to discern his own thoughts. Most of his papers are rumoured to have been whisked away during the coup against Nkrumah in 1966, his final manuscript remained unfinished and has not surfaced, and he had quit journalism. This chapter thus emphasizes Padmore's power, importance, and memorialization as a means of trying to understand the man in the absence of better sources. This is not, however, a detour. The response of those closest to an individual after their death can often reveal certain characteristics about the person. This chapter will examine the reaction to Padmore's death as a means of interpreting some conclusions about his life and legacy.

¹¹ Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy*, 22-23.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Poe, *Kwame Nkrumah's Contribution to Pan-Africanism*, 4-10; Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 135-154.

1 Duty or desire? Ghana's independence celebration, Nkrumah's invitation, and the decision to move to Ghana

Padmore's years in Ghana can only be properly understood within the context of his growing skepticism and exhaustion discussed in the last chapter. While living in Ghana between 1957-1959, the wariness he indicated in 1956 about his own role in African nationalist movements translated into a new assessment of the potential of these movements for sweeping social change. For example, at the end of January 1957, Padmore informed Wright that he had been invited to the independence ceremony but that 'I really cannot afford the money just to see spades dance. I prefer a quiet holiday in France this summer.'¹⁴ Why, then, did he and Dorothy Padmore attend the ceremony? And why, within the year, had he shipped most of his belongings to Ghana in order to embark on a three-year contract as Nkrumah's Adviser on African Affairs?

In April 1957, Dorothy Padmore wrote to Ellen Wright that George was growing increasingly thin, and that 'up to the end' he wavered 'as usual' as to whether or not they should go to Accra for the independence celebrations.¹⁵ Flying *gratis* on a VIP plane and having accommodation provided by Nkrumah at his own home, solved Padmore's financial concerns about the trip. Despite the undeniable symbolic importance of the event, his observation above to Richard Wright that the ceremony would be nothing more than a show is reflective of his emphasis (while in Ghana) upon the *future* of Ghana, rather than the euphoric celebration. Padmore stayed in Ghana for over two months after the ceremony, until 20 May 1957. His speeches at rallies praised 'the Common People of Ghana whose devotion and self-sacrifice have made possible the birth of your new nation' and encouraged 'the application of hard work' and 'self-discipline' to the building of their country.¹⁶ His focus was on the development of Ghana in close cooperation with other nationalist movements. From Accra he wrote to Eric Williams and Norman Manley to encourage close cooperation between Ghana and the West Indies, asking for advice specifically on legal experts and judges that could come to Ghana.¹⁷ He also traveled to Freetown for two weeks to support a youth

¹⁴ George Padmore to Richard Wright, 29 January 1957. Wright MSS/103/1522.

¹⁵ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 9 April 1957. Wright MSS/103/1521.

¹⁶ 'Padmore Hints New Job for CiPiPists,' *Ghana Evening News*, 26 March 1957.

¹⁷ 'Correspondence with West Indian Ministers re: law officers,' Norman Manley to Padmore, 23 March 1957; Padmore to Eric Williams, 15 March 1957. Bureau of African Affairs Papers, George Padmore Library, Accra. Sc/BAA/187 (hereafter cited as BAA MSS).

movement that hoped to have an influence in Sierra Leone's upcoming election.¹⁸ When he left Accra to return to England on 20 May, he reiterated his warning about the challenges that lay ahead and stated that 'on the issues of housing, food, water and clothing there can be no [political] difference.'¹⁹ Ultimately, Padmore went to Ghana to observe its post-independence planning – not for the ceremony.



Figure 5: Padmore (standing, centre) at CPP rally in Togoland, date unknown.

At some point during these two months, Nkrumah asked Padmore to move to Ghana in order to 'ensure that everything is set out right'.²⁰ Dorothy Padmore understood this request to mean that Padmore would be involved in 'plans to advance the social economic well-being of the people'.²¹ Before he returned to London, Padmore had already conceived of plans to order army generators to be placed in villages before the Volta River project was complete, to set up rural water depots, and to build a network of feeder roads to connect farms with main motor roads. Padmore's disinterest in independence ceremonies and his enthusiasm for new development projects support Dorothy Padmore's later claim that Padmore 'never saw African independence except

¹⁸ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 2 May 1957. Wright MSS/103/1521; George Padmore to Richard Wright, 22 April 1957. Wright MSS/103/1522; 'Padmore Back from Sierra Leone, Gives Impressions,' *Ghana Evening News*, 11 May 1957.

¹⁹ 'George Padmore's Farewell Message,' *Ghana Evening News*, 21 May 1957.

²⁰ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 2 May 1957. Wright MSS/103/1521.

²¹ *Ibid.*

as a prelude to African socialism.²² His enthusiasm for returning to Ghana, at this point, was based upon interest in the practical task of building Ghanaian socialism. Yet his job was as Advisor to the Prime Minister on African Affairs. Thus his actual role would be concerned with supporting African liberation and African unity.

2 Competing Visions: the ambiguities of realizing Pan-Africanism in practice

Upon arrival in Accra in December 1957, Padmore hired a staff and began to set up an office that would focus on African liberation. The office was intended to harness resources and expertise on Africa that would engage in information gathering and publishing, as well as practical and ideological support to African freedom fighters. It would supplement, not duplicate, the work of the Ministry of External Affairs. Its status was separate from the government's ministries since Padmore reported directly to Nkrumah who, at the time, was not only the Prime Minister but also held the portfolios for Defence and External Affairs.²³ Padmore's office coordinated what was referred to as the Africa Centre, which housed freedom fighters from across Africa in a building near the Accra airport. At some point, the Africa Centre accommodated Patrice Lumumba, Tom Mboya, and Julius Nyerere. It is a great loss that no documentation has been found of Padmore's impression of these men or his interaction with them.²⁴

Padmore's office was also involved in a number of other initiatives to enhance the new state's reputation as a leader of Africa. He advised on Accra's bid to be the site for both the new UN Economic Commission for Africa, as well as the host of the regional office for the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).²⁵ He also indirectly assisted with the Kenya Defence Committee that was set up by the CPP, the Ghana TUC, and NASSO (the National Association of Socialist Students Organisation, which Padmore was closely advising).²⁶ The Committee raised funds for the defence of Tom Mboya and others in jail in Kenya, and even tried to send a Ghanaian lawyer to Kenya to help

²² Dorothy Padmore to St. Clair Drake, 3 June 1963. Drake MSS/Schomburg/MG 309, box 8, folder 23.

²³ Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 135. Kojo Botsio was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1958.

²⁴ Interview by the author with Kwaku Amoah-Awuah, Accra, Ghana, 31 May 2011.

²⁵ Daniel Chapman to George Padmore, 11 February 1958; Padmore to Chapman 27 January 1958. BAA MSS.

²⁶ Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 87.

with Mboya's case.²⁷ Padmore's office also worked with Michael Scott and the London-based Africa Bureau regarding United Nations debates on South West Africa (Namibia). Indeed, it was Padmore whom Scott thanked for all the work by the Ghana delegation in the UN with regard to this question.²⁸ Padmore admired Scott,²⁹ and this letter from the South African priest thanking him for his work would have been greatly appreciated by Padmore.

Having remained at a distance from organizational bureaucracy now for over twenty years, Padmore found it difficult to accept or acclimatize himself to this reality. By July 1958 his impatience with procedures was such that he sent out a directive to his staff stating that

I feel that we are devoting too much attention to what I consider petty routine matters which can be dealt with more efficiently...all directives, observations and recommendations addressed to me must be stated as laconically as the English language permits. I shall not pay attention to long-winded correspondence, memoranda, etc, etc...³⁰

Accustomed to working on his own, Padmore expected the office to run with the same efficiency he had set up for himself. His humourous (some might say cantankerous) remarks indicate that he knew he had to work within the bureaucratic structures, but was frustrated by undue formality.

Overall, however, Padmore's first six months in Ghana were a stimulating and fruitful beginning to his new job. In February 1958, he joined Ako Adjei, the Minister of the Interior, on a three-week tour of countries who would be invited to the Conference of Independent African states (CIAS), to be held in Accra in April. According to Dorothy Padmore, he received strong personal affirmation during the tour since all the African heads of state knew of his work and had his books on their shelves.³¹ The Padmore's were pleased by the first year anniversary celebrations in March that were 'more inclusive' of the general masses and less 'formal and exclusive' than the year before.³²

²⁷ George Padmore to Daniel Chapman, 26 May 1958. BAA MSS/12.

²⁸ Michael Scott to George Padmore, 28 October 1958. African Bureau Papers, Rhodes House, University of Oxford. MSS.Afr.s.1681. Box 303, file 3.

²⁹ Between 1947-1953 Padmore produced 11 newspaper articles related to Scott's work. See Appendix 1.

³⁰ George Padmore to Staff, Office of Adviser to the Prime Minister on African Affairs, 30 July 1958. BAA MSS/165.

³¹ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 19 March 1958. Wright MSS/103/1521.

³² Ibid.

This improved dynamic, along with the impending All-African Peoples Conference (AAPC) at the end of the year, were ‘exciting.’³³ These experiences were, for Padmore, a far cry from the twenty years of grinding work in London, always on the brink of poverty. His African tour was declared by Dorothy Padmore to be a ‘personal triumph.’ Padmore was enjoying himself.

Padmore’s first year in Ghana was also consumed by the planning of two conferences that aimed to establish a broad Pan-African movement to lay the groundwork for African independence and political unity. He played a significant role in preparations for the CIAS. Typically, it was Padmore’s office that put together and distributed all documentation of both the CIAS and the AAPC.³⁴ Although initially Padmore’s office was not in charge of preparations for the AAPC, gradually, Padmore became the focal organizer of the conference as he was ‘invited’ to take over the leadership of press conferences.³⁵ The AAPC, like the Manchester Congress before it, included African leaders from national political movements, trade unions, and youth organizations. It was the CPP, not the government of Ghana, who called the conference in Accra. The similarity to the Manchester Congress in delegates, programme, and resolutions is the key evidence for Padmore’s guiding influence upon this conference.

Despite his influence over the conference, Padmore’s expectations were not as prescriptive as might be imagined. Immediately before the conference, he informed a US official that he personally expected little more than ‘general guidelines’ and a ‘sense of being together’ to come out of the conference. He stated that ‘though Pan-Africanism is widely believed in, we just do not know what we want specifically or how to get it.’ All that was clearly known, was that ‘we do not intend to be like Russia, the United States, or anyone else. If you wear your shirt inside your trousers, we will wear ours outside just to be different.’³⁶ This supposed confession was typical of Padmore – it was intended to reinforce his message to the United States that Pan-Africanism was in development rather than definitive. It re-stated that the ‘ideology’ intended to forge its own path that would not kowtow to Moscow, nor to Western powers.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ George Padmore to Daniel Chapman, 26 May 1958. BAA MSS/12. See also ‘Secretary’s Personal Correspondence,’ Sc/BAA/1A.

³⁵ Press Conference of AAPC. United States National Archives, College Park (hereafter cited as NACP) RG59, box 3646, folder 770.00/8-158.

³⁶ Congratulatory message to AAPC, 2 December 1958. NACP, RG59, box 3646, folder 770.00/12-158.

His statement that ‘we do not know what we want specifically,’ is illuminating. Citing Padmore’s 1956 *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, Thompson has argued that the difference between Padmore and Nkrumah was that ‘whereas for George Padmore...an “ultimate amalgamation” of a “United States of Africa” was a distant hope, Nkrumah always saw a union of all Africa as imminent, regardless of the obstacles in his path.³⁷ This distinction is important. It helps us to see Padmore as both unequivocally within, but also in some ways outside, the shadow of Nkrumah. It also helps to explain Padmore’s lack of decisiveness in describing the goals of Pan-Africanism to a US official. Adjei claimed that their tour of Africa in February 1958 had shown the large gap between Nkrumah’s hopes for African unity, and the commitment of other African leaders. If this is correct, then Padmore’s pragmatic outlook would certainly have meant he evaluated the possibility of political unity carefully. Thompson argues that after this tour, Padmore ‘had lost any illusions he might have had about “continental unity.”’³⁸ What is crucial here is that although Padmore is credited with laying out the ideology of Pan-Africanism in its Cold War context,³⁹ he was actually not prescriptive about its content.

If Nkrumah and Padmore’s expectations of Pan-Africanism differed slightly, they also faced the competing visions of leaders from other independent African states – particularly Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and William Tubman in Liberia. Ghana’s relations with Egypt were bound up not only in competition between the Egypt-led Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and the Ghana-led AAPC, but also in Egypt’s support for Algeria as well as Egypt’s anti-Israel stance.⁴⁰ ‘The Question of Algeria,’ as articulated most famously by Fanon on the second day of the AAPC, challenged Nkrumah’s position on non-violent ‘Positive Action.’ Fanon’s call to recognize the system of violence, racism, and forced labour that embodied French colonialism were part of the same logic Padmore articulated in the 1930s and reiterated in his discussion of Mau Mau in 1956. Ahlman has shown that because Fanon’s basic premise was similar to that of some Ghanaians (he does not mention Padmore, but the

³⁷ Thompson, *Ghana’s Foreign Policy*, 8.

³⁸ Ibid, 60.

³⁹ Poe, *Kwame Nkrumah’s Contribution to Pan-Africanism*, 53.

⁴⁰ For more on Ghana’s relations with Egypt see Thompson, *Ghana’s Foreign Policy*, 45–48. For Padmore’s relations with Israel, see Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 135.

agreement is striking), Fanon's distinctive position – that nonviolence was an 'untenable option' for many African freedom fighters – created a 'discomfort' and 'uneasiness' for Nkrumah and the CPP such that, after 1960, Nkrumah's position shifted. The deliberations over the use of violence, Ahlman argues, were critical aspects of 'a broader moral and methodological dialogue over what an independent Africa should look like and how best to construct it.'⁴¹ Padmore was present for these debates and, almost certainly, would have shared Nkrumah's 'uneasiness.' Yet while Ahlman was able to recognize Nkrumah's 'silence' in December 1958, and then subsequently draw from Nkrumah's actions and rhetoric during and after 1960 to show that his ideas about the preeminence of non-violent 'Positive Action' were changing, no such extrapolation is possible for Padmore. This critical debate acts as another significant gap in our knowledge of Padmore's ideology as decolonization became a reality.

Indeed, his personal opinion of African politics throughout 1959 – which involved increasing tension over unity initiatives⁴² – continues to be difficult to ascertain. During the year, Padmore traveled with Nkrumah to Nigeria in February,⁴³ to Conakry in April for a Steering Committee meeting of the AAPC,⁴⁴ and to the 2nd Conference of Independent African States in Monrovia in August.⁴⁵ Although he seems to have welcomed the notable shift in President Tubman's position on an Association of African States in early 1959,⁴⁶ no personal assessment of the Sanniquellie Declaration in July 1959 with Liberia and Guinea has been found. Thus he attended the most important meetings throughout the year, but little is known about what he thought of these developments. Indeed, at the time when Pan-Africanism was in rapid development and more than ever before, was a major issue in popular discourse, Padmore's own ideological position is difficult to measure. This gap in knowledge about Padmore's position on the first African unity initiatives is indicative as a whole of our understanding of Padmore's pan-Africanism in 1958 and 1959. It is clear that he

⁴¹ Ahlman, 'Living with Nkrumahism,' 82.

⁴² For these tensions see especially Biney, *Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 135-154.

⁴³ 'Kwame Nkrumah Arrives in Nigeria,' *Daily Graphic*, 23 February 1959.

⁴⁴ 'US Embassy Report – Conversations with George Padmore,' 6 April 1959. NACP, RG59, box 3647, folder 770.00/4-159.

⁴⁵ List of Delegates to the Conference of Independent African States at Monrovia, 4-8 August 1959. NACP, RG 59, box 3648, folder 770.00/8-159.

⁴⁶ Adviser on African Affairs comments on Pan-African developments, 17 February 1959. NACP, RG59, box 3647, 770.00/2-259.

remained absolutely committed to African unity, but was not convinced of the form it would take in reality. Nevertheless, when tensions really began to emerge among African leaders in 1959, there are no reliable sources to show how Padmore reacted.

3 Outside influence: ‘tribalism’, modernization, and the contentious position of Padmore as Advisor for ‘African’ Affairs

Padmore never abandoned his long established views on ‘tribalism’. At the end of 1957, before leaving for Ghana, he began a new manuscript about ‘tribalism’ as ‘a disintegrating force in Africa.’⁴⁷ Although he never completed the manuscript and a draft has never been found, this next writing project point to his priorities at the time. In the autumn of 1958 he insisted to an old Comintern colleague that ‘tribal strife’ across Africa was ‘the greatest impediment to real progress.’⁴⁸ At the end of 1958, just before the All-African People’s Conference in Accra, a US Embassy official reported that Padmore had described his role in African nationalism as ‘a catalytic agent, standing...above the petty tribal and sectional jealousies and able to keep my eye on the goal.’⁴⁹ Padmore was, still, an ‘outsider’ in Ghana in 1958. Dorothy Padmore remarked after his death that Padmore ‘had to face this business of being a “stranger” while working in Ghana.’⁵⁰ There were those in Nkrumah’s circle who disapproved of Padmore’s position ‘on the grounds that a West Indian could hardly have anything to teach them about Africa.’⁵¹ However his statement that he was ‘above’ ‘tribal’ jealousies also shows that Padmore, in certain ways, embraced his status as an ‘outsider.’ He believed that it helped him direct the nationalist movements towards a new vision of African unity – a vision, he believed, that needed to move beyond ‘tribal’ loyalties and instead foster a continental identity.

Padmore’s continuing analysis of the challenges facing Africa placed him both ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ the dominant thought of Nkrumah and the young nationalists in the CPP. Rathbone notes that many of the nationalist projects in Africa emphasized material modernization and economic change, and that African nationalists after 1945 perceived

⁴⁷ Dorothy Padmore to Ellen Wright, 30 September 1957. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁴⁸ ‘Remembrances about George Padmore.’ James MSS/UWI, box 23, folder 440.

⁴⁹ ‘On the Eve of the Pan-African Conference, 2 December 1958. NACP, RG 59, box 3646, 770.00/12-158.

⁵⁰ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 31 October 1959. Wright MSS/103/1521.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Ghana’s Foreign Policy*, 29. The remarks are attributed to Nkrumah’s principal secretary, A.L. Adu.

the traditions of chieftancy as a barrier to their goals of progress.⁵² Although Padmore was an ‘outsider’ to the historical allegiances of chieftancy and thus, he believed, able to be objective, there were many young nationalists in Ghana who shared his belief that ‘tribalism’ would keep them from their vision of national progress. At the end of 1958, Nkrumah was reported to have stated at a press conference in New Delhi that the system of chieftancy was ‘largely feudal.’⁵³ Padmore also articulated this idea.⁵⁴ His insistence that ‘tribalism’ was ‘the greatest danger’ was echoed by Nkrumah and the CPP. Indeed, Rathbone insists that the battles between chieftancy and the CPP between 1951 and 1960 ‘constituted a very sizeable chunk of the national political arena.’⁵⁵ Padmore’s interpretation of Joe Appiah’s defection to the NLM as a ‘tribal’ pull, and the devotion of his last unfinished book to ‘tribalism’, show that for Padmore, that sizeable presence was understood.

Although Padmore was memorialized after death as a Ghanaian (to be discussed below), it is important to note that the two years Padmore worked in Ghana were actually a period in which he was most distinctly *not* African. However, this was not entirely a cruel label imposed on a man who wanted to be accepted as an African, but was shunned by those who disapproved of his presence. Rather, Padmore embraced it as a useful position from which to objectively observe African independence and further its goals of progress and liberation.

4 Advancing the revolution at all costs? Nkrumah’s power and Padmore’s support

By the time of Padmore’s arrival in Ghana at the end of 1957 the cult of Nkrumahism was visible across the country. Kwame Nkrumah – “Africa’s Man of Destiny,” “Osagyefo,” and “Star of Ghana” – were household phrases. The major newspapers of the CPP never carried any criticism of Nkrumah personally.⁵⁶ Although Padmore no longer published with these newspapers, he would certainly have read *The Ghana Evening News* (formerly *Accra Evening News*) every day and would have been well

⁵² Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 3.

⁵³ Quoted in *Ibid*, 150.

⁵⁴ George Padmore, ‘Tribalist Aristocrats & Feudalist Chiefs Resent Rule of Common People,’ *AS*, 18 August 1955.

⁵⁵ Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 8.

⁵⁶ Austin, *Ghana Observed*, 39.

aware of the propaganda campaign that celebrated Nkrumah without question. In 1957, the *Daily Graphic*'s Sierra Leonean columnist, Bankole Timothy, was deported from Ghana for publishing an article about the development of a personality cult around Nkrumah.⁵⁷ Padmore was not blind to these deportations nor to the cult of personality. The previous chapter showed that before Ghana's independence, Padmore chose to uphold Nkrumah as the sole leader of Ghana despite concerns that his power was becoming unilateral. However, given the increasingly repressive measures of the opposition after independence, Padmore's support for Nkrumah requires further explanation.

Firstly, it would be ahistorical to speculate as to whether Padmore would have approved of Nkrumah's actions after 1959. The tendency to evaluate Padmore's 'importance' primarily via his relations with Nkrumah discounts a lifetime of work unassociated with Nkrumah. It also runs the risk of projecting Padmore onto Nkrumah's downfall. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that in 1958 and 1959 Padmore supported the cult of 'Nkrumahism.' An undated, 'Top Secret' report from Tawia Adamafio⁵⁸ to Nkrumah, outlined plans for a 'New Party' that was derived from discussions with Padmore. According to this document, Padmore agreed that 'the content of Pan-African Socialism must be clothed with a strong psychological armour of success and that *since the name Nkrumah has already become so great* and synonymous with success, it is best to describe the content of Pan-African Socialism as Nkrumahism for short.'⁵⁹

The memorandum ends by noting that Padmore had stressed 'most emphatically' that 'Destiny has placed an unshirkable duty on Kwame Nkrumah, not only to inspire the redemption of Africa but most important, to PROVIDE A DISTINCT AFRICAN STATE PATTERN FOR THE EMERGING NATIONS OF OUR PEOPLES.'⁶⁰ Perhaps the best evidence for Padmore's calculated support for Nkrumah comes from Nkrumah himself. When Nkrumah opened the George Padmore Library in Accra on 30 June 1961, he stated that Padmore's 'loyalty to me was...not based on

⁵⁷ Chick, 'Cecil King, the Press and Politics in West Africa,' 387.

⁵⁸ Tawia Adamafio was the General Secretary of the CPP and heavily involved in its ideological positions. He was arrested and jailed by Nkrumah in 1963. Adamafio, *By Nkrumah's Side: The Labour and the Wounds*.

⁵⁹ 'The New Party,' Memorandum Tawia Adamafio to Kwame Nkrumah, undated. BAA MSS/500. Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

emotionalism...He was loyal to me because he believed implicitly that what I stand for is the only thing that can lead to the total emancipation of the African continent.⁶¹ While Nkrumah made these remarks at a time when he was strongly invested in affirming the supremacy of his role in Africa, they nonetheless reinforce the pattern of Padmore's loyalty to Nkrumah. It was based upon Padmore's assessment that Ghana's precedent, and Nkrumah's charisma, posed the best opportunity to inspire Africa towards unity along a socialist model.

Unfortunately, this support for Nkrumah in reality also entailed repressive measures in which Padmore has been implicated. Rathbone has cited meetings of the Cabinet National Defence Council, which Padmore attended, where Special Branch police were directed to investigate the political opposition.⁶² The 'intimidatory use of deportation' began to figure in Cabinet business from October 1957.⁶³ In response to some of these deportations Nkrumah stated in a speech to the House on 19 June 1959 that 'it has been necessary to deal decisively with a comparatively small number of residents of foreign extraction who, while enjoying Ghana's hospitality, have sought to interfere in her domestic politics to the detriment of good government.'⁶⁴ Could these very words not have been spoken of Padmore during most of his time in Britain? Of course, Padmore was a British subject and so was not technically a foreigner in London. Yet he was often treated as one, and was certainly carrying out activities 'to the detriment of good government.' He had spent the majority of his life under the watchful eye of London Metropolitan Special Branch. He had been deported as a foreigner for his political agitation against the German government in 1933. Yet now he sat present at meetings where the same invasive practices were being instigated in the country that would be the 'beacon' for all Africa. It is not easy to consider the rationale for this. Although Padmore certainly could not see into the future and assess, as we now can with hindsight, the tragedy of Nkrumah's leadership, it cannot be claimed that he lived in Ghana unaware of the repressive policies the CPP was implementing.

⁶¹ 'An Address by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah on the Opening of the George Padmore Library in Accra on 30 June 1961,' *Bulletin on African Affairs* vol 2, no 86.

⁶² Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, 153.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

There is at least one possible explanation for Padmore's complicity in the deportations and surveillance. In a document completed just before his death entitled *A Guide to Pan-African Socialism*, Padmore outlined the need for the CPP and its allied organizations to support the 'building of our economy on a socialist basis, firmly keeping under State control the basic means of production.'⁶⁵ Padmore emphasized this need in the face of an 'economic counter-revolution' being mounted by the former colonial powers. Padmore had been fighting to see Africa free from colonial rule for over three decades. His belief in a counter-revolution could partly explain his willingness to support the primacy of the Party (CPP), the cult of personality around Nkrumah, and the repression and deportation of political dissidents. It has often been seen as a great irony that those who have experienced political repression, mirror these tactics once in power. For it is they who understand best the tenacity of those who voice opposition to government.

5 Growing tension between Padmore and African nationalists

Padmore's support for Nkrumah fed into popular assumptions that Padmore was in Ghana primarily for his own benefit. Much was made of the fact – even by his friend St. Clair Drake – that Padmore had never held a job before.⁶⁶ Sylvester Paintsil, as a member of the AAPC Standing Committee in 1959, told an Embassy official that Padmore 'has never had a job before and will do anything to hold on to his present position...Padmore loves being a big shot and he will never get a better opportunity than he now has.'⁶⁷ The jealousy of Padmore's close relationship to the Prime Minister – that is, the jealousy of his power – was matched by Padmore's own sensitivity to how his position was viewed within Ghana. His previous experience of expulsion from the Comintern, and his exclusion in England from mainstream society made him highly conscious of the need to be accorded a certain level of respect.

In August 1958, Padmore received an invitation to an event from the Official Functions Officer, which did not address him by his formal title.⁶⁸ Padmore's subsequent protest

⁶⁵ Quoted in Apter, *Ghana in Transition*, 340-341.

⁶⁶ 'On the Eve of the Pan-African Peoples Conference,' 2 December 1958. NACP, RG59, box 3646, folder 770.00/12-158.

⁶⁷ 'Developments against Padmore,' 12 May 1959. NACP, RG59, box 3647, folder 770.00/5-159.

⁶⁸ Padmore to Official Functions Officer, 8 August 1958. BAA MSS/165.

of this omission is interesting in light of the memorandum to his staff mentioned above which requested the removal of undue formality from communication. His apparent inconsistency can be explained by the fact that the informality came from outside his office, where his authority could not be asserted or evaluated by him directly. Believing that the omission was a slight which demeaned his office, he informed the Officer that ‘if in future you send me any invitation which places me below my official precedence, I shall send it back and draw the attention of the PM to the matter.’⁶⁹ Hooker also alluded to Padmore’s concern that his position be viewed with appropriate deference by demanding an impressive salary.⁷⁰ Image, as has been shown on numerous occasions for Padmore, was once again critical.

Padmore was in a liminal position – separate from the civil service, unelected, and with no official links to the Government, he nonetheless had a direct link to the Prime Minister. Hooker has stated that Padmore’s ‘extra-bureaucratic influence,’ far from smoothing over the matter of his presence in Ghana, only served to increase resentment.⁷¹ If Padmore’s unique influence over the Prime Minister was contentious for some, it was his activities regarding Pan-Africanism that seem to have been at the root of some opposition to his employment. Objections to Padmore’s work on African affairs emanated from two sources: young nationalists who opposed the use of Ghana’s resources for external projects, and the Ministry of External Affairs which did not wish to lose the precedence of its office.

Turning to the first, immediately before the AAPC in December 1958, the US Embassy recorded an interview with St. Clair Drake in which he described a lecture Padmore gave at the University of Ghana on Pan-Africanism. Drake assessed that ‘the tenor of the student’s remarks and questions...revealed clearly that they have no interest in the Conference and feel that Ghana’s time and money should be spent on internal development.’⁷² Although Padmore believed Pan-African unity to be essential to Ghana’s political and economic survival and development, some Ghanaians saw it as an external concern. This kind of nationalism, however, is precisely the self-interested,

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*, 133.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² ‘On the Eve of the Pan-African Peoples Conference,’ 2 December 1958. NACP, RG59, box 3646, folder 770.00/12-158.

short-sighted attitude that Padmore would have found unacceptable. As African liberation became increasingly driven by nationalist fervour, Padmore's own broad ideal of national and continental independence from colonialism clashed with a narrower priority of national interest.⁷³

That some of Ghana's young students believed Padmore's work to be superfluous was compounded by the fact that, within government, Padmore's focus on relations with African countries duplicated the work of the Ministry of External Affairs. Padmore's office had been designed to direct extra resources towards supporting African freedom fighters and building Pan-Africanism. It was an office focused on transnational relations while the Ministry of External Affairs was responsible for international (inter-state) relations. However in practice communication between the two offices was not efficient. For example, when the US Embassy called on Padmore to discuss Ghana's UN position on the Cameroon in February 1959, Padmore found that he had not received the memorandum on US views sent by the Embassy to the Ministry of External Affairs. He expressed annoyance, adding that 'External Affairs tended to keep things very much in their own hands.'⁷⁴ Padmore's insistence that his role be afforded the appropriate respect was, then, based upon a concrete need to distinguish his position from the Ministry of External Affairs and ensure that his office received the information it required to function efficiently.

These tensions form part of the picture of Padmore's two years in Ghana. His own concern before he came to Ghana that he was 'out of touch' was echoed by Tom Mboya, who allegedly told a US official that Padmore, 'over two decades had served a useful purpose in the development of Pan-Africanism, but his methods were now outdated and actually harmful.'⁷⁵ Other African leaders who disagreed with Padmore on African relations now questioned his advice regarding Pan-Africanism. All these tensions came together, again, in a growing worry that Padmore had become exhausted. He was growing increasingly thin, and was ignoring Dorothy Padmore's suggestion to have his worsening liver condition examined. The exhaustion, given the challenge to his leadership and the frequent international travel, was both physical and mental.

⁷³ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 90.

⁷⁴ Adviser on African Affairs comments on Pan-African developments, 17 February 1959. NACP, RG59, box 3647, 770.00/2-259.

⁷⁵ Conversation with Tom Mboya, 16 December 1958. NACP, RG 59, box 3646, folder 770.00/12-158.

Part Two ‘He Lives’: the death and resurrection of George Padmore

6.1 *The First Remembrance: A Funeral in London*

Padmore’s liver condition was well known to his doctor. He was first seen at University College (UC) Hospital in 1949 when it was determined that his liver function was abnormal. In 1956 he was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver but was not prescribed treatment and instead was informed that they should keep an eye on his condition. When Padmore was admitted to UC Hospital in September 1959, it was because his doctor’s check-up had determined that he had fluid in his abdomen – the point at which cirrhosis becomes damaging. He had a haemorrhage and although urgent action was taken, his liver was functioning so poorly that he slipped into a coma. Dorothy Padmore was not in London and was rushed to his side. He died within hours of her arrival, at 7:30pm on Wednesday 23 September, 1959.⁷⁶

Over 200 people attended the funeral in London at Golders Green Crematorium on 28 September. The *West African Pilot* reported that ‘all coloured communities in the UK turned out boldly to show the world how great George Padmore was to the liberation movements.’⁷⁷ The *Pilot* reported the attendance of a number of African functionaries and notable individuals including: the High Commissioner of Ghana in London, the Counsellor and First Secretary of the Sudanese Embassy, Commissioners for East and West Nigeria, the Ambassador for Haiti and Liberia, Ghana’s TUC leader John K. Tettegah, Richard Wright, and Mrs Norman F. Manley.

⁷⁶ Dr. Stokes and Professor Rosenheim to Kwame Nkrumah, 29 September 1959. BA MSS/500.

⁷⁷ ‘Memorial Service for George Padmore in UK,’ *WAP*, 30 September 1959.



Figure 6: Dorothy Padmore and Ghana delegation with Padmore's ashes in London, 28 September 1959

At the time of his death, the value of Padmore's estate amounted to the humble sum of £168. His will bequeathed twenty-five pounds to his nephew, Malcolm F. Luke, along with all his books excluding his "Britannica Encyclopedia" (which was given to Dorothy Padmore), twenty-five pounds to Julia Nurse, and ten pounds to his brother-in-law Beryl Luke in New York along with the photos of his parents. Whatever money was left after funeral payments was to be given to Dorothy Padmore, along with the rights to all his published materials and 'all monies owing to me by newspapers and others.'⁷⁸ Any books Malcolm Luke did not wish to keep, Padmore requested be given to the CPP 'towards the establishment of a library.' This his nephew did, and the books still occupy five prominent shelves in the George Padmore Library in Accra. Finally, his will stated that Padmore wished to be cremated, and his ashes buried in the grave of his mother in Port of Spain, Trinidad. It is unclear why Padmore's burial place was moved from Trinidad to Ghana, and whether or not this was of his choosing on his deathbed or the work of those in Ghana who wished to enshrine him on African soil. It is certainly significant. There is in Trinidad no monument to Padmore; no institution in his name. In fact there is no physical reminder of Padmore at all. His association with

⁷⁸ Last Will and Testament of George Padmore, 30 June 1951. Padmore MSS/Schomburg, MG 624.

Africa in the end became so great that the continent of his ancestors became his final resting place.

6.2 ‘*The Soliloquy of Africa*’⁷⁹: Memorializing Padmore in Ghana

This thesis has attempted to piece together a narrative of the individual based significantly upon how he represented himself to others and/or how others represented him. Although it has tried to extract as much as possible who Padmore *was*, it has ultimately been more about how Padmore *was perceived*. As the central argument of this thesis suggests, his incessant assessment of the social, political and economic climate in which he acted meant that how he, his authorship and his political actions were perceived was always essential to who he was. Thus how others represented him after his death is also hugely relevant to a biography of George Padmore. The statements of friends provide fragments of Padmore’s personality. The tributes paid by governments, political parties and nationalist movements give an idea of the extent of his renown. Finally, his memorialization in Africa was the ultimate prodigal return of a member of the diaspora, a descendant of Africa who in death, was resurrected into a living memory of the symbol of ‘Africa’ as one.

Upon news of Padmore’s death, cablegrams were sent from Padmore’s office in Accra to Patrice Lumumba, Mary Louise Hooper (South African Defense Fund, New York), Nnamdi Azikiwe, George S. Schuyler (Editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*), Fenner Brockway, Claude Barnett (Associated Negro Press), and Jomo Kenyatta.⁸⁰ Nkrumah met the airplane carrying Dorothy Padmore and Padmore’s ashes at the airport, along with a cavalcade of press and CPP loyalists.⁸¹ A song for schoolchildren was written⁸² and, in official ceremony, his ashes were laid to rest inside the grounds of Christiansborg Castle, the seat of numerous colonial governments across Gold Coast history.

⁷⁹ Albert Donkor, *The Soliloquy of Africa* (author published manuscript), New York Public Library. Donkor respectfully dedicated his manuscript to ‘the late comrade George Padmore, a beloved devotee of African nationalism.’

⁸⁰ Cablegrams, Bureau of African Affairs 1959. BAA MSS/3.

⁸¹ ‘Padmore’s ashes arrive,’ *Daily Graphic*, 5 October 1959.

⁸² ‘To Padmore,’ undated. Drake MSS, MG 309, box 8 (103).

Yet although his life had ended, a romanticized version of Padmore was developed in which he was accorded a special place in Ghanaian society because of his great deeds and words, which could live on. It was ‘only in his works’ that Padmore could now be found, in his ‘sincere effort to implement the great socialist ideas...the ideas against opportunism, Colonialism, Racialism and Tribal discrimination.’⁸³ Mabel Dove, one of the first West African female writers from the 1930s,⁸⁴ declared in a poem entitled “He Lives” that Padmore’s ‘thoughts, his works, will live’ through his message that ‘the freedom of the race is with the race.’⁸⁵ Padmore’s memorialization in Ghana discussed below highlighted some important aspects of his life’s achievements: his pan-Africanism, his close relationship with Nkrumah, the influence of his written works, and his commitment to the labouring poor. It also provides a tangible example of the atmosphere and motivations at work in Ghana at the time. Wolffe argues that the death of famous individuals should be examined since public expressions of grief can often represent the shared values and convictions of a society.⁸⁶ For example, the consistent theme noted in Akan Highlife songs that death is a reality ‘from which no one returns’,⁸⁷ was present in Ghanaian poems and obituaries about Padmore in 1959. Padmore was ‘gone,’⁸⁸ and only in his words and actions could he now live.

It is, in fact, the words and acts that were selected by CPP supporters to represent Padmore’s message that help inform our understanding of Ghana at the time. Wolffe has shown that some of the memorials enacted after ‘great deaths’ could be used as ‘propagandistic exercises on behalf of particular power elites.’⁸⁹ The transformation of individual, personal grief into ‘universal grief’ has been argued by Gregory to have ‘served a broadly political purpose’ by covering over the tensions present in Britain at the end of the First World War.⁹⁰ Both Gregory and Wolffe have exposed the role of grieving as a part of national healing and nation building in Britain. Similarly, the commemoration of Padmore in ‘universal bereavement’ also became valuable for a nation newly establishing its own identity in Africa.

⁸³ ‘Now George is no more!’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

⁸⁴ Newell and Gadzekpo, eds. *Mabel Dove*.

⁸⁵ Mabel Dove, ‘He Lives,’ *Ghana Times*, 28 September 1959.

⁸⁶ Wolffe, *Great Deaths*, 5.

⁸⁷ Van der Geest, ‘The Image of Death in Akan Highlife Songs of Ghana,’ 169.

⁸⁸ ‘This day a mighty man hath fallen in Israel,’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

⁸⁹ Wolffe, *Great Deaths*, 278.

⁹⁰ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, 7.

The notion of Padmore as a self-sacrificing hero for the common man was an important aspect of newspaper memorials. It was declared that Padmore had ‘denied himself many opportunities’ including going ‘on hunger strikes many times for African workers.’⁹¹ As the *Ghana Times* solemnly announced, he ‘saw poverty, saw tribulation and tasted the worst that any man born of a woman could ever experience,’ but ‘his determination and selflessness sustained him.’⁹² For a poor, former colony embarking upon a vast modernization programme, the notion of sacrifice and self-denial were critical tools for assuaging the high expectations of those who expected their lives to improve swiftly. Padmore’s memorialization provides a concrete example of how early post-colonial rule in Ghana attempted to solidify the ideas of loyalty and sacrifice to the state.

Two other themes apparent in Padmore’s memorials were representative of the predominant image of Ghana propagated by the CPP at the time: his commitment to the liberation of Africa (placed, of course, alongside Nkrumah), as well as the fact that though he was a West Indian, he was accepted in death as a Ghanaian. The *Evening News* alleged that Padmore’s last words before he left Ghana for London were that Ghana had ‘electrified Africa.’ This, it was claimed, was an ‘inspiring message’ for the CPP. CPP comrades were thus exhorted to ‘Arise in true loyalty and discipline to rally round the Leader.’ Padmore’s message should ‘burn in your hearts’ so that the Party would ‘shake itself stoutly and crush inner-party indiscipline and external reaction forever.’⁹³ Padmore’s Pan-Africanism thus became a tool for reinforcing Party control over its members. Padmore, it was claimed, had died for Ghana and for Africa,⁹⁴ and this ‘ultimate sacrifice’ was conveyed in the press as a powerful example of loyalty and sacrifice for the continent. The themes of Padmore’s Pan-Africanism and his socialist commitment to the workers of the world came together in an anonymous poem that called all to mourn a man who belonged to a wide Pan-African community. Workers were exhorted to ‘Raise high your matchetes [sic] – in canefields, From Barbados to Mauritius,’ to ‘Silence the trombones in Harlem and the steel bands in Trinidad,’ while

⁹¹ ‘George Padmore’s death an inspiration,’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

⁹² ‘A Beginning,’ *Ghana Times* 28 September 1959.

⁹³ ‘You have electrified Africa,’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

⁹⁴ ‘Now sorrow walks our streets with bended head’ and ‘George Padmore: The Man Africa Will Miss,’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

the men and women of Hola weep. GEORGE IS GONE!'⁹⁵ This poem was a forceful call to commit to the new nation, to African independence, and to the idea of the unity of all workers under a wide Pan-Africanism.

Indeed, the *West African Pilot* called Padmore a 'great throbbing heart of Pan-Africanism' who 'virtually [gave] up his whole life, not to his land of birth (Trinidad) but to his continent of origin – Africa.'⁹⁶ Five minutes of silence to mourn Padmore's death were observed by the United National Independence Party of Northern Rhodesia;⁹⁷ the First Annual National Conference of the Pan-Africanist Congress in Johannesburg paid tribute to Padmore;⁹⁸ and a moment of silence was observed at the October 6 meeting of the Steering Committee of the AAPC.⁹⁹ Moments of silence and memorial services occurred not just in Africa but in America. In December 1959, a dual memorial service was planned in Chicago to commemorate the centenary of the hanging of two Negroes for participating in the Harpers Ferry raid, as well as the life of George Padmore. Richard Wright delivered a speech, diplomatic representatives from Ghana and the Sudan attended, and a film on the history and birth of Ghana was screened.¹⁰⁰ Thus Padmore was celebrated in true pan-African style, in conjunction with two black American heroes who had participated in one of the most well-known attempts at a slave revolt in the United States, *and* Ghana, the symbol of independent Africa. Ghana, as Gaines has also shown, was intentionally cultivating its identity with the diaspora.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere of obedience and servility to Nkrumah that was confirmed between 1957 and 1960 was evident in how the opposition responded to Padmore's death. The Western Region of Chiefs sent their condolences directly to Nkrumah (with no comment on Padmore).¹⁰¹ When it was announced that Padmore's ashes would be buried in Christiansborg Castle, *The Ashanti Pioneer* ran a front page story reporting complaints by the opposition Northern People's Party (NPP) that the burial site was

⁹⁵ 'This day a mighty man hath fallen in Israel,' *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

⁹⁶ Editorial, *WAP*, 30 September 1959.

⁹⁷ Andrew Bwalya Mwenya to Office of Advisor on African Affairs, 27 December 1959. BAA MSS, Secretary's Personal Correspondence.

⁹⁸ Report of First Annual National Conference of the Pan-Africanist Congress in Johannesburg. *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Report of Meeting of Steering Committee of AAPC, 10 October 1959. NACP, RG59, box 3648, folder 770.00/10-1059.

¹⁰⁰ 'Friends of Ghana Plan Memorial,' *Chicago Defender*, 3 December 1959.

¹⁰¹ 'Tributes to Padmore,' *Ghana Times*, 25 September 1959.

inappropriate for an individual burial since it was a house of government. However, the article stated specifically that the objection was not because Padmore was not a Ghanaian: ‘Padmore is a naturalized Ghanaian, but a Ghanaian all the same.’¹⁰² A newspaper which only seven years previously had chastised Padmore as an outsider, now declared him to be a Ghanaian. Padmore’s memorialization as a Ghanaian is thus a significant example that helps us consider how identity in Ghana was transformed. His death was expressed in some ways as a very singular grief, with Nkrumah as the ‘chief mourner,’¹⁰³ the one to whom tragedy had occurred. His death was also translated into universal grief: Padmore had died for Ghana, for Africa, for workers and tradesmen across the colonial world.



Figure 7: Burial ceremony at Christiansborg Castle, Accra

Thus in death, Padmore was tied concretely to Africa. His burial in the centre of government, a former colonial fortress built to defend the interests of the slave trade, represented a powerful image of return for those of African descent dispersed across the Americas and Europe. In a drastic shift instigated in significant ways by Nkrumah’s totalizing control, the Ghanaian opposition who had previously attacked Padmore as an

¹⁰² ‘Why the Castle?’ *AP*, 29 September, 1959.

¹⁰³ Stewart, ‘Now sorrow walks the streets with bended head,’ *Evening News*, 3 October 1959.

‘outsider’, accepted him – in death – as a Ghanaian. Nkrumah dedicated three key projects that combined Padmore’s two strongest commitments: African unity and knowledge-production. The George Padmore Primary School was founded in Tema, a workers suburb built outside Accra in the 1960s. Nkrumah dedicated his book, *Africa Must Unite*, to Padmore and to ‘The African Nation that must be,’¹⁰⁴ and in 1961 he founded a library in Accra, the George Padmore Research Library, that was intended to act as a centre for research on Africa.¹⁰⁵ Finally, when Padmore’s death was announced in the *Ghana Times* under the headline, “A Great Beacon Has Dimmed,” the image of George Padmore and Ghana, the great ‘beacon for the black world’s liberatory aspirations,’¹⁰⁶ became eternally intertwined.

6.3 *Extracts of a personality: Obituaries as source and myth for George Padmore*

It is unfortunately often true that only in death are the characteristics of a person expressed. Death forces individuals to put into words the most important aspects of a friend that they have noticed. Likewise, obituaries, while rarely negative, are an important source for analyzing ‘who’ a person was. Padmore’s pragmatism, his reserved manner at times and his radicalism at others, were all remembered and interpreted in different ways by friends and colleagues.

The psychological distance he maintained in many of his relationships and his cautious weighing of words, were a salient point for a number of those who remembered Padmore. Given Padmore’s stated dislike for social functions and his already emphasized political focus, it is not surprising that St. Lucian economist and nobel laureate, Arthur Lewis, began his tribute to Padmore by noting that ‘We were respectful, rather than intimate friends...We met perhaps two or three times a year, for a jam session of talk on world affairs, and then we moved back into our respective spheres.’¹⁰⁷ Intimacy was, it seems, rare with Padmore. Yet the number of those who knew him as Lewis did, testifies to this thesis’s argument about the flexibility of his network that embraced individuals of different political persuasions, races, and geographical regions. Lewis praised Padmore’s pragmatism when he noted that

¹⁰⁴ Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Friends of Ghana Plan Memorial,’ *Chicago Defender*, 3 December 1959.

¹⁰⁶ Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Tribute by Professor Lewis,’ 4 October 1959. BAA/MSS.

Padmore ‘recognized that it takes all types to win the anti-colonial struggle.’¹⁰⁸ Nancy Cunard praised these same characteristics of discernment and tact.

He had a supreme grasp of the essential – wherever it might be...Time and again, throughout the years I knew him, what also impressed me was his ability at “keeping his own counsel”. To be expansive, lavish, even, with subjects and ideas in conversation and then to know – no matter how suddenly if occasion arose – how to be silent was a salient characteristic of his.¹⁰⁹

That some of his closer friends emphasized Padmore’s ability both for lively, intense discussion and for checking his conversation where necessary, corroborates an important characteristic born out in previous testimonies of Padmore as far back as his earliest days in Moscow. The reserved man who kept ‘his own counsel’ is born out in two observations made by Dorothy Padmore after his death. She wrote that ‘George was a modest man who shunned publicity.’¹¹⁰ She also noted that even though she had been his partner for nearly twenty years, he ‘was so unforthcoming about his life before I met him that I have only the vaguest ideas of what occurred.’¹¹¹ As his friends noticed, Padmore’s personality allowed both for the lively, bombastic language that ‘incensed’,¹¹² his audience against the injustices he outlined, as well as the quiet tact that kept him, for the most part, on the periphery of public fame.

However, a more negative interpretation of Padmore’s reserved character was offered by the *Washington Post*. This obituary claimed that Padmore ‘looked upon the “masses” as something to be moved around in a game of tactics. He could never have campaigned for office; the views of “ordinary people” bored him.’¹¹³ This criticism rather perceptively recalls Padmore’s earlier private statement that social functions ‘bore me.’¹¹⁴ The reference to his ‘game of tactics’ directly supports the central argument of this thesis – that Padmore was a strategist. However, his activities in Ghana reinforce the fact that he viewed the ‘masses’ as the focal point of strategy; that is, the ones for which the strategy was being thought out rather than the ones who would be manipulated. At the same time, he was clearly not ‘of’ the masses. Just as he

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS/17/10.

¹¹⁰ Dorothy Padmore, ‘On the death of George Padmore,’ undated. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 17.

¹¹¹ Nancy Cunard to Dorothy Padmore, November 1959. Cunard MSS/17/10.

¹¹² ‘His Biography,’ *Ghana Times*, 25 October 1959.

¹¹³ Russell Howe, ‘Africa Owes a Lot to “The Major”’ *Washington Post*, 11 October 1959.

¹¹⁴ George Padmore to Dorothy Brooks, 17 April 1956. Wright MSS/103/1522.

viewed himself above the ‘petty tribal jealousies’ of Africans, his physical appearance distanced him from ‘ordinary people’ in Ghana because of his absorption of English culture. There remains something of the impenetrable in Padmore, with his remarks about attending garden parties and the curt dismissal of bureaucratic procedures. His acerbic remarks and polished exterior led some to describe him in elitist terms.

As in his life, different aspects of Padmore were identified by those with varying agendas. The contrast between his more blatant radicalism before World War II and the moderation that began to appear in the 1950s is shown in two different obituaries. For the author of the *Ghana Times* obituary, Padmore’s articles from the *Gold Coast Spectator* in the 1930s left the impression that his ‘hatred of the whiteman’s domination was so intense that it burned like fire in him.’¹¹⁵ In contrast to this fervent language describing Padmore’s work, *Public Opinion* in Jamaica (which by 1959 unequivocally represented a liberal middle-class agenda), painted Padmore as ‘Cast in the same mold as men like Mahatma Gandhi,’ as a non-violent leader who ‘confined [his battle] to the spoken and written word.’¹¹⁶ This equating of non-violence with the written word is particularly interesting when attributed to Padmore, whose writing was known for its fierce and piercing rhetoric, and especially given the fervent manner in which Padmore had justified his use of ‘violent language’ to Harold Moody in 1939 against the violence of colonialism.

Within the context of this comparison to Gandhi, some rightly celebrated Padmore as a leader of the wider anti-colonialist movement in general. President Nehru grieved the loss of a man he knew while in London to be ‘a brave champion of freedom...for all the people in colonial areas.’¹¹⁷ On 25 September, the Trinidad Cabinet mourned the death of Padmore, ‘a distinguished son of the soil.’¹¹⁸ The *Bermuda Recorder* remembered Padmore first as the ‘world famous Negro journalist.’¹¹⁹ Although this was the only obituary which prioritized his journalism over his other political activities and/or authorship, a tribute by Sam Morris in the *Accra Evening News* succinctly described the value of his journalism to his readers in African newspapers. Of his numerous articles

¹¹⁵ ‘His Biography,’ *Ghana Times*, 25 September 1959.

¹¹⁶ ‘George Padmore,’ *Public Opinion*, 10 October 1959.

¹¹⁷ ‘Nehru Mourns, AEN, 3 October 1959.

¹¹⁸ ‘Cabinet Mourns for George Padmore,’ *Barbados Advocate*, 25 September 1959.

¹¹⁹ ‘Death of Mr George Padmore in London,’ *Bermuda Recorder*, 3 October 1959.

over the years for the *Accra Evening News*, Morris characterized Padmore as ‘the watchdog stationed in London protecting the interest of his brethren in the motherland, Africa.’¹²⁰

All of these remembrances, in one way or another, isolate fragments of who Padmore was – of what he was understood to have represented and achieved in his life. He was a journalist, an author, a man adamantly opposed to colonialism in all its forms and in all its geographical regions. He was tactful in his conversation and his relationships. Consistently placing others at the forefront of movements he organized, he did indeed ‘care little for the glitter of gold and the glamour of titles and court.’¹²¹ He was, as Dorothy Padmore stated, ‘not a man who wanted monuments in his image and his name.’¹²² In many places Padmore has remained quietly, as Dorothy Padmore believes he would have wished, outside the status of the monument. As mentioned, there is no monument in his land of birth and only in June 2011 was a ‘blue plaque’ placed outside 22 Cranleigh Street, London. Yet she believed that a monument should be raised: ‘the only monument which he could have wanted: a new free, independent Ghana, dedicated to the welfare of the common man.’¹²³

7 The tragedy of the colonial subject: towards a new eulogy for George Padmore

The fact that Padmore was ‘so unforthcoming’ about his life to his closest partner, that he made no effort to keep his personal papers,¹²⁴ and that he ignored the multiple urgings of C.L.R. James to write his autobiography, all point to a lack of a sense of ‘importance’ by Padmore himself. Yet in beginning the task of writing his biography, Dorothy Padmore intended ‘to do the job that I think George would have done – an interpretation of an epoch which linked him with the two great movements – Communism and Pan-Africanism.’¹²⁵ In 1993 Ronald Walters published an important book on Pan-Africanism in which he urged historians of the diaspora to consider the ‘contacts’ and ‘linkages’ among Africa and its diaspora not just on an individual level,

¹²⁰ Sam Morris, ‘My Tribute to Late George Padmore,’ *AEN*, 3 October 1959.

¹²¹ ‘George Padmore,’ *Public Opinion*, 10 October 1959.

¹²² Dorothy Padmore, ‘On the death of George Padmore,’ undated. Nkrumah MSS/Howard/154-41, folder 17.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Dorothy Padmore to St. Clair Drake, 3 June 1963. Drake MSS/Schomburg, MG 309, box 8 (103).

¹²⁵ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 20 October 1959. Wright MSS/103/1521.

but as part of movements. He argued that it is ‘very often the movement behind the contact which is important, [and] for the clearest context, the movement must be seen within the various stages of the struggle for community.’¹²⁶ If Dorothy Padmore was correct then, Padmore saw his ‘importance’ not in his own individual achievements, but in the life he had lived historically and socially. This final section will consider the task of writing a biography of Padmore as a historical project, and as a means of embracing both his achievements and his flaws.

In his 2004 book, *Conscripts of Modernity*, Scott suggested a rereading of the 1963 revised edition of C.L.R. James’s classic work, *The Black Jacobins*, as having both Romantic and Tragic literary elements, and argued for a new set of questions to be asked by post-colonial academics. Scott called this new set of questions, ‘the *strategic* point of criticism’¹²⁷ – a term particularly apt for this thesis’s argument about the governing principle of both Padmore’s social and political life. For Scott, ‘what is at stake’ in the study of colonialism ‘is not whether the colonized accommodated or resisted but how colonial power transformed the ground on which accommodation or resistance was possible in the first place.’ This thesis has shown, for example, that the attempts to subvert Padmore’s work as Soviet propaganda altered Padmore’s position in relation to the British and colonial authorities, and thus shifted the parameters in which he was viewed and through which he could work.

Scott uses the historical moment of Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), as well as the two moments of James’s writing *The Black Jacobins* (published in 1938) and his revised edition in 1963, to emphasize how the key individuals that shaped these moments (the first successful slave revolt and the ending of colonialism in the West Indies and Africa) formulated their actions based in very specific historical contexts. Scott’s argument is that James’s 1963 version of Toussaint Louverture turned the narrative away from its fundamentally Romantic arc, the arc of confrontation and overcoming, and added an element of the tragic. Scott’s description of what James was doing in the last chapter of *The Black Jacobins* bears quoting at length since it highlights the importance of Toussaint’s socio-historical context to his actions, and echoes what has been argued in this thesis.

¹²⁶ Walters, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora*, 41.

¹²⁷ Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 123. Emphasis in original.

Toussaint, James insists, was always a realist. But the reality that mattered to him, the idea of emancipation to which he was committed, was at odds with the constraining forces of an old form of life that had, partially at least, made him who he was. The paralyzing collision between his aspiration and his conditions, therefore, was not external to him...This is why the alternatives with which he was confronted – France with enslavement or freedom without France – were neither alternatives of his choosing nor alternatives between which he could choose. They were, in short, *tragic* alternatives. Each involved giving up values that were, for him, fundamental – that is, nonexchangeable and unexpungeable – commitments.¹²⁸

The tragedy of Toussaint Louverture's dilemma (which Scott argues James suggested in the revised edition) was that for Toussaint, 'the problem of emancipation was not merely a problem of ending slavery...Rather, the problem of emancipation entailed also – and simultaneously – the project of imagining and constructing a sustainable freedom within new forms of life. Freedom, in other words, had to have both a negative and positive moment.'¹²⁹ Although Padmore wrote and thought seriously about the past and future of black peoples, he did not live to experience the tragedy of West Indian independence that, as Scott argues, influenced James's addition in 1963 of a tragic element to Toussaint Louverture's story. Padmore also did not embark on the immense project James undertook to study literature and Greek tragedy – a project Scott shows was essential to James's revised edition. It is not possible, then, to impose upon Padmore the same tragic interpretation of emancipatory politics that James conveyed. Instead, Padmore can be seen to be caught up in the moment of colonial independence, like Toussaint, knowing that the moment required both a negative and a positive movement. Padmore's work with Nkrumah, and particularly his reasons for moving to Ghana and engaging in post-independence politics was an obvious commitment to the idea of a positive moment of freedom as well as the overcoming of a negative.

Interpreting Padmore's anti-colonial mission as a tragic one helps to explain the more ambivalent, self-questioning period of the 1950s for Padmore; for in the tragic narrative, 'the rhythm is more tentative, its direction less determinative, more recursive, and its meaning less transparent.'¹³⁰ Tragedy recognizes the dilemma of human ideals and ambition against the constraints of history, and of human weakness and frailty in facing that dilemma. Padmore faced a similar 'insurmountable conundrum' to Toussaint – the

¹²⁸ Ibid, 133.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 135.

conundrum of achieving emancipation, and then fashioning a new and free society out of decades of degradation and oppression – once colonial independence became a possibility. Here we come back to the importance James placed on Padmore as a *West Indian*. Scott argues that the birth of a Caribbean people, exiled from Africa and formed on the modern slave plantation, meant that ‘there was no *before* slavery to return to’,¹³¹ after the end of slavery, and thus new futures had to be imagined. It is possible that because of Padmore’s peculiarly ‘modern’ position as a West Indian, he only conceived of an African future whose social structure moved forward, in modernity and away from a ‘tribal’ orientation. His vision was of something entirely new – something that would expunge both the colonial and the pre-colonial past. For him, there could be no other alternative. He had been inspired by the ideals of Marxism and in his bid to create an entirely new Africa demonstrated his commitment to this inspiration and, simultaneously, his forgetfulness of another Marxian principle – that history is always a part of the present. As Kwame Botwe-Asamoah put it, the colonial legacy ‘is much more difficult to overcome than the anti-colonial struggle.’¹³²

The point of viewing Padmore as a tragic figure is not that he did not appreciate this fact, but that he did – and was constrained by the dilemma between economic necessity (ie in Ghana, building a socialist society on their own terms), or political freedom (Nkrumah’s increasing willingness to silence any and all opposition and place himself as the sole figurehead). Confronted by animosity to Nkrumah’s independence project by Africans both within and outside Ghana, as well as the smug cynicism of British and American diplomats, he remained committed to Nkrumah despite his own misgivings. As he searched for the best strategy for independence, his private remarks show that he was less sure of himself, more tentative in his ideas of pan-Africanism. He did not place importance upon the spectacle of celebrating Ghanaian independence, but in the difficult project of building an independent future – a project, he admitted, that was not entirely clear. Despite the fact that he did not describe the historical moment of independence as either Romantic or Tragic, clearly the narrative arc of Romantic overcoming was not the one Padmore wanted to focus upon. Instead, his hopes to forge a new Africa that would overcome both its colonial and ‘tribal’ past, bore the mark of

¹³¹ Ibid, 164.

¹³² Asamoah, *Kwame Nkrumah’s Politico-Cultural Thought and Policies*, xi.

the tragic dilemma of one committed to ideals created from his particular place in the modern world, yet constrained by that society to carry those ideas through.

Conclusion

It is impossible to conclusively assess the extent of Padmore's influence upon Nkrumah and his political 'power' because of the limited sources available. His activities reveal that he was primarily involved, as in the rest of his political career, in the tasks of organizing. He planned and promoted the African conferences in Ghana in 1958, arranged housing and welfare for African dissidents, and mentored young CPP supporters in NASSO. Although he headed an office on African Affairs, he expressed frustration at being sidelined in diplomatic communication by Foreign Affairs. Yet he also was present at cabinet meetings and was believed to have a close line to Nkrumah. Nkrumah certainly held power, but Padmore had influence. This influence was viewed as the greatest stage of his power by some African nationalists and, importantly, by his first biographer. His 'power' in Ghana, then, remains a contentious theme.

This chapter reads as a departure from other chapters of the thesis, bringing an abrupt ending to a life so rich in experiences. His sudden death at the end of 1959, on the cusp of the rapid collapse of colonial regimes across Africa and at the age of 55, was 'before its time' in more than one way. At the end of the funeral and ceremonies for Padmore, Dorothy Padmore made a poignant declaration to Richard Wright which began this chapter. Personally, she had just lost her life partner and the simple sentence – 'I am sad' – is a powerful evocation of that loss.¹³³ She believed Padmore to be important; a 'great man,' whose mortality now appeared to diminish that greatness such that his effort and commitment 'boil[ed] down to so little.' Her assessment of the value of Padmore's life has been crucial in this chapter to gaining a glimpse into how Padmore viewed his life and his work, his position at the 'epoch' of two great movements. Her confession to Wright about Padmore's significance is also a touching conclusion to the discussion of Padmore's 'importance.' Although he did not witness European imperial disintegration in Africa, his numerous books on Africa, his role in organizing two major Pan-African Congresses, and his position in Ghana at the time of his death, meant that

¹³³ Dorothy Padmore to Richard Wright, 31 October 1959. Wright MSS/103/1521.

he was celebrated firstly for his work on Africa. Yet the problem with Padmore's memorialization as an 'African' or as a 'father of African liberation' is that it eclipses Padmore's other numerous accomplishments. A final assessment must include all of his work.

Conclusion

As a member of a minority group – living, that is, in England – he has paid most careful attention to the weaknesses of his adversaries. It is important that he acquires a perfect knowledge of their defects; for it is from their defects that they derive their way of seeing him. He will then proceed to offer the self which they are looking for; and each self changes with the white need and the white situation which he wants to exploit or embrace him.¹

After all that has just been said, it will be understood that the first impulse of the black man is to say *no* to those who attempt to build a definition of him.²

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.³

In the introduction to Gilroy's seminal text, *The Black Atlantic*, he asks how the 'doubleness' articulated by Du Bois and Wright influenced the execution of political movements by black people to end racial oppression and establish independence.⁴ In Padmore's case, his hyper-sensitivity to audience and image translated into considered, pragmatic political strategy that imbued his leadership of the anti-colonial, black resistance movement, from the dawn of fascism in Europe to the twilight of British imperialism in Africa. Padmore's location of himself within a particular time and place, as noted at the end of the last chapter, is the first evidence that he possessed what Mills has termed 'the sociological imagination'.⁵ Although always trapped, to a certain extent, within 'the private orbits' in which he lived, Padmore also managed to distinguish between 'the personal troubles of milieu' and 'the public issues of social structure'.⁶ His life holds meaning beyond a single individual because of his own awareness and attempt to reorder the social, economic, and political structures that governed the lives of all races at the time, but also because he was a product of these structures. Studying him reveals more for historians about late imperial Britain and its unraveling from within.

¹ Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile*, 87.

² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 23.

³ Mills, *Sociological Imagination*, 3.

⁴ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 30.

⁵ Mills notes that 'The first fruit of this imagination...is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within this period.' Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 5.

⁶ Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, 3; 8.

This thesis has offered a new interpretation of the life and importance of George Padmore. It has also shown that Padmore's political praxis provides tools for new interpretations of the history of the 'black diaspora,' the British Empire, the Cold War, and decolonization. It does so, first, by comparing Padmore's early life in the West Indies as part of a West Indian intellectual tradition first analyzed by C.L.R. James. It shows that the Caribbean left its mark on Padmore in important ways that were evident through to the end of his life in Ghana, but that the colonial experience in the West Indies formed only the possibility of a common type rather than a hybrid imperial history. Second, by demonstrating Padmore's extensive journalism in West Indian and West African newspapers it has contributed significant detail towards showing that Padmore widened the print journalism 'nexus' which Von Eschen argues was the vehicle for imagining the African diaspora in the 1930s and 1940s.⁷ Third, by analyzing the dialogue between Padmore and other prominent black men from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States, it suggests that historians should consider this group's often blunt, critical communication not as a unique tension but as part of a vibrant community of debate between individuals who did not mediate their discussion through the anxious tensions of race. It thus restores the complex tensions of race to a prominent position in the history of the British Empire and decolonization. Fourth, in examining the relationship between Padmore and colonial administrators in the early Cold War, it reminds historians that in these uncertain years, deciphering how to employ the new world power alliances to advantage involved a good deal of guesswork on both sides. Finally, by privileging the voice of an individual who has received widespread recognition for his anti-colonial work yet little specific attention in the process of British decolonization in Africa, it recognizes the contribution of Padmore to the creation of a new climate which exposed, at every turn, the farcical nature of a liberal British Empire. By emphasizing Padmore's 'pragmatic anti-imperialism' it shows that the rising tide of anticolonialism and anti-racism in the 1930s and 1940s should be considered as a turning point not just in harnessing a new *mood* or *feeling* of unity, but primarily as one that viewed Empire, racism, and economic degradation as part of a *system* which fundamentally required the application of *strategy* to their destruction.

⁷ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 8; 14-16.

George Padmore, the ‘left,’ and the practice of anti-imperial politics

In 1955, Padmore praised the political statesmanship of one of the most well known imperial apologists, Winston Churchill, whom Ronald Hyam has called ‘the quintessential pragmatist.’⁸ This thesis has shown that Padmore should be considered (with a twist of irony), in similar terms: as one whose pragmatic outlook constantly informed his network and the ways he represented ideas and events to particular audiences. However, it has also shown that alongside Padmore’s pragmatism, there was also a clear bottom line. In his 1949 book, *Africa: Britain’s Third Empire*, Padmore declared himself to be ‘a life-long Anti-Imperialist.’⁹ In making this statement, Padmore was quite clear in what it meant to be an ‘Anti-Imperialist,’ without compromise, for his entire life. Breaking with the main emphasis of Lenin and Hobson, Padmore declared his work to be ‘an indictment of a *social* system – Imperialism.’¹⁰ George Padmore’s life brings together the politics of the ‘left,’ theories of imperialism and strategies of anti-imperialism in dynamic ways.

Padmore’s work for the Comintern between 1929 and 1934 was an essential phase in his career. He demonstrated an impressive capacity for correspondence and for the daily tasks of organizing. These ultimately served to establish ‘George Padmore’ at the centre of black radical activism and a world movement of anti-imperialism. He was a focal point for transmitting knowledge. Yet Padmore’s personal leadership and ‘independent’ initiative was not welcomed by his comrades in the CP. Their reluctant assistance (or failure to assist at all in some cases) led to conflict between Padmore and his comrades which held under the surface the tensions of race. From the deterioration of relations between Padmore and his CP comrades between 1929-1934, to the trauma of his arrest and deportation, to the public attacks by former comrades in the communist press, to his precarious position in the second half of the 1930s, this decade was undeniably active and inspiring for Padmore, but it can also be characterized as painful. The relations between Padmore and his white and black communist comrades show that in attempting to forge both a strong, militant, aware black community that could put an

⁸ Hyam, *Understanding the British Empire*, 336.

⁹ Padmore, *Africa: Britain’s Third Empire*, 9. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Ibid.

end to racist, imperialist exploitation, and a multi-racial community of international workers, the limits of geographical and racial experience proved destructive.

When Padmore moved to London, he found his closest ally to be the Independent Labour Party (ILP), whose anti-Stalinist, pro-Soviet orientation fit well with his own beliefs at the time. His relationship with this organization shows that he was still very much ideologically committed to some of the basic doctrines he had learned in the Soviet Union. General historiographical texts (with the exception of Stephen Howe's *Anticolonialism in British Politics*) on decolonization, have either underestimated or underprivileged the importance of the European left in sustaining an anti-colonial discourse during the interwar period. Padmore is one of the best examples of this intersection, whose activity spanned the birth of anticolonial nationalism from the 'Wilsonian Moment' to the 'Winds of Change' in Africa.

Indeed, one of the most valuable steps forward in Cold War scholarship has been the very recent argument that study of the Cold War should take a much longer view than the typical post-1946 consensus.¹¹ Deighton has argued that 'anti-Communism and anti-Soviet thinking were already firmly part of the British cultural landscape in the 1940s' and shows that these were linked to debates both about fascism and Britain's empire in the 1930s.¹² When Padmore moved to London in 1935, he quickly came under surveillance by London Metropolitan Police's Special Branch. Padmore was one of many individuals in Britain in the interwar period who had ties to the communist movement, and was involved in campaigns both against European fascism and British imperialism. He was not the only one. How did such a double threat play itself out in 1930s Britain? This could prove a valuable arena of study for historians of Britain, Empire, and the Cold War that go well beyond the scope of this study. What is important here is to note how Padmore's own experience supports these arguments that Cold War historiography should begin to consider a longer view of the experience of 'East-West' tensions.

¹¹ One of the most important of these is Antony Best, "'We are virtually at war with Russia': Britain and the Cold War in East Asia, 1923-1940,' *Cold War History* (online, forthcoming articles) doi: 10.1080/14682745.2011.569436

¹² Deighton, 'Britain and the Cold War, 1945-1955,' 115.

Anti-imperialism during the interwar period has received significant renewed attention in the last decade. In particular, the transnational connection of anticolonial activists has been emphasized,¹³ and even presented as ‘the first genuinely global intellectual exchange.’¹⁴ These arguments have been a response to the generally accepted view noted by Hopkins that the period from 1914-1950 was an era of ‘deglobalization.’¹⁵ These interwar studies give credence to Harper’s argument that despite the remarkable closing up of nineteenth century globalizing practices, ‘globalist currents’ resurfaced particularly ‘in periods of challenge to the international order.’¹⁶ Despite the closing of borders and some trade, challenges to the ‘world system’ retained their global network in terms of transferring ideas. Pennybacker’s study of Padmore and other activists who addressed racial politics draws attention to the wide geography of campaigns which converged in London and usually involved organizations led by socialists and communists. Padmore’s politics, Pennybacker highlights, were part of a larger discourse that ‘condemn[ed] imperialism and fascism in the same breath.’¹⁷ London became the meeting point for these activists because the running of Britain’s empire made the issues of racism and fascism so acute. Padmore’s continued ideological orientation toward Marxism, and his primary affiliation within the debates of the British left fundamentally shaped his ideas about imperialism, racism, and the strategy of anti-imperialism. His fundamental belief in the 1930s was that *economic* change was the primary goal and that without it, political and social change could not be achieved.

But in 1945, Padmore’s initiative was captured by the potential of a post-war momentum that saw a more articulate awareness by colonial peoples of their condition. In Padmore’s consistent articulation of immediate self-government, he formed a part of a key group of nationalists and anti-colonialists, including Gandhi, who rejected the nineteenth century colonial view of ‘developmental time,’ or a ‘stagist view of history’ and replaced ‘the structure of “not yet” in their imagination’ with ‘the horizon of “now”’.¹⁸ He utilized his networks (shown to have been cultivated in chapter four) among numerous anticolonial groups to encourage unity in this momentum. These

¹³ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*; Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*; Whittall, ‘Creolizing London.’

¹⁴ Adas, ‘Contested Hegemonies,’ 61.

¹⁵ Hopkins, ‘The History of Globalization – and the Globalization of History,’ 35-36.

¹⁶ Harper, ‘Empire, Diaspora, and the Languages of Globalism, 1850-1914,’ 165-166.

¹⁷ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 13.

¹⁸ Chkrabarty, ‘Subaltern History as Political Thought,’ 209.

networks now became even more significant as he worked to connect disparate anti-colonial movements in solidarity with each other, and as he utilized his contacts on the British left (who now had a place in Parliament), to lobby the Government. Most importantly, he harnessed his skills as a journalist and his publishing connections to print the materials of the Pan-African Congress, to publish two very contentious books, and to significantly expand his journalism in West African newspapers.

The banning of his books and the suppression of his journalism demonstrate that by studying anti-colonial activists like Padmore, we expand our understanding of how the early tensions of the Cold War impacted the running of the Empire. As colonial administrators and anti-colonialists alike began to utilize the rhetoric of the Cold War to their advantage, they each also operated in a space of contention – where both were attempting to read the mood and interpret each other's statements in the midst of a very ambiguous ideological space. Padmore was not entirely confident in how to represent his politics and, in particular, his relationship to the Soviet Union. British officials struggled to understand the Soviet threat to its Empire in 1946 and 1947, and to place Padmore on a 'side.' That historians still insist that the Cold War overshadows our vision of those who tried to project a life outside this system of power relations,¹⁹ only compounds the point that for these individuals at the time, properly articulating and enacting this vision was laden with difficulty. If with the benefit of hindsight and, indeed, knowledge of how the dominant ideological worldviews of both European imperialism and the Cold War would end, we still have trouble comprehending how these ideologies functioned in practice, it was infinitely more fraught for those caught in their web.

Padmore's Marxism remained evident in his political ideas in two ways: firstly, by his own admittance in 1956, Marxism 'provides a rational explanation for a good deal that would otherwise be unintelligible';²⁰ secondly, by his plans for Gold Coast economic independence during the 1950s. Yet unlike Richard Wright, Padmore did not write in any detail after 1935 about his split from the Communist Party. Wright has become the principal figure of black criticisms of the communist movement celebrated for his

¹⁹ Mark Philip Bradley, 'Decolonization, the global South, and the Cold War, 1919-1962' in Leffler, and Westad, eds. *Cambridge History of the Cold War, volume I: Origins*, 465.

²⁰ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, xvi.

‘tragic’ honesty in *The God That Failed*,²¹ and preserved by Paul Gilroy in 1993 as a ‘sophisticated and perceptive critic of Marxism and of the communist movement of his time.’²² Padmore’s reticence to consistently renounce the Communist Party publicly has meant that he has not attained similar renown: it is much more difficult to track his personal critique of the communist movement. His most directly overt critique of Communism is found in one brief paragraph of the Author’s Note to *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, which criticized the inflexibility of doctrinaire Communism that could not fully address the African context, yet demanded complete loyalty to a fluctuating party line.²³

This thesis takes seriously Pennybacker’s request not to ‘disentangle’ the post-war histories of ‘decolonization’ and ‘decline of Empire’ from the interwar era.²⁴ Indeed, by studying Padmore’s whole life this thesis has shown the ways in which these two apparently different periods, coalesce. Picking up on the questions asked in the introduction about the implications for anti-colonial resistance of viewing the British Empire either as a monolithic structure or as Darwin’s ‘world system,’ we see an undeniable ambivalence in Padmore’s politics during the 1950s. He maintained an affinity for the idea of the ‘masses’ and the power of popular protest, yet increasingly presented independence as a negotiation which Britain ultimately controlled. This ambivalence is a useful example of the experience of those who carried with them their encounter of leftist politics in the interwar period, into the era of decolonization. The failure of the left to win the argument against appeasement and to lead the resistance to fascism haunted the politics of ‘negotiation’ in the 1950s. In the 1950s Padmore’s ideology was a bit more tentative; his representation of the power and agency held by Africans less forceful; and his tactic of presenting independence either as a negotiation or as a demand, less assured.

While his years working for the Comintern are perhaps the greatest cause for his celebrity, they were also the first evidence that his leadership did not require his face and name at center stage. In setting out the programme of his new organization in 1936, the IASB, it is clear that Padmore believed his position to be that of an intermediary,

²¹ Crossman, Introduction to *The God That Failed*, 15.

²² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 151.

²³ Padmore, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, xvi.

²⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 13.

transmitting ideas and fostering networks between the colonies and Britain. Padmore placed teaching at the centre of his political praxis: in his correspondence with black workers and middle class ‘colonials’ while working for the Comintern; in his debates about military strategy during World War II; in his advisory role to Nkrumah in the 1950s; and his mentoring of NASSO and young CPP loyalists after 1957. While the majority of his network was geographically based between West Africa, the Caribbean, the United States, and Europe, it also included individuals from China, Vietnam, Burma, India, and Norway. His dialogue was certainly a global exchange. Given the current historiographical fascination with the dynamic between imperial ‘core’ and ‘periphery,’²⁵ the prolonged neglect of Padmore in the history of British decolonization is surprising. Padmore’s intermediary role provides valuable insight into the way this relationship functioned simultaneously within ardent ideological principles *and* strategic necessity.

Given Padmore’s combined pragmatism and anti-imperialism, it seems he might easily fit into Owen’s argument that what constituted ‘anti-imperialism’ in any given instance was ‘contentious.’²⁶ Padmore’s political activism engaged with the party political system and harnessed the processes of government to its cause; however, it also clearly remained on the fringes of that system. Padmore’s life thus challenges Owen’s conclusion that because critics of Empire had to ‘harness their cause to the party system’ this resulted in a ‘bending and reshaping’ of anti-imperialism in order to appeal to official politics.²⁷ Padmore’s life was spent attacking the purported liberalism of empire as a sham. When fascism rose in Europe, he pointed out that black people from Mississippi to Africa had as much liberty ‘as the Jews enjoy in Hitler’s Germany.’²⁸ When the British Labour Party came to power in 1945, he exposed the hypocrisy of their support for Empire against their previous promises, and identified resource extraction as the exploitative intention of colonial development policy. Contrasting the peaceful negotiation of independence in the Gold Coast with the brutal suppression of Mau Mau in Kenya, he placed the blame for violence squarely at the feet of the imperialists and the nature of the system they perpetuated. He held up a mirror to late

²⁵ See for example Dussel, ‘The “World-System”: Europe as “Center” and its “Periphery” beyond Eurocentrism,’ 97-120.

²⁶ Owen, ‘Critics of Empire in Britain,’ 188.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 191.

²⁸ Padmore, ‘The Negro Faces the War,’ *Workers Age*, 23 December 1939

imperial Britain and expressed what ‘outsiders’ saw. ‘Anti-imperialism,’ for Padmore, was not contentious. He manipulated his identity and bent his networks but in his ideological understanding of imperialism and the position of people of colour within this system, he was clear. Imperialism *was* exploitation. It was also, however, a powerful idea. Thus public solidarity among all black peoples, whether they disagreed in practice or not, was essential.

George Padmore and racial politics

George Padmore died without having witnessed the accomplishment to which he had dedicated his life – the liberation of the African continent from European colonial rule. Richard Wright, with whom he shared his hopes and fears for a decade and a half, followed him to an early grave just over one year later. Frantz Fanon, a fellow Caribbean intellectual, died in 1961 as did one of the African freedom fighters Padmore supported while in Ghana, Patrice Lumumba. W.E.B. Du Bois, the main progenitor of the Pan-African Congresses, died just five years before his centenary, in 1963. As C.L.R. James emphasized, George Padmore was part of a particular community of remarkable men. These individuals may not all have been in close contact, may not all have espoused the same ideas and ideologies. But something linked them. This thesis has argued for a very careful reading of the similarities and differences between the leaders of black resistance in the first half of the twentieth century. It has pointed out Padmore’s unique qualities, while also trying to be attentive not only to ‘visible and narrative data’ but also to the ‘unanticipated codes’ and ‘genealogies we can but imperfectly trace.’²⁹ How Padmore ‘fit’ into the history of the black diaspora reveals just as much about the peoples and the leaders of black resistance as they do about Padmore.

Firstly, as Chapter One demonstrated, Padmore’s West Indian upbringing fostered a particular kind of legacy within what C.L.R. James has argued was the mark of a West Indian intellectual tradition. This recalled the memories of slavery and fed into a powerful rhetoric of moral and intellectual opposition to empire. Padmore’s persistent argument against imperialism was grounded in a West Indian tradition of voicing

²⁹ Burton, ‘New Narratives of imperial politics in the nineteenth century,’ 229.

opposition to injustice and exploitation. As he reminded his readers in the epigraph to *How Britain Rules Africa*, he was not a slave: his writing was an act of defiance against the slavery of his ancestors. As discussed in Chapter Seven, this memory of slavery then had consequences for how Padmore envisioned a new life after the end of European colonial rule in Africa. He was committed to building new nations that eschewed the ‘tribal’ aspects of their past and adhered to the ideals of racial unity and socially planned economies. Padmore’s ‘West Indianess’ also created conflict with African nationalists because of his fluid notion of nationality. As shown in the first chapter, the border crossing so typically undertaken in the Caribbean meant that these ‘remarkable West Indian men’ were shaped by the idea of movement and the ability to cross national boundaries. This movement, for Padmore, also meant that his move to the United States rather than the ‘mother country,’ to train for a profession rather than for intellectual aspirations, shaped his ideology and political praxis in unique ways.

Secondly though, Padmore was of a new generation of black men and women who began to clearly see and forcefully articulate their condition within dominant structures of power that, they argued, shaped all of society. In his 1940 autobiography, *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois admitted that early in his life, he had not been able to see the damage of these structures: ‘my criticism was confined to the relation of my people to the world movement. I was not questioning the world movement in itself. What the white world was doing, its goals and ideals, I had not doubted were quite right.’³⁰ Padmore and his colleague’s were of a later generation which *started* from an awareness that the white world was not all it should be and that this might very well be the major cause of its exploitative, racist practices towards non-European peoples. They were, then, able to take their analysis further and engage with the white world’s ideologies in different ways.

Their critique also, importantly, attempted to engage not just with the white population in power and with the black bourgeoisie, but also with the ‘black masses.’ Padmore learned, while in Hamburg, to work with the network of colonial seamen to disperse ideas as widely as possible. He wrote for labour newspapers in the West Indies, and when he went to West Africa in the 1950s, targeted his speeches to trade unions, student

³⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, quoted in Zamir, *Dark Voices*, 2.

organizations, and community meetings. Future scholarship can continue to unearth the impact of the ideas of Padmore and his colleagues on everyday lives, since as Alexander and Halpern argue, ‘within the vast domain of modern capitalism and empires’ communities are never ‘impervious to the teachings of bourgeois reformers and radicals alike.’³¹

Padmore’s journalistic career could provide one starting point. Raymond Betts argues that ‘the pace of decolonization...was in some measure a function of a time of rapid communications in which words and images reached far and arrived swiftly, “impacting”...a large audience.³² Padmore’s connection to fledgling newspapers in West Africa began when he was leader of the ITUCNW. His aid in launching the *Gold Coast Spectator* demonstrates the important link between communist organizations and the colonial bourgeoisie which, as Von Eschen wrote when describing the Black British community in the 1930s, ‘transcended personal and ideological differences.’³³ Padmore then became ‘the most influential journalist writing on the strikes in the Caribbean,’³⁴ and his articles were a key contribution to the Trinidadian labour newspapers *The People* and *The Vanguard* and then the Jamaican *Public Opinion* in the 1930s and 1940s. The reprinting of articles between, for example, Nnamdi Azikiwe’s *West African Pilot*, West Indian labour newspapers, and African American newspapers was an essential way of transmitting information as well as expressing solidarity. The newspapers of the 1930s through the 1950s were, I would argue, an essential communication line across the African diaspora that deserves greater study. They are an important reminder that while the confrontations and collaborations that occurred in the metropolis’s of London, Paris, and New York were important, much more work needs to be done to determine how individuals utilized the media, the longer networks of the post and even word of mouth, to speak *across* space and distance to foster a community of dissidence.

Physical appearance, image and its powerful influence, were often carefully cultivated by Padmore. He could be brash and opinionated at particular times, but he could also be reserved and careful. The appearance of either of these personas often depended

³¹ Alexander and Halpern, *Racializing Class, Classifying Race*, 12.

³² Betts, *Decolonization*, 39.

³³ Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 12.

³⁴ Ibid, 15.

upon the presence of race in the relationship. In his privately harsh criticism of Kenyatta in 1932, with James in the 1940s, and Abrahams in the 1950s, there existed no front, no veil that sometimes appeared in Padmore's public relations with all races.

In summarizing the importance of Leopold Senghor, one of the most important individuals in the *Negritude* movement, Cooper argued that although Senghor faced the complexity of being both 'African' and 'European', ultimately, '*in between*' is as much a place to be at home as any other.³⁵ Padmore's life shows that it was certainly possible to live 'in between,' and indeed this could furnish individuals with a certain motivation. However, it also shows the hindrances placed on these individuals' capacity to act precisely because they were seen to occupy, and/or saw themselves as occupying, this position. Padmore himself judged harshly those Africans and West Indians who acted 'more British than the Queen.'³⁶ As he became more involved in the politics of the Gold Coast/Ghana in the 1950s, his status as a 'West Indian' and a 'detribalized African' became an easy criticism. Padmore contemplated these labels as he questioned his role in African liberation movements.

Putting Padmore in black and white: biography and the 'identity' of its subject

What has been the purpose in examining Padmore through a number of different 'identities' or 'labels'? Why has this structured and filled the body of this thesis? If it were to simply point out that Padmore had many identities, that he was multi-faceted, then this would be a rather boring conclusion and a poor attempt at biographical writing. All human beings are complex. The task of a biography is to illuminate the unique qualities of the individual and the times in which they lived, and to think about how these two factors shape history and our understanding of humanity.

Harper argues that historians should adopt 'a *diasporic* perspective on identities, links, and flows in a global context.' Like Cooper, he used as his example an individual who he noted did not see his own fragmentary identity as in any way providing 'hesitation in his loyalties' nor did the ambiguities in his life explain his changing ideas.³⁷ This latter

³⁵ Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection,' 1539.

³⁶ Padmore, 'Unitary Government Versus Federal Government,' AS, 30 September 1954.

³⁷ Harper, 'Empire, Diaspora, and the Languages of Globalism,' 152.

argument is also true of Padmore. Yet what exactly a ‘diasporic perspective on identities’ is, remains unclear. In Padmore’s case, his experience of a multiple diasporic identity did cause him to question his involvement in African nationalism during the 1950s. What Padmore’s life reinforces is that historians still need to consider the history of identity in diasporas, contextualized by time and place. Padmore diverged from his colleague’s in important ways. He did not have James’s culturally analytical eye, nor Williams’ intellectual desire for greatness. He had neither’s long-term connection to the West Indies. Colonial exploitation drew different reactions from different people across the colonized world and caused individuals to draw on different influences to form varied solutions to, even sometimes, the same situation.

There is one aspect of Padmore’s identity which was not isolated in a specific chapter but was nevertheless a major ‘signifier’ of who Padmore was: an activist. Padmore’s MI5 file, had it survived, would have doubtlessly provided greater evidence for Padmore’s direct, ‘on the ground’ activism through rallies, protests, and lobbying. Despite this loss, this thesis has shown that Padmore was, in practice, in permanent activism mode. When he addressed CPP supporters in Ghana in the 1950s, he did so effortlessly because of two decades of experience of public speaking at meetings and rallies in Britain. He articulated the principles that he had carefully thought out as a writer in books and newspapers, and he did so tirelessly. He was extremely hardworking, methodical, and unceasing in his efforts. Pounding away on his typewriter, meeting with all types of colonial activists to offer advice and educate them in the ideology and strategies of anti-imperialism, or dashing to the office of a Member of Parliament in order to bring them a colonial issue, Padmore was relentless. In the end, he even neglected his own health in favour of travel and organizing for African unity.

Brian Alleyne’s important study of black activism in Britain centered on the circle of individuals who founded and continue to run New Beacon Books and the George Padmore Institute in London. Alleyne concludes that Padmore was unique among his Caribbean contemporaries such as James and Williams because he was ‘foremost an activist.’ Padmore’s activism, Alleyne contends, is ‘one of the most important aspects

of Padmore as a model for the praxis of the New Beacon circle.³⁸ In the course of Alleyne's research, he listened to dozens of speeches by John La Rose, the circles' nexus, in which La Rose 'always t[ook] the opportunity to say a few words about the life of George Padmore. Padmore's internationalist, socialist, and anti-colonialist outlook [we]re publicly evoked by John La Rose as a model of activist praxis.' The Institute in London where this group 'have placed their hopes and efforts for the continuation of much of their activist work' is named after Padmore.³⁹ The George Padmore Institute remains an important hive of activity for black activism in London. Thus notwithstanding the contention made in the last chapter that Padmore was most prominently memorialized as a 'father of Pan-Africanism' in Ghana, his life continues to be evoked in Britain as a model for black activism.

Hall has argued that identity is not just plural, but fluid - a process. Scott argues that according to Stuart, that process is always undertaken within relations of power, 'in relation to institutions, apparatuses, and disciplines that position the self in *structured* ways, in relations of inclusion/exclusion.'⁴⁰ It will be clear now that, in this thesis, while particular 'identities' were the focal point for chronological, temporally based chapters, each identity was always present, shifting its meaning slightly as it moved from background to foreground, and back again. Quite often, these shifts had to do with structural conditions and, usually, Padmore's interpretation of these conditions. He was a 'communist' at a moment when the international communist movement retained significant revolutionary clout as an anti-racist, anti-colonial organization and when his personal intellectual development was convinced of the validity of the ideology and, more importantly, its representatives. He was a 'communist' once again, after 1945, for colonial administrators who sought to exclude him from legitimate discourse by utilizing the structures of Cold War power relations. He was an 'African' when recruiting young Africans to that international communist movement, or when harnessing the enthusiasm of 1945 into a vocal pan-African movement. He was a West Indian during the Labour Revolts of the 1930s, and he was both a 'West Indian' and an 'African' when celebrating and encouraging Ghanaians in their revolution. His journalism included him within a West Indian radical-intellectual tradition. He was

³⁸ Alleyne, *Radicals Against Race*, 138.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 100.

⁴⁰ Scott, 'Stuart Hall's Ethics,' 14.

also, always, an outsider. Restless, principled, convinced that change was possible but that it was also a battle; he set himself up against those who held power and privilege and avoided the temptation of authority or advantage for himself. If Scott is correct that identities ‘are constructed *through* difference,’⁴¹ then Padmore’s life provides an illustrative and inspiring example indeed.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Appendix One: Newspaper and Journal Articles by George Padmore¹

Accra Evening News

George Padmore, 'Sierra Leone Politicians in London,' 1 May 1952.

---- 'Seretse Khama Tells London Meeting "I am Not Bitter, But Frustrated,"' 3 May 1952.

George Padmore, Our London Correspondent, 'Constitutional Reform for Jamaica,' 6 May 1952.

---- 'Africans Boycott Central African Federation Conference in London,' 8 May 1952.

---- 'London Conference Discusses Gold Coast Aluminium Project,' 4 June 1952.

---- 'Party System Linchpin of Political Democracy,' 7 June 1952.

---- 'West Indian Lady Appointed Private Secretary to Gold Coast Prime Minister,' 12 June 1052.

---- 'A Comparative Study of "Bloodless" Revolution in Gold Coast and Constitutional Advances in the New Asian Dominions,' 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21,23 June 1952.

---- Dictatorship Laws In East Africa Criticised: Nationalist Movement in Kenya Suppressed,' 14 October 1952.

---- 'Premier's SG Move Called Statesmanlike in London,' 27 October 1952.

---- 'Gold Coast Judge Named Candidate for Mau Mau Enquiry,' 27 October 1952.

---- 'Crisis in East Africa: Jomo Kenyatta Exiled,' 28 October 1952.

---- 'Archbishop of Canterbury Says Africans Losing Faith In Their White Rulers,' 29 October 1952.

---- 'MPs Goodwill Mission to Kenya: English and West Indian Lawyers To Defend African Terrorists,' 3 November 1952.

---- 'Gold Coast Dollar Earnings Saving Britain from Bankruptcy,' 5 November 1952.

---- 'Kenya Whites Threaten MPs,' 7 November 1952.

---- 'Jomo Kenyatta: "Burning Spear" of East African Nationalism,' 8 November 1952.

---- 'Socialist Lawyer Who Gave Away a Fortune,' 15 November 1952.

---- 'Race Relations And Colonial Affairs: New Important Psychological Factor,' 19 November 1952.

---- 'British Nurse Leaves Legacy to Fight Colour Bar: Rev Michael Scott Appointed Trustee,' 25 November 1952.

---- 'Zulu Appointed Professor,' 3 December 1952.

---- 'Gold Coast Ministers Protest Against Repression in Kenya,' 8 December 1952.

---- 'First Black Ambassador in London,' 16 December 1952.

---- 'British MPs Protest To US Against Treatment of Colonial Political Leaders,' 30 December 1952.

---- 'Dominion Status Or Greatest Constitutional Crisis: A Review of 1952 & Forecast For 1953,' 9 January 1953.

---- 'Commonwealth Economic Conference Reveals Exploitation of Colonies,' 10 January 1953.

¹ This list is intended as a comprehensive list of Padmore's journalism primarily in colonial newspapers, which formed a major part of the research for this thesis. It is hoped that it will be useful for other historians in the future. It does *not* include articles from the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Amsterdam News (New York)*, or *Baltimore Afro-American*. Padmore produced over five hundred articles for the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* during World War II. These articles are all available online in a text-searchable database through ProQuest.

Accra Evening News (cont'd)

George Padmore, Our London Correspondent. 'Kenya Africans Appeal to Queen,' 13 February 1953.

--- 'Constitutional Crisis Facing West Africa: Nigerian Nationalist Movement Purge Ministers,' 17 February 1953.

--- 'Asian Revolution Inspiring Africans,' 19 February 1953.

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